

Extra, extra, read all about it!

Contemporary art is postconceptual art

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'The coming together of different times that constitute the contemporary, and the relations between the social spaces in which these times are embedded and articulated, are ... the two main axes along which the historical meaning of art is to be plotted' (27). What does this sentence indicate? A task, a description, a condition under which art is contemporary? In his stimulating new book, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*,* Peter Osborne highlights the problem of contemporary art from varying perspectives, but always in relation to a critical stance, a stance that operates in a kaleidoscopic fashion, through rapidly turning combinations and modes.

The aim of the book is to render the idea of contemporary art critically intelligible. From its opening pages, this criticism appears as internally divided. The specific and complex historical quality of our present, its contemporaneity, must be disclosed as the (critical) condition of possibility of an art which, in turn, is itself disclosed through its capacity to occupy and critically (transfiguratively) reflect the transnational spaces and heterogeneous temporalities of global capitalism that 'constitute the contemporary'. On the one hand, the critical element of the book pertains, then, to a specific unstable historical transcendental – contemporaneity as a qualitative condition of the historical present – which shows art's configurations to be determined by this condition. It is thus transcendental in manner. On the other hand, if sometimes in a more subterranean way, the uncertain but continuing critical and metaphysical dimensions of art – its immanent, problematic criticality – unfolds these dimensions, transforming them into 'new historical temporalizations' of that contemporary condition. More radically, at the end of *Anywhere or Not At All*, this critical drive of art is described as 'the negating and the puncturing of horizons of expectation'.

Yet the commitment to immanence that characterizes Osborne's criticism can in no way satisfy itself with such oscillations between 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand': instead, it aims to establish and render intelligible the meshing and permeations of these two moments. This interweaving points to the futurity of contemporaneity, to the inner folds of its disjunction:

If modernity projects a present of permanent transition, forever reaching beyond itself, the contemporary fixes or enfolds such transitoriness within the duration of a conjuncture, or at its most extreme, the stasis of a present moment.... It is with regard to the disruption of these normative rhythms that the contemporary appears as 'heterochronic' – the temporal dimension of a general heteronomy or multiplicity of determinations – or even as 'untimely' in Nietzsche's sense. The contemporary marks both the moment of disjunction (and hence antagonism) within the disjunctive unity of the historical present and the existential unity of the disjunctiveness of presentness itself. (25)

This of course is pure Benjamin. And, as such, one could characterize Osborne's kaleidoscopic manner of criticism simply by paraphrasing 'The Author as Producer': *Anywhere or Not At All* is an attempt to situate the critical intelligibility of contemporary art within the conditions and processes of contemporaneity, rather than to ask the ideological question of how it positions itself in relation to these conditions (is it in accord with them, is it reactionary, revolutionary, etc.?). There is, however, a crucial difference. Benjamin's criticism of New Objectivity in the 1930s was not a dismissal, but a recasting of the political tendency of literature, a claim that an author must not be a reproducer of the apparatus of production without simultaneously working to transform it in the direction of socialism.¹ Deriving his insights out

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of our present situation, Osborne ascertains that the specific futurity of the contemporary no longer holds any such contract with an impending future. This is no great scoop, but still, Osborne is one of the few to draw out clearly the question this implies, namely: what, then, *does* qualify the futurity of the contemporaneity which is critically reflected by art?

In its opening sections, *Anywhere or Not At All* identifies a kind of internal retreat of modernity's transitory time to the specific dimension of the present. The very speed and disparity of the different logics of change wrap up the anticipatory dimension of time in presentness itself. Futurity is contracted and only fictionally projected into the existence of an *actual* total conjunction of times. This involves a disavowal of the futurity of the present by its very presentness; essentially, it implies a disavowal of politics. This, of course, is not a 'position' defended by the book, but rather an insight into the fact that while modernity involved a certain political purchase on the future, the contemporary seems to contract the future into a present which speculatively totalizes all coeval times within itself.

Pertaining to art, this shift in the quality of futurity gives rise, therefore, to an unrelenting question. What, in this context, makes for the difference between the *critical* potentiality of art, its reflective transfiguration of the projected *actual* total conjunction, and that conjunction itself in its ever-changing fictional projection, in so far as it regulates the very social (ir)rationality of expansive capitalistic reproduction? What, in other words, constitutes the immanent consistency of artistic criticism? The point here is not immediately to conflate the artistic critical effect with a (supposedly) practical effect. Rather, the point is to determine in what that criticality of art consists, in what manner it connects to what is not art, in what manner it operates.² Consequently, how one reads the book depends on where, among its different approaches, one looks for the answer to this question.

If the criticality of art is the focal point, then the answer is to be found (at least for this reader) in the first half of the book. The book starts with a shift that springs from art itself: its persistent turn against its aesthetic grounding, both in the short sequence after 1945, and in the long sequence of the twentieth century. Pursuing this transformation, Osborne shows how contemporary art compels us to think it out *philosophically*. Here lies the impetus and the strength of his main hypothesis: contemporary art is postconceptual art.

Anti-aesthetic

Taking its cue from the anti-aesthetic tendency in modern art, *Anywhere or Not At All* tracks this all the way back to the worm in the fruit, to an extremely precise restaging of the confrontation between Kant and Jena romanticism. Destroying the continuing identification of aesthetics with the philosophy of art, the book's second chapter, 'Art Beyond Aesthetics', disentangles them in a most illuminating way.

Basing itself on a critical fragment of Schlegel, the book argues for an aporetic gap in Kant's use of the term 'aesthetics'. First, the term distinguishes things of sensibility versus things of mind – *aestheta* and *noeta* – as the duality organized by the determinate judgements of knowledge. Kant starts by disavowing the extension of the term aesthetics to judgements of taste: there can be no 'science of the beautiful'. Nonetheless, he will go on to resort to this very extension, albeit in a quite singular way.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant develops a critique of a particular *power* of judgement, not of particular judgements: the critique of the feeling of disinterested pleasure accompanying the reflective awareness of the unity or harmonizing of the subjective faculties. In such judgements 'the mind feels itself', beyond the sensible apprehension of the objects of time and space. Kant's aesthetic judgement moves beyond his own dualism; it posits the subject as a speculative, self-reflecting process. However, this relation of the subject to itself also necessary refers to an object, but an object whose appearance only serves to trigger the auto-affection of judgement. This means that aesthetic judgements are strictly indifferent to the character of that object, that they disregard all of its finalities and conceptual determinations. Hence Kant gives privilege to objects of nature as occasioning my capacity to feel the free harmonious play of all my faculties. Judgements pertaining to art ('this painting is beautiful') can never be purely aesthetic, since they are 'logically conditioned' by determinate concepts such as art or painting. The beauty of painting adheres to the object; it is not a free beauty. Or, to put it otherwise: art objects can only appear as freely beautiful when they appear *as if* they were mere products of nature.

This effect of such an 'as if' is what Kant calls 'aesthetic art'. Such art can only appear as art qua the exclusion of what makes art different from nature, namely the metaphysical, cognitive, political, technical, historical, material elements that make for the determination of its autonomy. Osborne thus clarifies aesthetic art as the 'negotiation of an impasse', which

is carried over in today's hard-wearing presupposition that the logical autonomy of aesthetic judgement simply is the philosophical basis of the autonomy of art. This is a clarification that is particularly welcome in the French context, because it shows that the main post-phenomenological reflections on art to be found in French philosophy – namely, those of Rancière and Badiou – do not in fact break with this presupposition, though they rewrite the conflation between aesthetics and art in quite different, antagonistic ways. Deleuze's rewriting of this relation affirms the metaphysical dimension of art, but excludes its conceptual and historical dimensions. Osborne remarks that these philosophies thus do not grasp the specificity of the contemporary in art, but, unfortunately, does not pursue this line of thought further.

Instead, *Anywhere or Not At All* stresses those elements which, turning against 'aesthetic art', try to account for the ontological distinctiveness of the work of art and hence rewrite the relation between aesthetics and art on a new basis: that is, what Osborne defines as the critical category of postconceptual art. Jena romanticism, 'contemporary' generic modernism, the legacy of US and British conceptual art, critical autonomy, transcategoriality, and its serial, textual, distributive, architectural qualities, are some of the moments that enter into the sequence that Osborne goes on to outline.

Starting with Jena romanticism, Osborne identifies the group around the journal *Athenæum*, the first artistic avant-garde of modernity, as producing, around 1800, the inaugural radical dissolution of the impasse of 'aesthetic art'. Transposing the reflexive structure of the subject onto the art object itself, the romantics claim the systematic and speculative dimensions of philosophy for an ontological conception of autonomous art. Asserting that each work of art encounters the question of the idea of art within its own reflexive connections, Schlegel and Novalis show that art is both irreducibly conceptual in its disposition and irreducibly historical and 'aesthetic' (*felt* by the mind) in its mode of appearance. Art presents the absolute (truth) in a plural, non-organic fragmentation of its reflexive dimension. It answers to the theoretical construction of a generic dimension ('universal progressive poetry') which refers to the historically shifting, unstable relations between aesthetic and other aspects – cognitive, semantic, social, technical, and so on – of artworks. Progressivity indicates that such reflexivity is contracted in the fragmentary incompleteness of the works; it transfers the accent from the realization to the

project, as in the actualization of reflexivity to be found in Schlegel's abbreviated presentation of the potentiality of poetry – that is, in a project which has no need of further 'realization'.³ The non-evidence of the relations between what affects me and these other determinations makes for the non-evidence of the relations between art and non-art. Its actualizations are critically construed in and through the immanent mediations of artworks. The early German romantics thus reveal the genealogical 'disparity' between art and aesthetics which, Osborne argues, postconceptual art actualizes.

Turning to the anti-aesthetic trajectory of 'contemporary' generic modernism, Osborne reiterates that artistic modernism is predicated upon the sense of the present as new; it unfolds through a negativity that produces the qualitatively new, and orients the temporality of art towards the future.⁴ As such, modernism is not identical with a particular historical sequence, not even its inaugural one (the dominant Western art of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century); it is the ongoing affirmation of that orientation. Thus, contemporary art is not 'post-modern' simply because it is a distinctive development of that temporal structure of futurity. But how, then, does the historical sequence of modernism join up with the specificity of the contemporary sequence? More precisely: since our apprehension of the art of our own present requires that we risk a claim on its futurity, how does this claim impact upon the historical variations of modernism? Osborne pursues the claim that contemporary art is postconceptual art. This means that his genealogy of modernism concentrates on those practices that negate aesthetics in art, and that counter the proponents of a revived aestheticism in the contemporary field.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the restriction of art judgements to a few contingent mediums becomes a critical problem for art practices. In Duchamp, the negation of the aesthetic substance of artworks converges with the negation of the mediums that link individual artworks to art (in the singular). Rather than seeing negation as a purification of certain aspects of these mediums, Duchamp took them to constitute an abandonment of craft in general.⁵ This became the basis of an alternative to both aesthetic modernism (Baudelaire's intense valorization of transitory temporality) and medium-specific modernisms (epitomized by Greenberg). It runs from Duchamp, Dada, Surrealism and the Russian avant-gardes through to Fluxus, conceptual

art, some minimalism, and the postconceptual and postminimal movements of the 1960s and beyond. In the light of this expanded modernism, the critically dominant medium-specific modernism of the USA in the decades after the Second World War proves, in fact, to be a short-lived reactive moment, linked to the tradition of the nineteenth century. Following Osborne, generic modernism, which breaks with medium-specificity, actually appears instead as the main tradition of the twentieth century.

It is negation in conceptual art, in its analytical programme (rapidly, Joseph Kosuth in the USA and Art & Language in Britain), which aimed to eliminate aesthetics completely from art, to found an anti-aesthetic. (It is this specific moment that is developed in Osborne's earlier *Conceptual Art*.) Their 'failure' subsequently proved aesthetics to be a necessary but insufficient component of art: the role played by the aesthetic may be necessary but it does not account for art's ontological specificity; it is only a part of it. Conceptual art's passage to the limit demonstrates

the radical emptiness or blankness of the aesthetic in itself, as an ontological support, that derives its meaning, in each instance, relationally or contextually, whatever its precise form of materiality – and this includes those instances when it functions as a negation, as well as a carrier, of meaning. (49)

All these moments – Jena romanticism, generic modernism, conceptual negation – enter then into the critical category of postconceptual art, which answers to a new difficulty: the dislocation of medium-specificity, the disappearance of art currents (*isms*), and the destruction of the corresponding analytic categories, tend to insulate the artwork, to cut it from any mediations, and thereby threaten to dissociate its ontological individuality from the collectivity of its potential meanings. This is what, as Osborne notes, Adorno defines as a problem of 'nominalism' in *Aesthetic Theory*.⁶ Of course, the category of postconceptual art singles out neither a certain empirical determination of artworks, nor a set of given criteria for judgement. Its criticality is rather constituted at the level of the historical ontology of the artwork. Osborne specifies this in numerous directions, but isolates a certain number of what he calls 'insights' in this regard: the ineliminable but insufficient character of the aesthetic dimension; the requirement of a materialization; the critical necessity of an anti-aestheticist use of aesthetic materials; an expansion to infinity of the possible material forms of art; a radically distributive, relational unity

of the individual artwork across its multiple material instantiations; and a historical malleability of the unity of the work. Prolonging Adorno's reflections, one can add to this list: a critical relation to the status of autonomy, in so far as the work both criticizes illusory autonomy – the existence of art in a purely separated sphere – and produces autonomy on a new basis by transposing external tensions into the inner tensions – between art and non-art – of its configuration.

However, although *Anywhere or Not At All* assures its readers that it is treating the critical post-conceptualism of art on the level of historical ontology, in the second half of the book what is meant by 'postconceptuality' shifts, in fact, between a number of different levels, generating a certain perplexity as a result. Thus, following a rapid (and non-exhaustive) enumeration of some transcategorial elements linked to postconceptual artworks, as Osborne describes them – distribution, textualization, architecture – it is towards these fluctuations in the meaning of 'postconceptuality' itself, most problematically as it is related to 'social space', that this review will direct its main attention.

Distribution, textualization, architecturalization

Robert Smithson is the artist who is accorded the most serious and extended case study in *Anywhere or Not At All*. In chapter 4, Osborne shows how Smithson moves beyond any easy ways out of medium-specificity, such as the infinite splintering of categories which conflates with the meaninglessness of the purely individual work, or the empirical affirmation of 'mixed media', or the aestheticism of 'site-specificity'.⁷ The artist instead crosses categories in a dialectical practice of negation: non-sculpture, non-painting, but mainly 'non-site'. It is for this reason that Osborne also insists on countering the reduction of Smithson's work to sculpture, with which one can only agree. (However, even though *Anywhere or Not At All* cites exhibitions proposing this, it somehow seems overstated. The real reasons for renewed interest in Smithson are precisely those exposed by Osborne himself.) The investigation of a specific site is 'a matter of extracting concepts', as Smithson has put it.

This notion of non-site has its origin in a pun on museums as non-sights: they negate the place outside the exhibition space via a negation of the sight of it. The artist then goes out to see the non-sights; he tours the sites left unseen (*A Tour of the Monuments of*

the Passaic, New Jersey, 1967), and turns itinerary into a material of art. Mirror displacements, hypothetical islands, magazine works, boxed containers of sites, all these are fictional modes of transposition of a site 'outside of itself'. In his *Spiral Jetty* essay, Smithson envisions the resulting avalanche of categories as a form of entropy, a mutual meltdown of one through the other which creates a new transcategoriality, namely, for Osborne, that of distribution. *Spiral Jetty* has different materializations (the essay, the film, the site object in Utah) and its unity is distributed across them. The work is thus never simply identical with any one of its instantiations, whilst nevertheless existing only in their varying actualizations.

Turning to 'textualization', Osborne underlines how magazine works, because of their circulation, displace modern art space from its gallery location back into social space. Dan Graham's *Homes for America* is simultaneously a slide show from November 1966, the original paste-up in *Arts Magazine* 1970, and a revised paste-up produced for exhibition after 1970. This temporal differentiation is predicated on its infinite spatial possibilities, and raises the problem of the conceptual unity of the work, of its borders. With regard to art's 'architecturalization', this problem is further radicalized. In so far as works aspire to effect change, the relation of art to architecture repeats the constructivist hope of 'realizing the communist expression of material structures' (142). If architecture stands for the material organization of social space in the present, as Osborne argues, including the social space of art, the question then becomes how art can produce a criticism of the social practices with which it is associated: urban development, tourism and cultural policy.

Osborne proposes a very convincing historical interpretation of constructivism, which leads him to a characterization of the actual transnational art space today:

The contemporary project-based urban art of international exhibition spaces is largely the outcome of negotiations between artists and curators, museum or exhibition authorities, and corporations, councils and governments.... These practices of organization, co-ordination and negotiation – whether they are about 'production' or 'installation' ... – are crucial mediations of art with urban social forms. At their broadest, they articulate a new kind of exhibition space: a capitalist constructivism of the exhibition-form. (161)

On the next page, Osborne suggests that such exhibitions have become the basic unit of mediations

between artworks: 'The curator functions as director and the works of art function as the elements of the constructive process of exhibition building. Such works are intrinsically double-coded: they have their own ("liminally autonomous") significations and modes of experience, and they have their more fully "post-autonomous meanings"' (162), which Osborne equates with their place in the general exhibition construction.

Positing transnational biennales as a novel cultural space, 'a primary marker of art's contemporaneity', the book, however, then gets sidetracked into what it calls the 'convergence and the mutual conditioning of historical transformation in the ontology of the artwork and the social relations of space'. The question here is the following: if this new capitalist constructivism of the exhibition form, which transforms the culture industry into 'art industry', is to be included in the spatial ontology of postconceptual art, how does the postconceptual artwork *critically* treat this objective contradiction, its integration into a communicational culture which constitutes its very immanence as art?

In fact the book is not very helpful on this point; it remains blocked in dealing out the 'mutual' terms of conditioning, inside of which it moves restlessly back and forth. On the one hand, 'it has thus become incumbent upon art with a claim on the present to situate itself, reflexively, within this expanded world' (163). On the other hand, 'it is still the art-character of the works on show – their particular ways of "showing", their individual lack of self-evidence – that makes all this possible, that raises [the biennales] above the status of an extended series of world exhibitions' (165). On the one hand, in itself, this incorporation of contemporary art into transnational exhibition spaces dictates neither the end of autonomous art nor its survival; it only indicates what works have to wrestle with to produce their critical status. On the other hand, the very same reasons that show autonomy becoming more and more difficult to achieve also give 'grounds for believing that this system itself has an increased need for autonomous art, with which to feed its need for "the new"' (167).

This perpetual rhetorical balancing act goes nowhere fast; more importantly, it obscures the strong thin line that is being drawn out of the critical dimension of postconceptuality. Of course Osborne knows that the cultural, communicational and economic mediations of the transnational biennale cannot simply substitute for the critical collective mediations of autonomous art. Indeed, he knows it

so well that he humorously deflates them. Citing the theoretical schmooze of Isabelle McGraw and Daniel Birnbaum – ‘Criticism never has been as strong as it is today, since it is now part of a knowledge-based economy’ – he retorts: ‘One might equally claim: “Criticism never has been as weak as it is today, since it is now part of a knowledge-based economy”’ (215). And of course Osborne knows, and even mentions in passing, that ‘by virtue of their power of assembly, international biennales are manifestations of the cultural-economic power of the “centre”, wherever they crop up and whatever they show. In short, they are the Research and Development branch of the transnationalization of the culture industry’ (164). But why, then, does he quote Okwui Enwezor’s extremely weak notion of ‘the terrible nearness of distant places’, which serves merely as a disguise for a consensual, almost academically humanist discourse on a supposedly subversive globalization of art? In fact, the recent Enwezor megashow at the Palais de Tokyo in 2012, *Intense Proximity*, organized as a co-curation, was not only ‘quite chaotic’ (Osborne); its total disregard for elementary conditions of exhibition simply rendered the works invisible. But so what? What is important is not the works, but the show, the sponsors, the notoriety, the tourism, and so on. Of course Osborne’s writing never falls prey to direct naivety in this respect, though it does sometimes produce laconic affirmations, without argument. He states that the art market, via galleries, deals in individual works, whilst the exhibition is the unit of artistic significance, the object of constructive intent. Yet one could equally state that any spectator experiences the constructive intent with which galleries expose works; likewise, galleries, via sponsors, embassy lists and other forms of lobbying, have a crucial say in what works are shown at biennales, and how they are shown. The permeations are inextricable.

More to the point, the fluctuations of Osborne’s writing suggest some implicit avoidances. Most specifically, why does Osborne never develop the divisions that these objective contradictions entail? Here, for example, Deleuze’s conception of the institution could have helped clarify the ‘mutual conditioning’ of social space and autonomous art. For Deleuze, any institution satisfies a tendency, but it can never be explained by that tendency. A tendency is thus satisfied by means that do not depend on that tendency, which implies that it is never satisfied without being forced, bullied, transformed.⁸ Since the tendency finds only an indirect satisfaction in

the institution, this raises the question: to whom is the institution useful? To a privileged class, to those who need it, to its own bureaucratic reproduction? At any rate, utility is always more than utility, in this sense, and the tendency never results from the institution itself.

Exclusions

This points to some basic problems that Osborne never really gets around to developing, namely: what artworks are excluded by transnational biennales, and how do these biennales format the work they show? And since most international biennales only show work that is already known, where then does it get known? It may be worth mentioning in this regard a very rare and excellent small show at the Pompidou in 2008 curated by Joanna Mytkowska, *Five Artists Under the Pressure of War*, which exhibited Ahman Shibli, Akram Zaatari, Yael Bartana, Omer Fast and Rabih Mouré, showing works from Lebanon, Palestine and Israel, all dealing with the ‘same’ conflictual reality in different ways, producing the cohesion of a singular collective meaning. Such an example at least shows that the variations inherent to the network status of social art space must be reflected, and that this cannot just be equated with the empirical dominance of biennales.

It is difficult to understand why Osborne never renders explicit or activates these contradictions in their conflicts with the discourse and functioning of the biennale system, conflicts such as those between the ‘liminal autonomous meanings’ and the ‘postautonomous ones’, which Osborne himself identifies in the ‘double-coded’ character of the art populating contemporary international exhibition spaces. Why does the book not develop the new immanent tensions of artworks that spring from the transformation of the ‘art-industry’? In this respect, it does not help that *Anywhere or Not At All*’s analyses of artworks are mostly confined to an illustrative function. The only plausible hypothesis is that the author himself hesitates. In the second part of the book, the writing constantly switches between what is to be included on the level of the historical ontology of the artwork, what is to be treated on the level of sociology or anthropology, what is deemed to be empirical, and/or what is to be carried over into a historicized transcendental.

As such, it seems, at times, as if Osborne simply posits the international social space of exhibition as a unit of artistic significance, as an element of the spatial ontology of postconceptual art, while,

at others, he appears to track it back to the social fact of communicational capitalism, with which all autonomous artworks have to deal critically. Basically, as soon as postconceptuality does more than transform the configuration of autonomous works (through distribution, serial variation, textualization, etc.), as soon as it tries to grasp those mediations of the artwork that are no longer generated by critical autonomy itself but by its wider cultural social production, the book stumbles on the ambivalences of its own central concept. What it never really accomplishes is a rewriting of the critical relation between art and culture *within* the new transnational 'art industry' itself.

This raises another question. If transnational exhibition units are carried over as a historicized transcendental to the level of the historical ontology of the artwork, what then of all the other empirical instances of art in its global production? How does the critical category of postconceptuality on the ontological level of the artwork deal with the continuing production of medium specific works? Here, again, the book manufactures avoidance. In chapter 3 it briefly exposes Richter's *Atlas* project and Polke's painting via their connection to the visual culture of different media forms. But this does not tell the reader if Osborne thus considers *all* painting that restricts itself to painterly elements – canvas, colour, isolated hanging – as a revival of irrelevant aestheticism. If this is the case, it would be good to say so. Or, to put it more relevantly: the book never proves that postconceptuality can be a discriminative critical concept capable of distinguishing differences within medium-specific work.

For example, do paintings like the soft-edged abstractions of Tomma Abts or the funky-coloured mappings, architectures and numberings of Joanne Greenbaum situate themselves reflexively in the expanded field of contemporary art? Personally, I would argue that such work may have more to do with the puncturing of horizons of expectation than does the work of, say, Claire Fontaine, which is a commodity 'through and through'. Of course this is simply arguing on the level of judgement. However, the reader never clearly discovers in *Anywhere or Not At All* how the critical category of postconceptualism operates in regard to medium-work, now that such medium orientation has ceased to be hegemonic.

Asserting the relation of postconceptual art to the blind spot within the fictional totality of contemporary presentness, linking the critical charge of such art to the negating and the puncturing of

the historical horizons that constitute it, Osborne's *Anywhere or Not At All* is more than just an excellent book. It presents us with the lineaments of a critical philosophy of art that proves the conceptual dimension to be essential to contemporary art. Following this strong thin line of risk in his own thinking, Osborne genuinely opens a way forward; a way that escapes the aesthetic impasse of contemporary philosophy, and that connects it anew with the problems immanent to art, to the metaphysical dimension it operates with in its own right. However, Osborne immediately binds these problems to a regulatory mapping of the transcendental conditions of art space and time in global cultural capitalism. In doing so, he not only misses out on unfolding the risk he has taken; more anecdotally, he also tends to mislead the reader. Nonetheless, this is not a book to miss, for it amounts to one of the few highly intriguing, unprecedented and disquieting propositions about art to be found in these consensual times.

Notes

1. This is also the aporetic dimension of Benjamin's essay: it relies heavily on transformative practices taking place in post-revolutionary Soviet reality, even whilst reflecting on the critical form of involvement within capitalist relations of production. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, Part 2: 1931–1934, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2005, pp. 768–82.
2. This is also a reformulation of Adorno's question concerning the radical entwinement of autonomous art with its commodity form; and of the ensuing debate as to whether capitalist culture produces or destroys autonomous art, or antinomically does both.
3. See Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Other Literary Aphorisms*, trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1968.
4. See Peter Osborne, 'Modernism as Translation', in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, pp. 53–62; *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, Verso, London and New York, 1995.
5. Osborne confronts this postconceptual reading of modernism with Thierry de Duve's work on Duchamp. See *Kant after Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1998. De Duve has convincingly shown that there is more than one philosophical problematic of modernism, but he limits the generic moment to a purely nominalistic one, predicated on the readymade: art is anything that manages to get named 'art'.
6. See *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Athlone Press, London, 1997, 199–225.
7. The aestheticism of site-specificity (in which a work is supposed to adhere to the sensible elements of the place it invests) has its twin in 'memory art', and it is a welcome aspect of his book that Osborne shows how Benjamin's effort to give all strata of memory back to history has been inverted in recent commemorative works, which give all of history back to personal cultural memory, thus reducing temporality to the issue of a moral individualism.
8. See Gilles Deleuze, 'Instincts and Institutions', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles and New York, 2004, pp. 19–21.