



# Article Defining Art as Phenomenal Being

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**Abstract:** At the beginning of the 20th century, the definition of art became one of the difficult topics of aesthetics and art theory. The emergence of the institutional approach and the debates surrounding it provoked many responses. This article proposes one possible response that uses Kant's example of category deduction as a productive analogy that can serve as a "deduction of art categories". Art is seen as a phenomenal entity constituted by multiple meaning perspectives, each of which has a figure representing it (author, spectator, patron, collector, curator, connoisseur, critic, historian, typologist, theorist, aesthetician, and metaphysician). The position of each of these figures legitimates a categorical definition that participates in the constitution of the "phenomenal being of art".

Keywords: artworld; phenomenon; categories

# 1. Introduction: Institutional Theory

With his famous 1964 article *The Artworld* Arthur Danto laid the foundations of the institutional theory of the artworld. The approach was taken up by George Dickie (*Defining Art*, 1969) and developed more extensively in many of his subsequent publications. In his version, "work of art is an artifact that is a candidate for artworld evaluation" (Dickie 1969). In a subsequent publication, Dickie gives a more expansive version. Tiziana Andina rightly notes that the marks of the artworld are not strict and therefore other institutions may fall under this definition (Andina 2013).

We can try to refine the artworld participants by recalling a forgotten but very solid study. The art historian Paul Frankl (1878–1962), known for his research on the Gothic, was one of Heinrich Wölflin's most outstanding students. In his monumental work *Das System der Kunstwissehnschaft* (1938), Frankl developed a system of art history based on a "noology of meaning". In the section *Die Psychologie der Kunstempfänglichen*, Paul Frankl discusses eleven perspectives on the work of art, which taken as a whole delineate the circle of the "art public" (*Kunstpublikum*): Art lover (*Kunstlieberhaber*), Commissioner (*Besteller*), Patron (*Mäzen*), Collector (*Sammler*), Art Dealer (*Kunsthändler*), Connoisseur (*Kenner*), Art Preserver (*Kunsterbe*), Art Politician (*Kunstpublikur*). (P. Frankl 1998, pp. 840–56). Frankl's list can be seen as an early version of the artworld and its enumeration is more comprehensive than Dickie's. This completeness is helpful in clarifying the inhabitants of the artworld, but might it not also serve us for a more substantial task.

# 2. Phenomenal Being

In this definition of art we will use the concept of phenomenon and phenomenology developed by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*. In paragraph 7 of *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger defines the phenomenon as "the showing-itself-in-itself, the manifest" ("das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende, das Offenbare" Heidegger 1977, p. 28), and phenomenology gives access to this "self-manifestation". The notion of the phenomenon is not identical to the notion of the appearance, because phenomenon does not refer to another existence that manifests itself through it, so that this existence itself is not given immediately and completely, i.e., originally (see for more details about the phenomenon and also about the communicative aspect of the phenomenon in Pantev 2020). We find an example of



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**Copyright:** © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by/ 4.0/). such use of the term phenomenon in Kant, where phenomenon is an empirical appearance (Erscheinung) of the thing-in-itself (Ding an sich), which under no circumstances appears and can only be thought of as some unknown X. This does not mean, of course, that the phenomenon cannot have modifications and derivations (Heidegger 1977, p. 35). Heidegger ontologizes phenomenology and on this understanding, the phenomenon is "the being of entity, its meaning" (Ibid.).

Can we also call art a phenomenon? And an ontological phenomenon? To what and to whom does it manifest itself? Obviously, the backside of the canvas of a painting and the subterranean foundations of a cathedral cannot be ascribed to the phenomenon as the self-appearing being. We can gain access to the phenomenality of art if we explicate the main points of view on which the work of art appears.

If, with the help of Paul Frankl, we describe the figures involved in the artworld, their positions, and their participation in constituting the meaning of this world, then we can hope to obtain an integral description of the artworld. For there is no doubt that each of the figures Frankl mentions is distinguishable from the others by the specificity of its participation in constituting the meaning of the artworld. We can assume that each figure contributes to a "table of artistic categories", which we can think of by analogy with Kant's table of categories.

#### 3. Categories and Deduction of Categories

When discussing the question of categories, the name of Aristotle as the author of the most influential treatise on the subject (Categories) cannot be omitted. Kant criticized Aristotle for not stating the principle through which he arrived at the list of the ten categories. Kant therefore thinks that Aristotle gives us only a "rhapsody" of categories, not a system of categories (Kant 1998, p. 213). Indeed, Aristotle does not explain where these categories come from and why their number is just so. His list in Categories (1b 26-28) and Topics I,9 (103b22-24) looks like this: substance (*ousia*), quantity (*posotês*), quality (*poiotês*), relation (pros ti), where (pou), when (pote), position (kheistai), have (ekhein), action (poiein), and affection (*paskhein*). Being (to on) is spoken of in different ways, and each of them is spoken of in a different sense. These different ways are grouped into two groups-in one group, the substance (*ousia*) is predicated, and in the other group are its modifications (the other nine predicates). Being has a register of meanings expressed by the categories (Metaphysics, V, 7), and all of them refer to substance. Categories are only those senses of the register that refer to being "without combining" (1b24-2a5). Aristotle's categories resemble the "great genera" (Being, Rest, Motion, Same, Other) of Plato's dialogue Sophist (254d-257a). For Aristotle, categories are predicates that express the most general distinguishable and irreducible senses of being.

Already in antiquity Ammonius (V CE), and in the 19th century Adorlf Trendelenburg thought that Aristotle's categories derived from parts of speech. According to Trendelenburg, the correspondences are: substance/substantive, quality/non-numerical adjective, quantity/numerical adjective, relative/comparative, action/active verb, passion/passive verb, being in a position/intransitive verb, having/perfect tense, place/locative adverb, and time/temporal (Baumer 1993, p. 353).

In what follows we will try, with the help of Aristotle and Kant, to find the categories of art as its basic predicates. We will argue that art is a being that has many meanings and all of them refer to the self-existent (the substance in art)—the work of art. Only the substance (the work of art) does not apply to any other category than itself. All others apply to it. In order to obtain basic, i.e., categorial meanings, we will consider the figures that constitute them.

Aristotle's short text has attracted the attention of many commentators. Both Stoics (Athenodorus, Annaeus Cornitus) and Neoplatonists (Eudorus of Alexandria, Nicostratus, Lucius, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Dexippus) criticized it. It is crucial to his influence that Porphyry disagreed with his teacher Plotinus, who sharply criticized Aristotle's *Categories* (Enn. 6.1-3). Plotinus thinks that the same categories cannot have the same

meaning for the intelligible and the sensible. Porphyry, however, positively evaluates their significance, and they became a basic text for students of philosophy in late antiquity and then in the Middle Ages. Porphyry's positive attitude to Aristotle's *Categories* is supported by the commentaries of Dexippus (fourth century), who was a student of Iamblichus, and also by those of Simplicius (ca. 480–560 CE).

In Dexippus's later commentary, many of the problems are made especially clear because the author has carefully studied the earlier criticisms. Dexippus reminds us at the beginning of the commentary, which is written in the dialogue genre, that in the Greek language, the word "khategoria" means "judicial accusation" and its opposite is the word justification (*apologia*) (Dexippus I, 6, 1–5). Categories are common names (genera and species) that are ascribed to one or another existent as its characteristics (predicates). The opposite is the case of non-being, which does not fall under any category (Dexippus I, 13, 15-20). Another important question about the list of categories is where does the boundary between the different categories pass? According to Dexippus's interpretation, "the difference is in a quality that is essential (ousiôdes) and constitutive of substance (ousia)" (Dexippus II, 49, 10–12).

To make up for the deficiencies in "Aristotle's list", Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* sets himself the task of making a "deduction of categories". Kant uses the term "deduction" in the sense of "proving right", as the term "deduction" was used in law. In Kant's vocabulary, categories are a kind of concepts that are pure (not empirical) and original (not derived). According to Kant, categories are the basis of our thinking and thanks to them we perform a "synthesis of the manifold in view" and can think about objects and subjects. In every judgment we make a subject-predicate connection. To connect one with the other, we need a point of unity. This point of unity necessary for every judgment is our Self, which appears as the transcendental condition for every judgment. When we direct our attention to some "multiplicity in one intuition (Anschauung)" we subsume this multiplicity under the unity of the Self (transcendental apperception). The categories are precisely these "functions of judging" (Kant B:143). Every intuition stands under the condition of a category. Kant defines it as "necessarily subordinate to the categories".

The transcendental deduction of categories shows "how subjective condition of thinking should have objective validity" (Kant B: 122). But how can the category as a pure concept be applied to phenomena that are always sensible? How can two such heterogeneous elements of our knowledge be connected? Kant's answer lies in the doctrine of the "schematism of pure concepts of the understanding (Verstand)" (Kant A137/B176). The notion that mediates between the intellectual and the sensible is the "transcendental schema" (Kant A138/B177). The schema is a product of the faculty of imagination (Kant A140/B180). When we think or perceive a triangle, the schema is a product of a priori productive imagination, and the image is a product of empirical reproductive imagination. Schemata are themselves "a priori definitions of time", and this is one of his most original philosophical discoveries.

For the purposes of our study, we will transpose Kant's notion of the schematism of categories on the definitions of time and the role of imagination in it with historically crystallized figures of the artworld. Their position, horizon, and genre of expression will for us act as a producer of categories through which we predict the work of art. Categories constitute the pleroma of meanings of the phenomenal being of art.

### 4. Art Categories

Here we will try to deduce the categories describing the phenomenon of art from 12 artworld figures: *Author, Recipient, Patron, Collector, Curator, Connoisseur, Art Critic, Historian of Art, Theorist, Aesthetician, Metaphysician*. The list is similar to Paul Frankl's, but not identical to his, and besides, the aim here is different—not just a reference to these figures, but a deduction of an art category from their position.

Author. The first perspective is that of the author. It defines art as a sphere in which the authorial aspect is primordial and cannot be reduced. The authorial specificity of art is un-

conditional and cannot be relativized either by works with an unknown author or by cases where the author himself aims at anonymity (Banksy) or remains completely unknown (graffiti). The author position defines art as containing an "artifact with intentionality", which distinguishes it from the accidental artifact. For the sake of economy and clarity, the broad theme of the author is considered in a quadruple typology: the muse author (Homer); the explorer author (Leonardo and the representatives of European academism); the author as genius (in Romantic theory); and in the perspective of the "death of the author" (Roland Barthes). The intentionality of the artistic artifact is its "addressability to a potential spectator". This differentiates the artistic artifact from the tool as an artifact and from the consumer good as another type of artifact.

**Recipient.** Unlike the natural phenomenon, which is "real-being-in-itself", and the entity as a mathematical entity, which is "ideal-being-in-itself", the work of art is always "for-someone", it is "being-for-perception". The recipient is artistically marked, intensified, through with multiple conventions. Unlike a natural piece of Pentelic marble, which is "in itself", the Parthenon is turned towards a viewer, which is specifically emphasized through the optical corrections that "deform" the geometric regularity in view of the viewer's perception. The painting has a horizon matching the horizon of the eyes, the poem has a title, the statue a pedestal, the symphony an introductory conductor's pause. The spectrum of recipient statuses can be divided into: ritual spectator; mimetic spectator; reflective spectator and spectator-participant. The recipient is characterized by an essential passivity that is asymmetrical to the activity of the author. This categorical definition is historical, and some contemporary art forms such as performance art challenge it.

**Patron.** Kant's distinction between the work of art and the work of craft has an analogy in his ethics to the distinction between dignity and price. The work of art has a self-value that is evidenced by the fact that its "appearance" is often due not to the market but to the support of a patron. Patronage is a social gesture that shows that the work of art is not homogeneous in the market and is not a "logical" part of it. The work "transcends" both the fanciful outcomes of the profession as a routine activity and the determination by market demand. The distinction between value and price has a relationship and correspondence with other categorical definitions such as contemplation and museum-ness.

**Collector.** To put it again in the spirit of Kant, a work of art is a thing free from natural processes. One aspect of this freedom is the aspiration of the "artistic will" (to borrow this variation on Alois Riegl's notion) to protect the work from the influence of nature and history and to preserve it "immutable and intact" (*firmitas*) for the viewer. Spinoza's metaphysical maxim "every existing thing strives to persist in its being" can be implemented with success to the work of art as artistic being. This distinguishes the work of art from other "availabilities" (Heidegger), which are usable and therefore expendable. The figure that embodies the moment of "preservation" in the phenomenal being of art is the collector, individual or institutional.

The collector "wrenches things from their primary relations" (Benjamin, 109) and, by protecting them from natural and historical influences, preserves them in another order that is freed from their primary context. The collector can be called a "second-order author". With his taste, he creates an artistic meta-order—an order in which the beginnings, the sequence and the totality are entirely the work of the collector. For this order, the collector appears as a spokesperson who alone can answer questions about it. The works in a collection as a spatial whole are in the strict sense present. The collector protects them from outside influences by preserving them in a "being-one-with-another".

**Curator.** We can distinguish two modes of the collection. One is the museum one, in which the leading element is isolation, static and immutable. The second modus is dynamic, eventful, intentional-the collection in its expository aspect of "being-before-others". The expository modus is related to the figure of the curator. The collector collects and the curator displays. Thanks to the curator, the collection turns from being-in-itself into being-for-us, in the language of Hegel. The collection "in itself" has only one spectator-the collector as its "author". As possessor, he has an "absolute point of view" towards the collection, i.e.,

as it is "in itself" as a collection. The curator, however, orients the collection towards the viewer and therefore "incorporates" the presence of others, the sequence of observation, its rhythm and the "cadence" of retrospective gaze and reminiscence at the end of the viewing.

**Connoisseur.** The dealer, collector and curator need an authority to authenticate the work. The question that this authority and the figure presenting it must answer is whether the artistic work that appears to the recipient is the same as that for which it presents itself. The task of confirming authenticity emerged with the emergence of the art market, first in the Netherlands, when the immediacy of the commissioner-author relationship broke down and the art connoisseur encountered the work as an isolated object in the field of the art market.

In 1666, André Philibien (1619–1895), in his treatise *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, first defined the three main questions on wich the answer to which the judgement of the authenticity of a work depends:

- Who is the author?
- Is the work authentic?
- What is its value?

In his book *Die Werke italienischer Meister in den Galerien von München, Dresden und Berlin: Ein kritischer Versuch* (1880), which he published under the pseudonym Ivan Lermolieff, the Italian physician and art lover Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891) presented and defended an original method he called "experimental". According to Morelli, each artist early forms a model on which he paints minor elements of the human figure. These elements do not depend on the stage of his artistic biography, nor on the person depicted. According to Morelli, the most characteristic examples of such static elements are the ways in which artists paint the ear and the fingers. Max Friedländer, in his book *Der Kunstkenner* (1919), expresses reservations about Morelli's method, but nevertheless accepts that in individual cases this method can achieve certain results. For Friedländer, however, it is the intuition of the connoisseur that is most important. According to him, the first glance at a picture should last no more than three seconds, after which the impression should be subjected to reflection and further study. This procedure may be repeated several times until the connoisseur reaches confidence in his judgment.

The *opus magnum* for the connoisseur is the compilation of a *catalogue raisonné*. The first such book to introduce and validate the term was the *Catalogue raisonné de toutes les pièces qui forment l'œuvre de Rembrandt*, published in 1751 by Edme-François Gersaint (1695–1750), in which the author described 418 images attributed to Rembrandt. We can call this genre an "artistic encyclopedia about an artist". The tasks of the genre, established with the development of this genre in the 19th century, are several: to present all the works; to describe the history of each work, which includes all its owners, an important argument for its attribution; to describe the physical qualities of each work; and to describe the artistic qualities of each work.

Art Critic. When it is not a work coming from the past that is judged, but a new work or a new exposition of old works, then the triad of author-work-viewer is mediated by another figure, that of the art critic. The emergence of this figure is motivated by the opening of art salons to a non-professional public. The critic evaluates the new work, and often his judgment has the power of a verdict on the artist's fate. Important for the emergence and stabilization of this figure was the appearance of periodicals: *La Gazette* (1631) and *Mercure de France* (1672) in France, and *Tatler* (1701) and *The Spectator* (1711) in England, through which publications reviews of exhibitions reached art lovers and the general public. This genre therefore combines description, analysis and necessarily evaluation. Through the periodical, the critics' articles reached not only those who would inform themselves before going to the Salon, or those who would read the text after they had already been to the Salon, but also art lovers who were far from the Salon and would not see the paintings on display there. An important element in this genre is therefore the presence of "pictorial descriptions", so that absentees—"by fate or chance"—feel like virtual visitors.

In the essay *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'État présent de la peinture en France, Avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés au Louvre, ce mois d'août* 1746, published in 1747 by Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne (1688–1771), the author admits that in this work of his, which is an entire book of 200 pages, La Font de Saint-Yenne declares that he sought to avoid the monotony of scientific expositions (*dissertatons*) through more variety in style and picturesqueness. The author wanted to be neither an art historian nor an art theorist and stated that he would not avoid showing the faults of artists, but would also strive to encourage them to improve (1747:2). The critic intends neither to apologize for the artist nor to discourage him (1747:160).

**Historian of Art.** If "the connoisseur is a laconic historian" (Erwin Panofsky), then the historian is a profligate connoisseur. The history of art is a kind of collection, but one that is arranged not with personal taste in mind, but according to a conception of "art in its history" (in Ernst Gombrich's phrase). The critic evaluates the new, the historian the significant. The critic takes the risk of being the first to appreciate, the historian takes the risk of (re)appreciating what is preserved by tradition. The figure of the art historian gains autonomy when, from books containing information on materials and technologies (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Books 33–37, Cennino Cennini, *Libro dell'Arte*, 14th cent.), an autobiography (Ghiberti, the second part of his *Commentaries*, 1450), or a series of biographies (Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori e scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*, 1550), authors arrive at a "biography of concepts". With Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768) and his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), art history emerges in the modern understanding of this perspective on art and its personifying figure, the art historian. Winkelmann presents a history of ancient art as a history of styles. Thanks to Winkelmann, art history is becoming established as a "biography of styles".

**Typologist.** The biographer and the historian share a similar adherence to an irreversible temporal sequence. However, works and authors can not only accompany and illustrate styles, but can also be located together in wholes for which it is not the temporal sequence of styles but the "type" that is determinative. Examples of such typological groupings are:

- Friedrich Schiller's-"naive" and "sentimental" (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, 1795);
- Wilhelm Voringer-"organic" and "geometrical" (Abstraktion und Einfühlung, 1908);
- Heinrich Wölflin–"classical" and "baroque" (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst, 1915).

The position of the typologist constitutes the element of permanence in the historical time of art. Following the example of the schematism of time presented by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B p. 230), typological repetition indicates the constant in the variable, which for Kant is the schema of substance ("The schema of substance is the constancy of the real in time", Ibid.). In the "succession" of figures presented here, the typologist's position can be seen as a transition from the historical to the theoretical in order to achieve a fullness (pleroma) of the phenomenal being of art.

**Theorist.** The typologist is ahistorical and the theorist is ahistorical. The typologist seeks to transcend the division of historical epochs, and the theorist to abstract from it. If we ask ourselves what is common in the structure of the classical books on the theory of art, we shall find that in many of them we can see a resemblance to Euclid's *Elements* (323–283), which in turn was influenced by the elementalism of Democritus. Euclid begins with definitions of the primitive elements (point, line, surface, figure), and in the remaining six books of his work explores the relations of the elements. It is not difficult to detect the same approach in many treatises on art, whether or not Euclid's books had a direct influence on them. We find such an approach in Aristotle's *Poetics*—the parts of tragedy (prologue, episode, exodus, chorus, parood, stasis, commos), in Aristoxenus (*Elements of Harmony*)—tone, interval, harmony, voice, in Vitruvius (*Ten Books on Architecture*)—the three orders (Doric, Ionic and Corinthian) and their ornaments, in Leonardo (*Treatise on Painting*)—perspective, light, color, figure, composition, and in Kandinsky (*Point and Line to* 

*Plane*)–point, line, plane. In the theorist's perspective, the definition of the art in question is given in the primary elements from which the structure of the artwork is composed.

Aesthetician. The Enlightenment is the epoch in which most of the listed perspectives and figures of the phenomenal being of art are differentiated. One of the most important events was the birth of aesthetics in 1750, thanks to the book of the same name (Aesthetica) by Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762). Already in the last two paragraphs (CXVI-CXVII) of his magisterial thesis of 1735 (Baumgarten 1735), Baumgarten introduces aesthetics through the theme of "sensuous knowledge" (aisteta), which is not only distinct from but also independent of logical knowledge (noeta) (CXVI). According to Baumgarten, "aesthetics is the science of sense cognition" and beauty is "the perfection of sense cognition" (Baumgarten 2007, p. 20). Thus, at Baumgarten's instigation, but also under the influence of a number of other theorists of the "age of taste", including Joseph Addison (The Spectator, 1711–1712), Du Bos (Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture, 1719), Edmund Burke (A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, 1757), and Immanuel Kant (Critique of the Faculty of Judgment, 1790), the profile of the aesthetic perspective takes shape: an emancipatory description and analysis of the perception of the beautiful and its modifications, and a search for the reasons why we appreciate a phenomenon as beautiful. In stabilizing this perspective, the affirmation of taste as an autonomous human faculty plays an essential role. Some contemporary art theorists argue for a position according to which art psychology is an autonomous discipline that has its own toolkit for analyzing the process of perception of an artwork and cannot be a species of aesthetics (Tsanev 2021).

**Metaphysician.** Where is the place of art if we consider it in the horizon of the whole spectrum of existing things? The metaphysics of art can answer this question. Examples of such concepts can be seen in Schelling (*Philosophie der Kunst*, 1802), Hegel (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst*, 1820) and Heidegger (*Der Ursprung der Kunstwerkes*, 1935–1936). Here, in contrast to aesthetics, the emphasis is not on perception and taste, but on relating art to the basic structures considered by metaphysics. If we accept as classical the structure of metaphysics presented in Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (1739), this means that art must be correlated with the four themes within it–Being, Nature, Human Being, God. For Schelling, art is "the image of the absolute", for Hegel "the first form of the absolute spirit", and for Heidegger "the dispute between the Earth and the World" ("der Streit zwischen Welt und Erde"). Heidegger's critique of aesthetics and his attempt to focus the question of art on the ontology of the work is an example of a contemporary consideration of art through the grand structures of metaphysics.

## 5. Conclusions

We have made a concise description of the 12 figures constituting the artworld: (1) Author, (2) Recipient, (3) Patron, (4) Collector, (5) Curator, (6) Connoisseur, (7) Art Critic, (8) Historian of Art, (9) Typologist, (10) Theorist, (11) Aesthetician, (12) Metaphysician. Thanks to the constitutive role of these positions and their perspectives and horizons in creating artistic meaning, we can describe art as a phenomenal being characterized by a set of artistic categories derived from the specificity of these positions: (1) artifacticity with an intentionality of (2) contemplation because it (3) has value that requires (4) preservation for (5) **exposure** with (6) **authenticity** and (7) **novelty** that gives it both (8) **historicity** and (9) **transhistoricity**, and (10) compositionality of art **elements**, and is (11) assessable in perception with autonomous categories (the beautiful and its modifications and derivatives) and (12) distinguishable from all other metaphysical structures (nature, instruments, knowledge, religion). This "table of artistic categories" is not "dogmatically rigid" either in relation to the "art system" or in relation to art history. Rather, the list of categorical definitions has the status of a "family resemblance", to use Ludwig Wittgenstein's phrase, but despite this softening formula, we still believe that it has sufficient "regulative" value in Kant's sense concerning our understanding of the constantly renewing world of art.

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