A central preoccupation of German aesthetic theorists over the last thirty years has been with the social and political truth-potential of works of art. Drawing on the distinctively Idealist and post-Idealist tradition of German philosophy since Hegel and the early romantics up to Heidegger, Gadamer and Adorno, several theorists have argued that works of art can and should be understood in terms of their capacity to communicate knowledge and enlightenment of our social-political and existential condition. This contrasts with the eighteenth-century British empiricist tradition and its partial continuation in contemporary analytic aesthetics, which tends to treat artworks solely as objects of pleasure or to focus solely on the structure of aesthetic judgements. Many of the main players in the German movement are now household names: Hans-Robert Jauß, Albrecht Wellmer and Peter Bürger are well known for their critical appraisals of Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory since its publication in 1970. But other figures, such as Karl-Heinz Bohrer, Rüdiger Bubner or Franz Koppe, are less familiar, and there is now a younger generation of writers who have yet to receive a hearing in Anglophone commentaries. Two figures worthy of particular attention are Christoph Menke and Martin Seel. Menke’s The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida (reviewed in RP 94) explores the tension between the autonomy of the aesthetic and the ‘sovereign’ character of the artwork in its relation of subversion to non-aesthetic practices.¹ Martin Seel’s Die Kunst der Entziehung: zum Begriff der ästhetischen Rationalität (The Art of Diremption: On the Concept of Aesthetic Rationality) theorizes the rationality of aesthetic experience in relation to moral-practical and theoretical discourse by drawing on insights from Habermas and Wellmer into our communicative appropriation of the differential ‘validity-dimensions’ of artworks.²

In this article I present an account of Martin Seel’s work. Although Seel has also written on the aesthetics of nature and environmental philosophy, as well as ethics and aesthetic aspects of the media and sport, I concentrate here on his first book, Die Kunst der Entziehung.³ I begin by situating him in relation to the reception of Adorno in Germany since the 1970s and then investigate the basic elements of his own aesthetic theory, concluding with a critical assessment.

After Adorno

In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno famously argues that contemporary artworks must negate their immediate sensuous tendencies in order to hold out the prospect of a utopia that resists pandering to the ‘system of illusions’ of capitalist consumerism and lapsing into premature reconciliation with the status quo. This entailed a special necessity to think art’s relation to critique and cognition, and to philosophy in particular. Thus Adorno defines the truth-content of artworks in terms of an ‘enigma’ awaiting resolution by philosophy. On the one hand, a work’s aesthetic qualities suggest a mode of knowing to which the determinate categories of discursive reason are not adequate; but on the other hand, aesthetic experience cannot itself impart enlightenment without the aid of philosophical reflection:

Philosophy and art converge in their truth content: The progressive self-unfolding truth of the artwork is none other than the truth of the philosophical concept… The truth content of artworks is not what they mean but rather what decides whether the work in itself is true or false, and this truth of the
work in itself is commensurable to philosophical interpretation and coincides ... with the idea of philosophical truth. For contemporary consciousness, fixated in the tangible and unmediated, the establishment of this relation to art obvious poses the greatest difficulties, yet without this relation art's truth content remains inaccessible: Aesthetic experience is not genuine experience unless it becomes philosophy.4

Hans-Robert Jauß's objection to this was that by proscribing any element of emotional catharsis in art, Adorno unwittingly undermined the possibility of any socially transformative effects for art by closing down the necessary channels of intersubjective communication that could release a work's expressive contents into social interaction.5 In a somewhat conventional rehabilitation of Kantian aesthetics, Rüdiger Bubner argued that Adorno ended only by assimilating aesthetic experience to theory and conversely by making theory itself aesthetic, in effect collapsing art into philosophy.6 Karl-Heinz Bohrer proposed that grasping the emancipatory force of aesthetic experience required investigating the specific element of shock in the instantaneous 'moment' (Augenblick) of colliding perceptions;7 while Franz Koppe argued that artworks should essentially be seen in anthropological terms as articulations of subjective needs and judged, following Habermas, not by the criterion of cognitive or representative truth (Wahrheit) but by that of 'expressive authenticity' or 'truthfulness' (Wahrhaftigkeit).8 Peter Bürger's well-known argument was that the historical aim of avant-garde art has been to subvert the idea of autonomy bequeathed to us by the bourgeois institution of art and to reunite art with everyday life practices, in this sense claiming that Adorno unjustifiably restricted truth and social import to the suspect category of autonomous artworks.9

While Martin Seel's reading of Adorno reflects elements of all these critiques, his chief point of departure is the work of Albrecht Wellmer.10 With Jauß, Wellmer agrees that Adorno's negative dialectics prevented him from appreciating the role of the intersubjective linguistic media through which agents communicate their aesthetic experience by means of syntheses of thought and feeling. Wellmer consequently adopts Habermas's neo-Kantian 'communicative' theory of the threefold validity-spheres of propositional truth, moral-practical rightness and expressive authenticity in order to develop a way of rescuing Adorno's ideas on truth, semblance and reconciliation in art. Against the other critics, however, Wellmer emphasizes that Adorno already implicitly recognized the irreducibility of the various kinds of validity at play in art to the one purely cognitive dimension, and further that Adorno always stressed the need of any philosophy of art to 'strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept'.11 Nonetheless, Wellmer accepts that Adorno failed to make clear enough how aesthetic enlightenment 'comes closer to being a capability rather than an abstract knowledge, something more like an ability to speak, judge, feel or perceive than the result of a cognitive effort'.12 As Wellmer puts it:

[A]rt is involved in questions of truth in a peculiar and complex way: not only does art open up the experience of reality, and correct and expand it; it is also the case that aesthetic 'validity' [Stimmigkeit] (i.e. the 'rightness' of a work of art) touches on questions of truth, truthfulness, and moral and practical correctness in an intricate fashion without being attributable to any one of the three dimensions of truth, or even to all three together. We might therefore suppose that the 'truth of art' can only be defended, if at all, as a phenomenon of interference between the various dimensions of truth.13

Seel elaborates Wellmer's suggestions into a systematic account of our various communicative relationships to art.14 The title of his book alludes to the German Idealist idea of the 'diremption' of consciousness from being and the mind's resultant yearning for identity with nature. However, Seel starts from the premiss that in a modern or perhaps postmodern age, reason involves not reconciliation but division and differentiation between spheres of judgement. Reason, he writes, 'is not the power of reconciliation but the art of diremption'.15 Art and aesthetic experience occupy one place in this dirempted, pluralistic conception of reason; they contribute to reasonable social life as a whole, but also possess their own independent rationality. Aesthetic considerations can check moral ones, and moral considerations aesthetic ones, while both can check theoretical propositions, and vice versa. But the specific rationality of the aesthetic must be neither underestimated nor exaggerated. As Seel puts it: 'Reason which is not aesthetic is not yet reason; but reason which becomes aesthetic is no longer reason'.16

In shifting the emphasis away from predominantly cognitive critique to perceptual experience and communication, it could be suggested that Seel here opens up the utopian aporias of Adorno's work to a productive dialogue with the more recent developments in social theory that stress diversity of cultural standpoint. By foregrounding 'competence' in the articulation and justification of lived perceptions and judgements, Seel offers a way of unpacking the idea of artistic truth-
potential in terms of intercultural practices of aesthetic discourse.

### Making experience

Seel begins by distinguishing between two equally unsalutary tendencies in the history of modern aesthetics: what he calls ‘overbidding’ theories (*Überbietungstheorie der Ästhetik*) and ‘privative’ theories (*Entzugstheorie der Ästhetik*). Overbidding theories tend to award the work of art special powers to impart aesthetic experiences whose claims to enlightenment are held to surpass, or ‘overbid’, the kinds of knowledge and truth attainable through philosophical reflection. Apart from Adorno, twentieth-century representatives include Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s idea of the work of art as a privileged point of access to the disclosure of being. The tendency originates in the early romantic movement with the move away from Kant’s analysis of subjective aesthetic judgement towards the idea of the work of art as an ‘organon of philosophy’, exemplified by Schelling, as well as with Hegel’s idea of art, religion and philosophy as the three forms of absolute spirit. Art’s only remaining function is then seen as being to illuminate the truths of philosophy, while philosophy in turn ‘intuits itself’ in the medium of art. By contrast, privative theories tend to react against the philosophical ‘overbidding’ of art in a nominalistic, overly affect-oriented concentration on subjective responses of liking and disliking. They thus ‘deprive’ artworks of any power to impart cognitive meanings in our aesthetic experience of them, either by (i) conservatively rehabilitating Kant’s Analytic of Beauty, or (ii) focusing exclusively on the element of taste and distaste in aesthetic judgements, as with the British empiricist tradition and some aspects of analytic aesthetics, or (iii) glorifying the independence of aesthetic experience from rational control after the fashion of Nietzsche (for example, Bataille and Lyotard). Privative theories helpfully disentangle the perceptual, emotive and evaluative aspects of aesthetic experience from the reflective, cognitive and interpretive aspects of historical criticism, but can give no explanation for why we might stand to learn something from aesthetic experience or to become enlightened about our world through art. Thus where overbidding theories tend to assimilate aesthetic experience to some higher, more absolute conception of reason, privative theories tend to sever all link between the aesthetic and the rational altogether.

Seel proposes that overcoming this duality requires mediating the element of cognition and reflection in Hegelian traditions of aesthetics with the element of perception and subjective judgement in the Kantian traditions. On the one hand, his aim will be to show how Kantian aesthetics necessarily requires ascribing cognitive meanings to aesthetic experience, and, on the other hand, to show how historicist philosophies of art presuppose contestable subjective valuing. In order to follow the first part of this argument, we first need to recall briefly Kant’s conclusion to the Analytic of Beauty in the *Critique of Judgement*.

Kant argues that the beauty attributed to the object of an aesthetic judgement must be universally communicable. This beauty, however, is a ‘subjective’, not an ‘objective’, universal, because it cannot derive from a prior concept of beauty. Aesthetic judgements, unlike cognitive judgements, do not subsume their object under a concept that would be capable of conveying prior knowledge of its beauty. Thus if the concept of a flower is that it has the properties of a stem, leaves and petals, I can infer from someone’s description of an object as having a stem, leaves and petals that it is a flower. However, if someone affirms to me that the flower is beautiful because it has the properties of a long and thin stem, shiny green leaves and bright red petals, I cannot infer, from these reasons alone, that the flower is beautiful. I cannot infer its beauty from any general principle of taste that says that all flowers possessing a long and thin stem, shiny green leaves and red petals are beautiful. For it may be that these very same properties will give me a reason to judge one flower as beautiful and another as garish or vulgar. Similarly, to take a different example, it could be that the very same melodic properties which give us reason to judge Beethoven’s music as noble and exalted would, transplanted into Schubert’s music, make Schubert sound monstrous to us, and conversely that the very same properties which give us reason to judge Schubert’s music as charming and poignant would, transplanted into Beethoven’s, make Beethoven sound trivial to us. The validity of aesthetic predicates is therefore fundamentally indeterminate with respect to the context of the appearance of the properties to which they refer. In consequence, subjects must simply go *and see*, or hear, each individual object in order to gain the necessary perceptual experience for reaching agreement as to why these particular properties give reason for ascribing these particular aesthetic predicates. This leads to Kant’s famous ‘antinomy of taste’, according to which aesthetic judgements cannot be founded on concepts, because otherwise it would be possible to ‘dispute’ (*disputieren*) matters
of taste by reference to a proof; while, on the other hand, aesthetic judgements must be founded on concepts, because otherwise it would not even be possible to ‘argue’ (streiten) about matters of taste. Kant sought to resolve this antinomy by proposing that aesthetic judgements rest not on determinate but on ‘indeterminate’ concepts. These ‘indeterminate’ concepts arise from our shared idea of the supersensible substrate of appearances that is expressed in our sensus communis, based on ‘free play’ between the Faculty of Understanding and the Faculty of Imagination.

Seel accepts that Kant’s resolution of the antinomy of taste is not itself satisfactory as an account of how perceptions and sensations relate to concepts and meanings in aesthetic judgement and aesthetic experience. Although Kant does adumbrate an idea of knowledge through art with reference to the ‘presentation of aesthetic Ideas’ by artistic genius, he does not mediate this discussion with the analysis of aesthetic judgement. Nonetheless, Seel maintains that Kant’s reference to ‘indeterminate’ concepts, and to ‘reflective’ (reflektierende) rather than ‘determinate’ (bestimmende) judgement, does open up ways of imagining a fusion between affective responses and historically informed cognitions. Aesthetic experience is mediated by language; and in our linguistic articulation of perceptions we can learn certain uniquely aesthetic meanings that are irreducible to determinate knowledge of objects under the aspect of propositional truth. These meanings will relate to the particular situated understanding of experience, the particular ways of revisiting our experience, that the work imparts, and whose degree of informativeness subjects can come to agree upon in direct perceptual evaluation of the object. To appreciate the ramifications of this proposal, we now need to consider Seel’s critique of historicist philosophies of art.

In his analysis of the Hegelian and more favourably sociological tradition in aesthetics, Seel argues that theories of art that make aesthetic value dependent on institutional conferment of artistic status tend to assimilate aesthetic understanding to purely theoretical knowledge about cultural and historical circumstances. Consequently, these theories need to include the possibility of intersubjective justifications of artistic status based on direct perceptual experience. A useful way of illustrating this argument is to consider his review of the work of Arthur Danto.

Danto, along with George Dickie, is known for espousing a version of the ‘institutional theory of art’. The institutional theory of art holds that what makes something an artwork is not anything inherent in the material substrate of the object but simply the social fact that it has had conferred upon it the status of ‘candidate for appreciation’ by certain institutional authorities: the curators, critics and other personnel of the ‘artworld’. The theory points out that what led to the oriental artefacts that once populated European archaeological museums being transferred to galleries of art at the end of the nineteenth century was simply an institutional decision. Similarly, what led to the
eventual acceptance of Duchamp’s *Fountain* by New York’s MOMA was nothing ‘intrinsically’ aesthetic or artistic capable of distinguishing the object from a real men’s urinal in a cloakroom, but simply the curators’ decision to award it artistic status by displaying it in the space of the gallery. Wollheim has objected that any such decision necessarily implies a judgement that should be capable of acclamation by more than just those blessed with ‘institutional authority’, based on reasons that demonstrably refer back to perceptual qualities of the object.\(^{23}\) But Danto has repeatedly sought to rebut this objection by pointing out that for every accepted artwork we can always imagine a material duplicate that is not an artwork: for every Warhol Brillo box in the art gallery we can imagine a Brillo box not in the gallery and hence not art, despite the absence of any perceptible difference. According to Danto, the only way artworks can consequently be distinguished from ordinary objects is by the fact that they have been intended by human agents to stand as objects that are, in one way or another, ‘about’ the fact that they are, or at least have been intended to stand as, artworks. They are, in this (Hegelian) sense, ‘self-conscious’.\(^{24}\)

Seel agrees with Danto that artworks possess this special aspect of intentional ‘aboutness’. However, he disagrees that the only way they can be distinguished from ordinary objects is by the fact that they are about *themselves*. For artworks are also, at the same time, about a context of experience that we, as perceiving spectators, see trans-figured through them. What *Fountain* is about is not only the fact that it is a urinal that has been presented as an artwork but also that, in being so presented, it has been presented to convey a particular perspective on the world: *pour épater les bourgeois*, to expose the complacency of Western civilization in the aftermath of the First World War, and so on. What we learn from *Fountain* is therefore not only something about the artworld but something about the real world *through* the artworld. Although Danto may deny that his theory excludes this, it is fair to say that his argument from the indiscernibility of physical objects gives an at best sketchy picture of the perceptual bases of art appreciation. For in referring to themselves, artworks also refer outwards to the world by evoking new ways of seeing the world. These new, and ever renewable, ways of seeing are what we esteem in *Fountain*; and we esteem them because they offer something more than either purely intellectual knowledge of cultural history or bare sensory intensity but a rewarding synthesis of cognition and perception. They are what make it worth our while not simply reading about Dadaism in the history books but actually going to see the work.

From Seel’s standpoint, the problem with Danto’s argument that anything could be proposed as art is that since only very few objects have actually been proposed as art, and since even fewer of these have retained and redeemed this status over time, we must be able to offer plausible reasons for this selectivity. Here Seel emphasizes that these reasons cannot be referred exclusively to changing cultural paradigms and institutional structures without a certain nor-
mative self-contradiction. For the reasons will also have to turn on the extent to which the intentionality of the art proposal can be shown to have ‘proved itself’ or ‘realized itself’ in the event of perception: there must be a sense in which the intention can be intersubjectively justified by reference to an aesthetic illumination of the world. Such perceptually oriented reasons are of course unlikely to be forthcoming if we live in a culture that has no relevant paradigm for recognizing the object as ‘art’ in the specifically modern Western sense, or, alternatively, as contemporaries of the twenty-first century, if we fail to identify a relevant historical context for the object (say, a medieval altar painting). But this circumstance does not itself invalidate the argument that any ascription of art status implies aesthetic evaluation, which in turn implies normative commitments on the part of judging subjects to engage in defensible criticism. The argument therefore remains that if an artwork is to retain and vindicate its status in the institution, there must be reasons in virtue of which its status can be justified by reference to experiential insights arising from our immediate confrontation with it.

From this, Seel concludes that once purged of their more reductive tendencies, the two opposing Kantian and Hegelian traditions of aesthetics can come together in a productive synthesis. If Kantian aesthetics is read as allowing a cognitive dimension, and Hegelian or historicist or sociological aesthetics is read as allowing for normative evaluation, then the two traditions can be jointly employed to theorize an idea of aesthetic knowledge.

Seel’s proposal here is that aesthetic knowledge arises from the way artworks transfigure everyday experience. Drawing on Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, Seel invokes the way artworks help us to ‘make experience’ (*Erfahrung machen*) out of the experience we already ‘have’ (*Erfahrung haben*).25 ‘Making experience’ involves recognizing complexes of meanings, internal correspondences and metaphorical resemblances between artworks and the everyday world. In this sense, artworks always refer to *ways of seeing* states of affairs in the world, rather than to states of affairs directly. In Nelson Goodman’s terms, artworks evoke ‘ways of world-making’: ways of exemplifying phenomena under semiotic systems that depart from stable discursive systems.26 Artworks thus impart experiential meanings to us that could not otherwise be conveyed through the propositional structure of theoretical discourse or through prescriptive moral-practical discourse. Furthermore, artworks that enlighten us about our world and our social relations to others elicit our aesthetic approval, and we thereby judge them ‘successful’. In Seel’s terminology, ‘successful’ (*gelungene*) replaces conventional substantive ‘beauty’. Formally ‘successful’ artworks (including the non-beautiful, grotesque, etc.) make use of their sensory media in an aesthetically cogent fashion that illuminates our horizons of experience and challenges our understanding. By contrast, ‘unsuccessful’ works merely repeat or reproduce a perspective we already have (as in cliche), or refer to the world too literally and discursively (as in excessively realist art), or fail to mediate the aesthetic with the moral-practical (as in moralistic, propagandist art). Much ‘mass’ cultural production is unsuccessful whenever it relies on sentimentality, simplistic narrative resolutions or commodified packaging of experience. But some works once deemed ‘masterpieces’ may also have to forfeit their claim to success whenever more democratic kinds of criticism challenge the restricted bases of social experience on which that claim was first tendered – for example, on grounds of class ideology, gender stereotype, racial prejudice, etc. – because such grounds can be both politically and aesthetically relevant. However, in each case, the successful work must always be shown to be successful by an open community of subjects capable of justifying their evaluations through the use of critical arguments that refer to aspects of perceptual experience; and this they can only do ostensively, by demonstratively persuading other subjects to see for themselves the informative meanings the work discloses when they apprehend it.

We have seen that Seel’s central proposition is that artworks derive their value from practices of critical communication between subjects, and in turn enrich our communication concerning other non-aesthetic spheres. Seel consequently holds that artworks should be valued not solely in terms of ‘truth’, in the narrow cognitive sense, but in terms of all three dimensions of validity in the Habermasian communicative scheme: as enlarging our horizons of representation (bearing on ‘truth’); informing and concretizing our moral relations (bearing on ‘rightness’); and articulating our subjective needs and feelings (bearing on ‘authenticity’).

However, it might be objected that this vision exaggerates the possibilities of consensus and the overall rationality of aesthetic life by placing too much emphasis on the discursive regulation of aesthetic experience. It certainly seems significant that whereas Wellmer preserves Adorno’s idea of art’s radical intimation of
utopia, speaking of ‘an arena for non-violent communication which would encompass the opened forms of art as well as the open structures of a no longer rigid type of individuation and socialization’, Seel expunes the concept of utopia from aesthetic discourse altogether. Here one might feel that in restricting himself purely to the social benefits of communication about art, Seel unduly sacrifices the idea of art’s redemptive enactment of nonviolent states of social communication within particular works. One might also feel that he accepts the distinctness of theoretical, moral-practical and aesthetic criteria too rigidly, and neglects the ways in which aesthetic practices often threaten to subvert this neat Neo-Kantian schema. Menke’s idea of the ‘sovereign’ work that sunders any neat compartmentalization of domains of autonomy and thereby calls into being whole new ways of configuring social and political affairs seems pertinent in this connection. Several Adorno advocates, such as Rose, Bernstein and Bowie, have raised problems with the Habermasian idea of a communicative ‘paradigm switch’ on which Seel relies, as a putative ‘way out’ of the ‘aporeias of the philosophy of the subject’. As these and other critics point out, the difficulty with any such idea is that it assumes some stable, formal, culturally invariant procedure for the discursive resolution of communicative claims, which must surely rebound against Seel’s attempt to make safely qualified, non-excessive claims on behalf of the aesthetic. Bernstein in particular emphasizes that the fact that we moderns can no longer regard art in the way Heidegger describes the temple for the Greeks – as grounding and ‘disclosing’ a whole social world – does not mean we cannot continue to mourn this loss of art’s social objectivity and critically yearn for its restoration through radical social transformation: it does not mean we can or should simply resign ourselves to a purely subjectivized world of exchanges of personal dispositions, even when that world is viewed as ‘intersubjectively’ structured.

These difficulties notwithstanding, however, one may argue that one of the great strengths of Seel’s approach is its ability to absorb the diverse cultural challenges to traditional conceptions of aesthetic value, from the new materialist criticism to feminism and post-colonial studies. It meets these challenges by deliberately linking recognition of historically marginalized groups into the normative context of intersubjective argument over aesthetic values; and in so doing, it also trenchantly corrects some elements in contemporary cultural studies that tend to gloss over the question of what specially aesthetic features of the object make it worthy of selection as the source of the demonstration of some pattern of cultural exclusion, rather than any other object. Seel explicitly addresses the question of how any such exclusion ought to move us to revise our idea of the bases of aesthetic appreciation and clearly state the social and political criteria that we thereby commit ourselves to incorporating into our idea of aesthetic merit, rather than simply eschewing questions of value and worth altogether. In this sense, he gets us to see how aesthetic claims are not helpfully treated solely in a Bourdieuan fashion as manoeuvres in a symbolic marketplace of cultural capital and crudely relativized to the habitus of their carrier groups; for aesthetic claims are claims to validity, and as such they demand to be taken seriously and argued with. In a wider context, one might also suggest that Seel’s Habermasian idea of ‘interrational criticism’ between differentiated spheres of validity evokes ways in which his work links up productively with recent discussions of Kant’s Critique of Judgement from the side of postmodernist writers in relation to the indeterminacy of aesthetic concepts and the relevance of aesthetics to moral reasoning – yet without going all the way towards the wholesale assimilation of ethics to the aesthetic singularity of encounters with the Other.

Notes

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2. Martin Seel, Die Kunst der Entzweigung: Zum Begriff der ästhetischen Rationalität, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1985. Menke and Seel were both pupils of Jauß and Wellmer at Constance University in the 1980s.


13. Ibid., pp. 22–3.


16. Ibid., p. 29.

17. Ibid., pp. 46–72.


29. I have not discussed Seel’s more recent writings on ethics and the aesthetics of nature, which are arguably of equal interest and import. One interesting instance of Seel’s careful weighing up the relative claims of ethics and aesthetics is his Eine Ästhetik der Natur, in which he argues that environmental ethics cannot help but begin from an anthropocentric perspective that defines the value of nature in terms of possibilities of human life-experience to which all subjects have an equal claim. Understanding these possibilities in a noninstrumental manner requires viewing nature not as a mere resource or condition of human welfare but as the very form or image of goodness itself. The form of the good life that nature presents to cultural understanding consists in the freedom, intentionless process and selfregenerating continuity with which it unfolds before us, even after significant human intervention in nature. This aesthetic approach suggests we may still have to take the idea of nature seriously as an insistent philosophical issue, beyond the various sociological critiques of figures such as Beck and Giddens on the ‘death of nature’, or Eder on the ‘socialization of nature’, or Haraway on ‘cyborgs’. For a more critical assessment of Seel’s aesthetics of nature, however, see Peter Dews’s commentary in The Limits of Disenchantment, pp. 155–60.