CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY OF AESTHETICS BEFORE AUSCHWITZ

The various forms of thinking on art are produced in different cultures of the world at different historical periods. Among these varied forms of thinking about art, the philosophical type of reflection is considered the most sophisticated one. Philosophers since ages have debated the nature and importance of art and beauty. This philosophical thinking on art is also known by different terms in different cultures of the world, but in the Western philosophical tradition, which the present research investigates, it has been assigned the term “aesthetics”. Aesthetics designate a philosophy concerned with the essence, perception and the appreciation of art and beauty. As an umbrella term which can combine all divergent modes of perspectives on art, “aesthetics” is insufficient to describe premodern and alternate modes of thinking other than Western or European. Such alternate modes of thinking are, for example: (a) the ancient Indian Sanskrit text on aesthetics by Bharata-Muni (200 BCE–200 CE) called Natyāśāstra¹ whose sixth chapter on rasa forms the basis of commentaries followed from the ninth to the eleventh century, most famously by Abhinavagupta (c.950 CE–1020 CE) in Abhinavabhārati; and (b) the ninth century Chinese thinking on art by the painter and art historian of T’ang dynasty (618 CE–906 CE) Chang Yen-yūan (c.815 CE–c.877 CE) written under the original title Litai ming hua chí² (847 CE), (“Record of Famous Paintings in Successive Dynasties”).

Aesthetics, in a strict sense, became a branch of philosophy in the eighteenth century. The German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) coined first the term ästhetisch (“aesthetic”) in his dissertation published in Latin as *Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnullis ad Poema Pertinentibus*³ (1735), translated as “Philosophical meditations on some matters pertaining to poetry”. Baumgarten became the first philosophical teacher ever to lecture on aesthetics and out of these academic courses emerged his large but unfinished two volume treatise *Aesthetica*⁴ (1750 and 1758). He used the term ästhetisch to denote “the science for directing the inferior faculty of cognition or the science of how something is to be sensitively cognized”⁵. Aesthetics, therefore, designated the science of perception, the domain of particular immediate sensory cognition in contrast to the general abstract forms of intellectual cognition. The term is used to understand two interrelated problems: (a) the place of art in philosophy, and (b) the relation between reason and sensibility. According to Baumgarten, aesthetics is a specialist area of inquiry concerned with perception and sensory experience. Baumgarten’s definition of aesthetics as rational perfection expressed in sensuous form suggested two contrasting things: (a) the notion of sensibility, and (b) the philosophy of art. Thus, sensibility and the philosophy of art, for Baumgarten, are contradictory in themselves, evoking the very Greek etymological origin of the term aisthētikos (meaning “sense perception” or “sensitive, perceptive”), an adjective which is again derived from the Greek verb aisthanesthai (“to perceive, to feel”) or aisthanomai (“I perceive, feel, sense”). Baumgarten makes a distinction between aesthēsis (“sensation” or “perception”) and noesis (“thought,” “intellection,”

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“cognition,” or “knowledge”) and handles down it for later philosophers of aesthetics to resolve. From its very terminological beginning, aesthetics acquired recognition as a domain of critical and philosophical discourse. It is used not only in philosophy but also in the field of fashion and design, and encompasses important domains such as literature, dance, music, theatre, film, painting, photography, architecture and sculpture. Similarly, the term “aesthetic” is used in connection with art to describe the sensibility and style of an artist’s work, and the word “aesthete” refers to a person who professes a superior appreciation of what is beautiful. The tradition of philosophical aesthetics questioned whether experience could be represented or assigned a moral value. This tradition, as mentioned earlier, originated in the 18th century. Following Baumgarten, aesthetics as a philosophical activity became concerned not just with the question of beauty but with the whole nature of experience in terms of perceptions, feelings and emotions. However, philosophers quickly realized that this inquiry opened out onto issues of subjectivity and identity and had the potential for transforming values and beliefs. This is because the issue of experience relates to the question of consciousness and, by implication, the role of unconscious experience in shaping identity. The subject of experience also became bound up with the questions of politics, psychoanalysis and art, and more widely, with the vital issues of modernity and postmodernity. So, while aesthetics began as a specialist branch of philosophy, it was actually in the right position to form the kernel for nearly all future philosophical inquiry.

Before Baumgarten, aesthetics did not exist in name as such, but there was a long and important tradition in philosophy which was concerned with the meaning and significance of perception and sensory experience. This tradition goes back to
classical philosophy (particularly Presocratic philosophers and the philosophers after Socrates, beginning with his great disciple Plato), in which issues of beauty and truth were first coupled together. Truth was associated with religious and ethical ideas during the classical era. Though the Greeks revered art as the highest form of human endeavour and had invented the term for aesthetics ("aisthētikos"), there did not exist within Greek world any separate discipline called “aesthetics” for exclusive deliberations on art. Presocratic philosophers made distinction between philosophy and science as the fields of inquiry about nature and universe, but they did not make any distinction between aethēsis and noesis. Thalēs of Miletus (c.624 BCE – c.546 BCE), one of the Seven Sages and according to Aristotle, the first philosopher in the Greek philosophical tradition, famous for his observations of the sky, did not make any distinction between aethēsis and noesis and declared that “all things are full of gods” (i.e., all things in the universe are modifications of a single eternal and divine substance which, according to Thalēs, is “water”). After the attack on sense perception by another Presocratic philosopher Parmenides of Elea (b. c.515 BCE – d. after 450 BCE), it was made incumbent upon the Greek philosophers to distinguish between aethēsis and noesis. Parmenides was the first Greek philosopher whose philosophical poem in the traditional epic medium of hexameter verse survives in fragments – roughly one hundred and sixty out of original eight hundred verses. The poem in fragments consists of a prologue and two sections, the Way of Truth and the Way of Seeming (or Opinion) which is transmitted under the title On Nature (written between 480 BCE and 470 BCE), but it is considered unauthentic. According to Parmenides, the world of verbal reasoning and the world of senses are utterly different and unrelated constructions, only the world of verbal reasoning represented reality. He showed that
what people regarded as fundamentally true was not beyond question and that “what is” can be deduced, not from experience or from the senses, but entirely from the logic of the verb “to be” and its relationship to the objects of thought and speech. The fact that the writings of Parmenides had survived, the later philosophers (Plato and Aristotle chiefly) had to quote him or examine his ideas.

In the Western tradition of aesthetics, *Hippias Major*[^6] (c. 390 BCE) by Plato (c.427 BCE–347 BCE) and *Poetics*[^7] (c.335 BCE) by Aristotle (384 BCE–322 BCE) are recognized as the founding philosophical reflections on art produced in ancient Greece. Plato’s philosophy was based on the teachings of his mentor Socrates (470 BCE–399 BCE), the itinerant philosopher, who held religious beliefs which were metaphysical in character. Socrates believed in an underlying, transcendent order to the universe, an order which was composed of eternally existing forms from which we derive absolute values of justice, beauty and truth. These Forms contained the inherent structures to be found within all existing objects. But in valuing wisdom and virtue in contrast to the warrior’s attributes of bravery and strength, Socrates differed from the majority of Greek society. Following him, Plato (c.427 BCE–347 BCE) argued that philosophers were unique in possessing wisdom, for attaining knowledge of the higher Forms of the universe. To define his position, Plato contrasted philosophy with both art and poetry, which he considered immoral and untruthful. Art and poetry are mimetic and play upon people’s emotions. On account of their dangerous influence, Plato in *The Republic*[^8] (c.375 BCE) banned artists and poets from his ideal state. The idea of poetry’s power to affect the viewer was a loaded issue in his time. Poets were believed to have access to the muses, the daughters of memory who possessed historical

knowledge and insight into the god’s motives. Poetry had a high public profile since plays were written in verse and it was also the custom to read poetry aloud in public forums. Plato disapproved of the power of poetry to seduce people, to give a false view of the gods and provide unsuitable models of behaviour to the young and impressionable. In making his negative judgement of poetry, Plato particularly castigated the work of Homer (c.800 BCE–700 BCE), who composed the two Greek epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Plato also viewed painting (wall painting) derogatively, as an imitative art based on the copying of Nature. He compared painting to a mirror and viewed that painting is no more skilled than turning a mirror round and round to capture the image of the sun and heavens and the earth. For this reason, he argued further that painting is twice removed from the truth, not even achieving the status of carpenters’ artefacts which represent the blueprint of the higher Forms at one remove. Thus, Plato condemned art, but he never entirely dissociated art from truth. He stated rather that art is a pale mirror, or a poor copy, of the truth. However, in *The Sophist* (360 BCE), he discussed a category entirely apart from the truth, which he termed “simulacrum”. He identified the sophist philosophers as simulacral, and derogatively compared the Sophist philosopher to a magician. Nietzsche, Deleuze and Derrida saw Plato’s arguments about the simulacrum as the Achilles heel in his philosophy. Nietzsche critiqued that if the simulacrum exists outside truth, then Plato is no longer in a position to judge it in relation to truth, and cannot describe it as false. Following Nietzsche, the postmodern philosophers nullified the opposition between truth and falsity. This in turn led to a re-evaluation of art’s relation or nonrelation to truth. The postmodern critique of Plato was anticipated in classical times itself in a celebrated story told by the Roman scholar Pliny the Elder.

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(23–79 AD) in his *Naturalis Historia*\(^\text{10}\) (“Natural History”). Written in thirty-seven books and dedicated to Titus in 77 AD but published posthumously, *Naturalis Historia* consists of 20,000 important facts obtained from 100 authors. Books 33–37 are on metals and stones, including the use of minerals in medicine, art and architecture, with a digression on the history of art which is the source of many good anecdotes and much valuable information about Greek artists.

In his *Metaphysics*\(^\text{11}\), Aristotle accuses Presocratics for failing to make any such distinction. It is the desire for understanding or knowledge (*noesis*) that makes one human and the humans are endowed with the senses through which they experience the universe, and acquire and produce knowledge about it. Whatever is learned in life is learned primarily through the sensory experience. Aristotle uses the word *technê* for this human capacity to understand the intrinsic rational of things. In his sketch of the evolution of human nature which parallels the evolution of *technê*, Aristotle considers arts as the first development by human beings for their necessities, then recreational arts for the enhancement of the quality of human life, and later the activities of simply satisfying the human desire to know (such as mathematics). Philosophy is a human desire for knowledge about the universe and as a sophisticated development in the progress of human nature intertwined with the sophistication of *technê*, emerges in the last, much after the development of arts for the very survival of humanity. *Poetics* works within these broad parameters set by Aristotle’s philosophy and tries to understand the internal rational (*technê*) in the production of art (poetry) which might have been produced either by instinct, by trial and error, or even by *technê*, but not as a compulsive reflective understanding. But one who is puzzled or bewildered by the

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aura, the wonder of art, and desires to know the logic/intelligibility at work in specific creations of art, the reflective or the philosophical understanding, which would give further pleasure to the seeker, is necessary. Aristotle’s *Poetics* is a philosophy of art, the revered Greek art of poetry, particularly tragedy.

Plato and Aristotle did differ in some significant ways in their respective views on art. For Plato, as in his famous cave analogy, the difference between *aesthêsis* and *noesis* is a difference of the degree of the reality of objects and considers *phantasia* (“imagination”) as deception. Aristotle thinks of *phantasia* as a mediating faculty between *aesthêsis* and *noesis* and argues about the relationship between *aesthêsis* and *noesis* in his book *De Anima* (“On the Soul,”), written in c.350 BCE. *Aesthêsis* is the faculty through which the *being of beings* is disclosed to the soul, while *noesis* is the faculty through which the *truth of being* is thought over. Thus, though Plato and Aristotle do make a distinction between *aesthêsis* and *noesis*, none of the two depart from *aesthêsis* and enforce *noesis*, the choice of thinking over sense perception. Both assume homology between *aesthêsis* and *noesis*. The distinction between *aesthêsis* and *noesis* can also be found in the efforts made by the Jewish philosopher Philo (c.25 BCE–c.50 CE) to syncretise the Jewish and the Hellenistic philosophical systems represented by the two respective figures of Moses and Plato, therefore this distinction entered into Jewish philosophy too. *The Poetics* offered the most extensive analysis of art after Plato. Aristotle laid the foundations for modern aesthetics in it. It focussed on the status and interaction of pleasure, understanding and emotion in the experience of works of art and explored the relationship of works of art to reality. Aristotle’s ideas about art made use of the concept of mimesis or imitation, but he did not evaluate art in terms of its degree of truth or moral worth and rejected Plato’s idea of art as a
distorting mirror of reality. Instead he analysed art in terms of its ability to engender emotion, especially emotions of pleasure and pain. Aristotle argued that the mimetic structure of art is embedded in the interaction between the work of art – poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, music and dance – and the audience. He stressed the fact that the works of art have their own structures and forms which are independent of structures and forms in reality. He underlined the fictional status of art which makes it possible to appreciate and enjoy things which are unattractive or painful in reality. For him, art is understood, evaluated and appreciated by the audience through a range of concepts derived from experience and life. Using such ideas, Aristotle made a particular study of the emotions aroused by tragic drama which is known as the theory of catharsis. He understood how tragic drama draws on the audience’s feelings of pity and fear, feelings which are aroused when the hero suffers a significant reversal of fortunes, such as when Oedipus in Sophocles’ tragedy *Oedipus the King*, discovers that Jocasta, his wife, is in fact his mother.

During the medieval period, when Christianity arose in the West by replacing paganism, aesthetics was subsumed within theological debates revolving around questions such as whether God created the universe from nothing and the classical distinction between the metaphysical, transcendent realm of the absolute inhabited by God and the sensory, corporeal realm inhabited by man. St. Augustine (354 AD–430 AD) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 AD–1274 AD) adapted the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle in an attempt to fulfil Christian requirements and resolve the paradoxes of metaphysics. Like Plato, Augustine believed in an underlying metaphysical form and order to the universe. For him, this belief in metaphysics was associated with God, and he considered anything possessing a sense of order and unity to be beautiful, as it
reflected a higher order. He sidestepped the traditional Christian association of sensual pleasure with immorality and connected the appreciation of beauty to reason and the mind. He departed marginally from Plato and was a little more generous towards artists and playwrights, stating that it was not necessarily their fault that art was incapable of representing higher truths. Following Aristotle, Aquinas explored the relationship between the perceiver and the experience of beauty, which contrasted with Augustine’s neo-Platonic philosophy that excluded the perceiver from consideration and viewed sensual beauty as an imitation of God’s own beauty. According to Aquinas, beauty produces a harmonious and restful state which is derived not so much from visual experience as from the activity of cognition in the perception of beauty. Aquinas’s theory of beauty and cognition reveals his desire to associate the experience of beauty with the intellect than with senses, thereby giving it an acceptable status within Christian theology. Poetry and music were capable of discussion in the medieval period, but they were subsumed under the concept of the seven liberal arts (Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astrology). Painting and Architecture belonged to the mechanical arts. The medieval culture adopted an attitude of scepticism towards the legacy of Roman art because it was associated with idolatry, but at certain times, images were defended as having a necessary didactic function. In the Byzantine era in Constantinople, from the 4th century AD to the 15th century, art was considered important as a priestly and often austere symbol of divine power. In the West by the end of the medieval period, between the 14th and 16th centuries, art was more openly embraced as an aid to religious instruction. Even the great Gothic cathedrals had an illustrative function, underlining the idea of God as the architect of the universe.
In Italy during the Renaissance which lasted approximately from 13th to 17th century, writers on art revived the classical conception of mimesis which originated from Plato and Aristotle. The architect Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) in his treatise *On Painting*¹² (1435) used the concept of mimesis in relation to the pursuit of naturalistic effects and the look of the “real” in art. The notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) reveal his conception of painting as a branch of natural philosophy and placed great value on the idea of art acting as a mirror to Nature and reality because he believed that Nature was part of divine creation. Raphael (1483–1520) acted as directors of artistic projects with big commercial studios and a host of assistances producing the actual work. The Italian painter and architect Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) initiated the genre of biography through his important book on art history *Le vite de’ più eccellenti architetti pittori et scultori italiani da Cimabue insino a’ tempi nostril* (1550), translated as *The Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Architects, Painters and Sculptors*¹³ (1996), which detailed the lives and careers of some of the most renowned Renaissance artists such as Giotto, Leonardo and Michelangelo. Ideas of artistic creativity and originality were discussed for the first time since the classical period. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) argued in *Les mots et les choses* (1966), translated as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*¹⁴ (1970) that the culture and ideas of the Renaissance and the period immediately following it were part of a network of knowledge and values which belong to “the Classical episteme”. It reflected the ideology of the absolute monarchies ruling Europe from the 15th to the 18th centuries. It posits an ideal of a transcendent, objective Mind or Subject. In European paintings of this period—Raphael’s *Scuola di*_

Atene (1509–11), Diego Velázquez’s (1599–1660) *Las Meninas* and Nicolas Poussin’s (1594–1665) *Et in Arcadia ego* or *Les bergers d’Arcadie* (1638), the Subject stands literally and metaphorically before the pictured world like an omnipotent God.

The radical break occurred in modern times with the coming of René Descartes (1596–1650) and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) who completely broke away from aesthēsis and enforce noesis: *cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I am”). Descartes wrote in his repudiation of senses: “I will regard myself as not having hands, or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or any senses, but as nevertheless falsely believing that I possess all these things.” He added further, “I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason—words of whose meaning I was previously ignorant.” Galileo also privileged thought over sensation in modern science in contrast to premodern science. The modern philosophy of Descartes and the modern science of Galileo disagreed about any homologous relationship between the being of beings revealed through senses in aesthēsis and the thinking of being discerned though the mind in noesis.

In the eighteenth century, there arose a wholesale questioning of imperialist and absolutist ideologies throughout Europe. Even religion was viewed with scepticism. This led to the declaration by the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) that philosophy had no business dealing with the question of God and his purported existence. Denis Diderot (1713–84) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) also joined this secular Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). Kant’s two of three major philosophical treatises *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781), translated as *Critique of...*
Pure Reason\textsuperscript{20} (1929) and Kritik der Urteilskraft (1790), translated as The Critique of Judgement\textsuperscript{21} (1952) were valuable contributions in inaugurating rigorous philosophical interrogations of art that runs up to the present and influences not only German but also French and Italian philosophy. Kant used the term “aesthetic” equivocally as his contemporary German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. Using it in the Greek philosophical tradition of aesthesis as theory of sense perception, Kant adopted the new meaning of the term between the first and the third critique. Kant’s third critique, The Critique of Judgement, came after Baumgarten’s distinction and views on aesthetics and is exclusively dedicated to the study of sensory and emotional experience which became known as aesthetics. It considers the philosophical reflections on art as universal or valid beyond their specific geographical, cultural and historical origins. Kant undermines the dominant modern philosophical discourses on art and beauty, especially Baumgarten’s theory of art and beauty, and points to the contrasts within the modern philosophical understandings of art and beauty. From Plato to the Enlightenment, beauty had been gauged according to the ideals of the metaphysical world and their traces within Nature or the mind, while Kant acknowledged initially that the appreciation of beauty is entirely subjective. He also maintained that beauty consists of a harmonious correspondence between experience and the intellect. Following his analysis of beauty, Kant investigated what the emotional experience of synthesis with the Other is like. He re-employed the concept of the sublime which had fallen into disuse since its development by the Greek rhetorician Longinus (1\textsuperscript{st} c. AD) in his treatise On the Sublime. The sublime is an experience of being overwhelmed and of losing control. In order to illustrate this, Kant

referred to the sense of vertigo induced by vast architectural edifices, such as the Pyramids or the interior of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, and the mortal fear provoked by wild nature. Kant maintained that the experience of the sublime generates an unexpected feeling of delight as a sense of space and time becomes enlarged. He introduced this feeling of delight in order to assign a positive value to the experience of the sublime, and so safeguard the Subject from irrevocably changed by it. Kant’s move to protect the Subject was commensurate with capitalist ideology around the idea of the Subject. The idea of sublime as unknown or unrepresentable in Kant influenced later philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille and Lyotard. Later, Kant said that the sublime is governed by “Reason” which guarantees that aesthetic judgements about beauty and the sublime are free and disinterested because they are ruled by the superiority of the mind. Kant’s ideas about the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements influenced both Romantic and Modernist aesthetics, but they were called into question by three major modern philosophers: Nietzsche, Freud and Marx.

Thus, Kant became a pioneer in developing the unique philosophical discipline of aesthetics in Germany. Philosophical aesthetics as a discipline is thoroughly grounded in German thought and philosophy of art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries specifically in Britain, France, Italy and the United States has a constant recourse to the German tradition. Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) took Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* as the starting point for his philosophical investigations of beauty and art and attempted to discover an objective principle of art which can overcome Kant’s subjectivism. He wrote *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters22, 1795) wherein he tried to set up a new paradigm by combining the theory of human drives with the

idea of education. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling’s (1775–1854) writings mark
the peak in the estimation of art’s role for philosophy. *System des transzendentalen
Idealismus* (1800), translated as *The System of Transcendental Idealism* is the most
important texts of German classical philosophy and most influential contribution to
the philosophy of art. Schelling is the first philosopher who considers art as possessing
the power to unify subject and object by means of beauty. Art fulfils functions which
cannot be executed by philosophical thought.

G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) believed that the historical process leading towards
the dawn of Spirit is divided into three major phases, which are reflected in the history
of art. Symbolic art points towards Spirit without being able to adequately represent it.
This art takes a representational form (humans or animals), or an allegorical form.
The next stage is Classical art, by which Hegel specifically meant Greek sculpture, and
the final stage is that of the Christian religion called by Hegel as Romantic art. These
three phases of art represent for Hegel an inexorable movement towards a recognition
that Man cannot represent or conceptualize non-being. Hegel believed that this
recognition would mean that art was no longer needed. Man’s limitation to
conceptualize non-being marked the realization that non-being should be held in awe
as proof of a divine intellect capable of reconciling opposites within itself. However,
Hegel’s appeal to a divine and transcendent order as a way of synthesizing all forms of
experience came under increasing attack by philosophers as the nineteenth century
proceeded.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) tries to go beyond the idealists in his effort to
redefine aesthetics as a sphere of life and inquiry, but falls below the level of discussion
which aesthetics had achieved during the previous decades. He wrote of the three
stages of human life: aesthetic, ethical and religious. The fault of his age was in being content to live in merely aesthetic categories. His critique of aesthetics can be found in Enten-Eller (Either/Or), Gjentagelsen (Repetition), and Stadier pa Livets Vej (Stages on Life’s Way). For Kierkegaard, the term ‘aesthetic’ has two different meanings: The first meaning refers to the sphere of art and beauty and the attitude created in the recipient by individual works of art or by the high valuation of art, while the second refers to an attitude toward life, a mode of life characterized by immediacy, sensuality, desire and natural inclination.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Karl Marx (1818–1883) attempted to explain experiences without recourse to received ideas about rationality and reason and founded in their different ways both modern and postmodern philosophy and aesthetics.

Nietzsche recognized the logical impossibility of maintaining and defining a subject in relation to what is unknown. He viewed that the unrepresentable defies all conceptual oppositions and fixed representations, and this realization marks “the end of the longest error” and “the high point of humanity”. According to him, the potential for real creative energy in society had been stifled for several millennia, since the early Greek writers such as Homer and the tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles in the 5th century BC. Nietzsche appreciated their writing as possessing a libidinal energy expressed in rhythm and musicality. In The Birth of Tragedy, he identified two posing but mutually enhancing tendencies composing this energy: (a) the Apollonian tendency towards form and images, and (b) the Dionysian tendency towards intoxication and excess. Nietzsche values the Dionysian tendency as a libidinal or instinctual energy
arising from the unconscious that opposes fixed values and forms. It is capable of superseding moral agendas. For Nietzsche, beauty signalled the collapse of all conceptually and morally determined oppositions. The opposites are tamed without tension in beauty. The violence is no more needed and everything follows or obeys so easily and pleasantly. This delights the artist’s will to power, which meant for Nietzsche the ability to embrace change and convert it into creative energy. But the Nietzschean idea of will to power was later misinterpreted by the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s, who thought it reflected their own ideology of Aryan supremacy.

For Freud, subjectivity was fragmented in the modern period and consciousness consisted of a constant struggle to make sense of these fragmented experiences and bring them into form through understanding and language. In light of this understanding, Freud developed a theory of artistic representation and transformation known as “sublimation”. Sublimation gives form to repressed unconscious feelings through narratives and representations. Freud cited as an example Michelangelo’s statue of Moses and viewed that the statue illustrated the prophet’s renunciation of his feelings of anger at his people in order to save the symbol which defined his community, the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Moses is seen tucking the tablets safely under his arm after losing his grip on them for a moment in his initial state of anger. Freud analyzed art as a symptom of unconscious desires and fears. In his essay Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood (1910), he described how he was particularly struck by the bizarre effect of the two women in Leonardo’s cartoon for St Anne with the Madonna and Two Others (c. 1498), in which it appears “as if two heads were growing from a single body”. At first, this monstrous hydra-like image

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underlying the composition of the two women might not be noticed. Once seen, it reveals the emergence of Leonardo’s unconscious fear of women.

Marx was principally concerned with political economy, but he conceptualized the conditions and possibilities of artistic production and human experience in the modern world. In his notebooks from the winter of 1857–58 published posthumously as the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf)* (1939), translated as *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (1973) and *Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (1867), translated as *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*\(^\text{25}\) in three volumes. Marx argued that in modern, capitalist societies man is alienated both from himself and from his human possibilities because the proletariat have no control over the price of their labour since property and the means of production is owned and controlled by the bourgeoisie. On the basis of this analysis, Marx called for a revolutionary change to the world. Marx made a few remarks about art which are linked to his critique of bourgeois values and ideas. He argued that the enduring appeal of Greek art is not that such art is timeless, as the bourgeois claim. The idea of timelessness sustains the economic value of art while also concealing the historical circumstances in which art is produced, and the class differences existing in these circumstances. Marx stated that the real reason why Greek art continues to be enjoyed is that it was produced at the dawn of Western civilization. Therefore, there is a nostalgia for the products of that innocent childhood. Marx believed that mythology was important for the Greeks to make sense of unpredictable natural forces. But he argued that art can no longer have the same function in the

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modern period as in Greek society since mankind has now gained control over nature through technology. Therefore, modern art requires the artist to have a fantasy independent of mythology. This capacity for independent fantasy involved an imaginative ability to represent the world in ways that science and technology cannot, and a capacity to grasp universal meanings concerning class inequality.

In the absence of a specific religious art in the late 19th and 20th centuries, the notion of art for art’s sake took on a quasi-religious significance. It was formed in direct opposition to bourgeois values of commercialism supported by the capitalist system of profit-making and exchange-value. The ideology that the work of art is autonomous and is independent of ideological, political and moral concerns pervaded a substantial part of the discourse of art during the modern period. The notion of art’s autonomy was derived from (a) Kant’s idea of the freedom and disinterestedness of aesthetic judgements, and (b) the Romantic movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries\textsuperscript{26}. Throughout the twentieth century, the writers belonging to the Marxist intellectual tradition criticized modernist aesthetics, arguing that art and human experience generally is not autonomous but is affected and shaped by ideology. Either art sustains ideology or art can be critical of ideology. Marxist debates are concerned with how art achieves criticality and how to delineate the interests of the oppressed classes. Marxist debates about art became pronounced in Germany and Russia in the 1920s and 1930s and centred on the vexed question of realism. Georg Lukács (1885–1971) developed a theory of critical realism with respect to literature. Lukács admired realist novelists such as Cervantes (1547–1616), Balzac (1799–1850), Dickens (1812–

\textsuperscript{26} The painter Joseph Turner (1775–1851) tied himself to a ship’s mat in order to witness a storm, whereas Théodore Géricault (1789–1824) often risked his life riding recklessly in order to understand horses and man’s relation to horses. This Romantic excessive behaviour was linked to a deep sense of fate and tragedy which emphasized humanity’s vulnerability and powerlessness, portrayed in paintings like \textit{The Raft of the Medusa} (1819) by Théodore Géricault and \textit{The Wreck of Hope} (1824) by Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840).
1870), Tolstoy (1828–1910) and Mann (1875–1955). He agreed with Marx’s view that Balzac anticipated the emergence of key typical characters under the reign of Napoleon III from 1852 to 1870, and believed that Balzac helped to establish a realist tradition of complex characterization which captured the underlying social processes at work in capitalism. Lukács’s arguments were vehemently challenged by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) on the ground that Lukács’s position was not responsive to the new demands of the epoch. According to Brecht, with the flow of time, methods become exhausted and what was popular yesterday is not today, for the people today are not what they were yesterday. Thus, for Brecht, realism is not a timeless concept but a radical, popular art influenced by modernist, avant-garde methods. Brecht wanted his audience to think about the political ramifications of his plays and not be complacent. Brecht is important to critical theory because he sought to make the theatre into a vehicle for political debate and responded forcefully to the challenge of creating an aesthetics that is neither simply art for art’s sake nor pure agitprop. His name is synonymous with *epische Theater*⁷⁷ (“Epic Theatre”), a method of staging he devised over a number of years with the goal of making performances more intellectual. He famously said that theatre ought to be viewed with the same detachment and disinterested judgement as that with which boxing enthusiasts view fights. Brecht called it *Verfremdung, seffekt* (“alienation-effect” or “estrangement-effect”) and in order to achieve it, he staged things so as to thwart the feeling of empathy audiences “naturally” feel for what they see on stage. He constantly interjected different effects into the theatrical performance to keep the audience on its toes, such as narrators, music, choirs, newsreel clips, diagrams and multiple settings.

Brecht collaborated with composer Kurt Weill on Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny (1930), written between 1927 and 1930 and translated in English by Steve Giles as Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny. It was a pivotal work in the genesis of Brecht’s theory and practice of epic theatre and classic of the modernist avant-garde art. The opera chronicles the development and demise of the ‘paradise city’ of Mahagonny in a series of tableaux that engage with the baser aspects of human nature. As the opera presented a powerful critique of the rising tide of fascism in Germany, it was singled out by the Nazis as a pernicious example of “degenerate” art. Brecht’s anti-Nazi stance necessitated him leaving Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933. He fled first to Denmark, where he was joined by Walter Benjamin, then to Sweden and thereafter, like many of his compatriots from the Frankfurt, to the U.S. He ended up in Los Angeles, which he famously described as God’s way of economizing by having heaven and hell in the same place. In 1947, Brecht was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee to account of his communist links and as a result, was immediately blacklisted in Hollywood which made him return first to Switzerland and then to East Germany.

In the modern period around 1930s, Martin Heidegger’s (1889–1976) writings on art tried to renew the romantic paradigm in the philosophy of art and draws a line between himself and the whole of Western philosophy of art. Heidegger distinguished six phases in the relation between philosophy and art: The centuries of great art in Greece, period after the decline of great art and philosophy in Greece, the beginning of the modern era, and the age of classical German philosophy. His most important essay on aesthetics, The Origin of the Work of Art, also repudiates philosophical aesthetics and replaces the ontological approach to art with an epistemological approach.

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Heidegger insists on art as an event of truth which leaves philosophy behind, but in the present essay he acknowledges that truth can also be brought about by practices other than art. In his late philosophical poem “Cezanne”, Heidegger indicates that art achieves what philosophy can only claim for.

Within existential aesthetics, Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980) composed important books *Quest-ce que la littérature* (1947), translated as *What is Literature?* and *La nausée* (1938), translated as *Nausea* in which he viewed philosophy and art as ways of revealing to human beings their own freedom and responsibility. The work of art exerts the human quality of consciousness to introduce meaningful order and regularities into the world.

The key German Marxist intellectual who made a series of important contributions to the debate on art’s political efficacy and the impact of new technology on aesthetics was Walter Benjamin\(^{29}\) (1892–1940). He believed that art and social life are inextricably mixed but as social life is characterized by technology and class, the artist as an intellectual is obliged to take political action in accordance with his ideals. Benjamin’s conviction develops not only into a critique of fascism but also any other form of political position. In the manner of Bertolt Brecht who was introduced to Benjamin by Asja Lacis in 1929 and upon whom Benjamin later wrote a series of essays posthumously published as *Versuche über Brecht*\(^{30}\) (1966), translated as *Understanding Brecht*\(^{31}\) (1973). Benjamin desired technical radicalism in art, with the aim of calling into question the accustomed ways in which ideas are represented and

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\(^{29}\) Benjamin was born into a well-to-do Jewish merchant family in Berlin. In his later life, Benjamin took an interest in messianism, but he did not develop any affinity for Judaism or Zionism. He also kept distance from other intellectual and cultural movements and charismatic leaders such as Franz Rosensweig (1886–1929) and Martin Buber (1876–1965). He was opposed to both simplistic right-wing and left-wing thinking. He followed an independent path which took him on complex intellectual and physical journeys, to Paris, Capri, Naples, Rome, Florence, Ibiza, Moscow, Lourdes, Marseille and Port Bou.

\(^{30}\) Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966.

understood. According to Benjamin, the major repressive technique of the bourgeois with respect to art is achieved by creating an “aura” about art, and ascribing to it notions of authenticity, uniqueness and originality. Benjamin believed that the discussion of the work of art’s beauty, at the exclusion of its social context, could also contribute to this false aura. The bourgeois society treats works of art as if they are a mysterious secret to be worshipped, as a cultic substitute for religion so as to sustain art’s economic value and their own class power. He hoped that the aura of the work of art would disappear in the wake of the advent of photography and film. In his most famous essay “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” (1936), translated as “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1968), Benjamin proclaimed that for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. He proposed that the inherent reproducibility of the photographic negative (in the modern age) counters the auratic myth (of the previous eras) of the work of art as original and unique. Both “high” and “low” art forms are treated by Benjamin as viable objects of collecting and critical study, but the new produced works are not secondary to previous forms: the new techniques like slow-motion photography or digital images can achieve things which the old could not. The copy thus outperforms the “original” and does away with this outmoded binary opposition. Benjamin’s investigations into photography included an essay on its early history called “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” (1931), translated as “A Small History of Photography” (1979) wherein he located a moment of radical political potential. He sensed an immediacy about the first photographic portraits about which he wrote

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passionately attempting to convey an experience of freedom beyond bourgeois constraints and conventions in what the photographs were unable to fix and contain.

Benjamin believed that political commitment required the writer and historian to be an imagist. He followed the spirit of this dictum in his massive history of the origins of modernity *Das Passegen-Werk* (1927–40), published posthumously in 1982 and translated as *The Arcades Project*34 (1999). This history of the nineteenth-century Paris arcades, creatively triggered by *Le Paysan de Paris* (“Paris Peasant”) (1926) by Louis Aragon (1897–1982), collects thousands of images and quotations strategically arranged with snippets of critical commentary in “convolutes”. Benjamin also completed a series of essays on Baudelaire that were intended to preface this project, which developed Baudelaire’s idea of the flâneur35 as a sociological icon of the 19th century. In *Illuminations*36 (1968), Benjamin theorized modernity by bringing together a collection of Marxist dialectics, Surrealism, snippets of theology, Baudelaire’s poetry, Kafka’s novels, the image of Proust, a Klee painting called Angelus Novus, book-collecting, translation, story-telling, photography and film. The book showed Benjamin’s thinking radically modified by his own encounters with Marxism and Surrealism which led to a hybrid approach to his analysis of contemporary culture.

During his life, Benjamin maintained marginal but important relation with major members of the Frankfurt School, especially Theodor Adorno, with whom he sustained a significant and long correspondence. He also came into contact with intellectual stalwarts like Gustav Wyneken, Gershom Scholem, Georg Simmel, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer and Martin Heidegger. He worked for

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35 The flâneur, i.e. the bourgeois subject strolling through the new city-spaces of modernity, is more than a mobile spectator. His very identity is constituted by the physiological charges and shocks of the city, and his enjoyment of the commodification of all subjects. The fast-paced, ever-changing experiences of the city are reflected in new artistic production processes and forms of photography and film.
36 See footnote 23.
his *Habilitation* on the subject of the German Baroque mourning play and completed it in 1925, which was eventually published under the title *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*\(^37\) (1928), translated as *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*\(^38\) (1977).

Following an extremely negative reaction, Benjamin withdrew the *Habilitation* from the University of Frankfurt. The *Habilitation* sought to explain in allegorical terms the type of drama known as Trauerspiel (mourning play), popular in Germany in the early part of the Baroque period (16\(^{th}\) century). Benjamin claimed that the Trauerspiel is of a different order from tragedy, with which it is generally compared, because it is rooted in history rather than myth. His examiners were not persuaded by this claim and the *Habilitation* was failed. As a Jew, Benjamin’s life was made very difficult by the rise of fascism in Germany. Like many of his Frankfurt School colleagues, he was forced into exile, but sadly he acted too late. He finally left Germany for Paris in 1933, but he didn’t try to get out of Europe until 1940 when Nazis had occupied France. Fleeing the Nazis, he headed toward Spain with an intention to escape to the USA, but was captured. Fearing being sent to the Gestapo, he committed suicide by taking a morphine overdose, or it was intentionally given to him. He died at Port Bou, on the Franco-Spanish border on 25 September 1940.

However, Benjamin’s friend and compatriot Theodor Wisengrund Adorno (1903–1969) survived World War II and interrogated the legacy of the Enlightenment and the role played by the Enlightenment in the Holocaust. Adorno was an assimilated Jew; he personally witnessed the events leading to the Holocaust and was in many ways a victim of the Holocaust. According to Adorno, science and technology’s attempts to control and objectify nature resulted into exploitation. He asserted that the


self was the first victim of modernity. The Nazi death camps and the negation bomb were a direct outcome of the attempt by instrumental reason, through technology, to dominate the subject. Witnessing the horrific events of World War II, Adorno declared that there can be no real history. For him, the Holocaust was so monstrous that it deified any attempt to represent or comprehend it. After this event the representation of history always seems inadequate. Art is also rendered useless and, hence, perverse in the face of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was an important historical event which compelled many philosophers and theorists to underline the complicity of art with the Holocaust and to rethink the philosophy of art. Adorno took the lead in the direction of rethinking the philosophy of art after Auschwitz. Taking Adorno’s views on art as the focal point, the present research on the philosophy of aesthetics after Auschwitz examines the significant philosophical works on art written by three contemporary philosophers: Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Jean-Luc Nancy (1940–) and Giorgio Agamben (1942–).

The next section presents a brief introduction to the Holocaust and a summary of the key literary and theoretical writings on it. It also highlights the relevance of Adorno’s philosophy of art after Auschwitz.

The Holocaust³⁹ (1939–1945) was a watershed event in human history occurring towards the end of World War II. On 30 June, 1933, Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany and remained Der Führer of the Nazi Germany from 1934 to

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1945. Hermann Goering sent the order to the chief of security police Reinhard Heydrich to plan the Final Solution of “the Jewish problem” in January 1939. Six million Jews were killed by Adolf Hitler and the supporters of his Nazi party. Apart from the Jews, Roma (Gypsies), black Germans, mentally and physically disabled people, homosexuals, Jehovah’s witnesses, trade unionists, political opponents, Poles and Soviet prisoners of war, who were labeled as “undesirables” according to Nazi race theory, were also imprisoned, enslaved and murdered. For this purpose, over 20000 camps were established across Europe by the Nazis which included concentration camps, transit camps, work camps and extermination (or death) camps. Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau were the six death camps specifically meant for the Jews set up in Poland. Sonderkommando (Special Work Unit) were employed to guard these camps and carry out the extermination activities. The first camps were established at Dachau on 1 April, 1933. Auschwitz was the most notorious of these death camps which operated between March 1942 and January 1945 and whose gate was marked with a slogan Arbiet Macht Frei (“Work Makes You Free”). The term “Auschwitz” has been used in the title of this research as an example of the utmost form of barbarity perpetrated on humanity. The human genocide of such an extremity and brutality perhaps would not have been witnessed by any previous human civilization.

Among the key responses to the Holocaust, major historians, philosophers and theologians such as Claude Lanzmann, Deborah E. Lipstadt, Donald Kenrick, Emil L. Fackenheim, Emmanuel Levinas, François Lyotard, Georges Bataille, Hannah Arendt, Heather Pringle, Lawrence L. Langer, Leon Poliakov, Lucy Dawidowicz, Maurice Blanchot, Paxton Gratton, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Pierre Klossowski, Raul Hilberg,
Richard L. Rubenstein, Saul Friedländer, Yehuda Bauer, etc. took up the important challenge of thinking after the Holocaust.


European art, philosophy and other human sciences prepared the ground for Nazism and facilitated it. As a result, conventional aesthetics and humanist tradition in art were debased and distorted. This debasement called for a strong critique of aesthetics and the whole Western tradition of humanism annexed to it. The celebrated thinkers of the West supported Hitler’s totalitarian regime and even endorsed his extermination of millions of innocent Jews through their writing or speech or action.
Only four months after Hitler’s becoming the Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Heidegger was appointed Rector of Freiburg University. Since Heidegger joined the Nazi party on May 1, 1933, he wore the swastika lapel pin for years afterwards, even in the company of Jewish friends. On May 27, he gave his inaugural address as rector (Rektorsrede) “The Role of the University in the New Reich” in which he exhorted students to align themselves with the Führer and embrace Germany’s national destiny. It was a call for Germany to move itself into the primordial realm of the powers of Being, with the Nazi party in the vanguard. As rector he implemented the Nazi race laws, which meant extinguishing the university privileges of his mentor and staunchest supporter Edmund Husserl. Despite his direct support for National Socialism, the Nazis did not support Heidegger in return and within a year he felt compelled to resign his post and thereafter described his period as rector as a failure. Towards the end of the World War II, he was called to account for his association with the Nazis. He was labeled by the Denazification commission as Mitläufer (fellow traveler) and in view of his influence as an intellectual he was prohibited from teaching. Although he was rehabilitated in 1951 and taught till death, his expression of sympathy for Nazism cannot be disputed and whether the reasons behind this sympathy were personal or the result of philosophical conviction are unclear. Some defend it by explaining as an unfortunate quirk of character and not related to his philosophy, while philosophers like Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) and Adorno refuted his philosophy as fascist at its core. Heidegger’s failure to condemn publicly the Holocaust is an evidence of this sympathy, as his equation of modernity with gas chambers. Here lies the root of the present research subject. The event of such totalitarian barbarism and its repercussions on humanity should be studied in different disciplines as in the context of aesthetics here.
In contemporary philosophy and critical theory, the Holocaust is an inescapable ethical horizon. Anyone writing in its wake must ask how one can account for this most horrendous of events, as well as ask the question of how it is to be avoided in future. Of all evils perpetrated in this dark period of history, those that took place in Auschwitz – the systematic destruction of human life on such a huge scale – form a symbolic centre. As a true picture emerged during the 1940s and 1950s of the scale of atrocities there, it became impossible to contemplate good life or to engage in any intellectual activity without first raising the question of Auschwitz. The present research assumes that the intellectual work in the name of Critical Theory carried out first by the members of the Frankfurt School in Germany and in their exile in countries such as Switzerland, England, France and America is significant in studying the phenomenon of anti-Semitism. Critical Theory after the Frankfurt school initiatives has also very much to do with the Jewish question or the event of the Holocaust and the prominent theorists like Derrida have indirectly expressed this pressing concern with ethnicity and genocide in their intellectual works. Therefore, the relationship between theory and Jewishness (which is replaced with the questions of humanity in general) is crucial. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the Frankfurt Institute suffered a setback as it was populated by the men of Jewish descent. The Institute was closed down for “tendencies hostile to the state” and its library which housed over sixty thousand volumes was seized by the Nazi government. Max Horkheimer, who was lecturing on freedom at that time, was the first member to be formally dismissed from the Institute. Except Karl August Wittfogel (1896–1988) who tried to escape to Switzerland but was caught and put into concentration camp in 1933 but freed later in

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1934, the most members of the Institute fled Germany. Adorno’s activities were also controversial during the period but after staying for a while in Germany, he also left for England. Even in exile in places like Geneva, London and Paris, the Institute remained connected to Germany in its intellectual pursuits. Though the work of the Institute was rooted in the tradition of European philosophy, the Jewish descent of the members raised an important question of their intellectual work indirectly guided by Jewish philosophy or culture.


According to Adorno, Auschwitz demonstrated the complete failure of culture: “That this could happen in the midst of the traditions of philosophy, of art and the enlightening sciences says more than that these traditions and their spirit lacked the power to take hold of men and work a change in them. There is untruth in those fields themselves, in the autarky that is emphatically claimed for them. All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage.”

*Aesthetics* had a nebulous complicity with the Holocaust. Therefore Adorno pronounced the strong and

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famous statement in his essay *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (1951), translated as “Cultural Criticism and Society (1997)” that poetry after Auschwitz was impossible and any attempt at writing poetry was a form of barbarism: “Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.” The statement underscores the gravity of the Holocaust. The only ethical question one can ask after World War II and specifically the Holocaust is how to avoid the horror of the camp.

The philosophy of art before Hegel, including that of Kant, views Adorno, did not have any high conception of the work of art, and only subordinated art to the status of some kind of sublimated means of enjoyment. Adorno thought that the abolition or the prohibition of art in our half-barbaric society which is becoming totally barbaric would make this abolition of art the half-partner of barbarism. He relied on art as the last factor of resistance against a total society and postulated the idea of art as social production by thinking of the relationship between art and its other as “a magnet to a field of iron filings”

He defined the role of art as mediation between people and society, and outlined its contribution to society in providing resistance to the powerful forces in society. Art resists all attempts to be co-opted by society; it negates present state of affairs and keeps alive the hope for a better life in a better world. But Adorno was misunderstood as someone calling for the abolition of

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art, and therefore he himself had to offer a clarification for his vituperation of aesthetics in *Negative Dialectics* (1966):

> Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living – especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens and his whole existence since has been imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier.\(^4^4\)

The philosophical disjunctions and upholding of the aesthetic ideal had made art a medium of social control in Nazi Germany. Art was practiced purely with a model of aesthetics during the Nazi dictatorship therefore it failed to resist social domination. The Holocaust changed many things, the philosophy of aesthetics was but one of them. The history of the philosophy of aesthetics from Adorno to Agamben is produced under the dark shadow of the Holocaust. First and foremost, Adorno’s philosophy of aesthetics becomes saturated with the event of the Holocaust.

The present research engages critically with Adorno’s philosophy of aesthetics and his radical proposition about the impossibility of aesthetics after Auschwitz by carrying out an analysis of selected works on aesthetics produced by three

philosophers: Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Jean-Luc Nancy (1940–) and Giorgio Agamben (1942–). Their philosophical works have been saturated with the Holocaust and harbor immense concerns for Jewish community, other minorities and humanity in general. They have offered their critiques about the impossible aesthetics by critiquing the continental tradition. Their philosophy is in tandem with Adorno’s philosophical critique of aesthetics. Adorno occupies an important position in continental tradition for giving a new twist to the philosophy of art after Auschwitz. According to him, art possesses a truth that is singular to it, but it is in need of an interpreter. Art therefore requires philosophy that interprets it in order to say what art cannot say while it can only be said in art by not saying it. Without philosophy, art cannot be understood at all, but philosophy is not sufficient to understand art completely. Hence the genuine aesthetic experience must become philosophy, the important idea with which the philosophers after Adorno engage with the Shoah. Adorno’s direct or indirect influence on later philosophers in their philosophical thinking about the Holocaust and aesthetics needs to be examined minutely. The subsequent philosophers have also thought through this analogy. Holocaust intersects with the concerns of some of the most important French thinkers of the past half century, shedding light on the vexed ability of postmodernism to confront the Shoah. The thinkers like Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Pierre Klossowski (1905–2001), Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003), Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1940–2007) have given philosophical responses to the Holocaust. This has been largely overlooked until now. Derrida, Nancy and Agamben have written the philosophical texts which ruminate on the incident of the Holocaust. The traumatic effects of the Holocaust pervade
Derrida’s tense and intensive preoccupation with memory, death and mourning. For example, Derrida writes: “The thought of the incineration of the holocaust, of cinders, runs through all my texts [...] What is the thought of the trace, in fact without which there would be no deconstruction? [...] The thought of the trace [...] is a thought about cinders and the advent of an event, a date, a memory. But I have no wish to demonstrate this here, the more so, since, in effect, ‘Auschwitz’ has obsessed everything that I have ever been able to think, a fact that is not especially original.”

The philosophical response of a Lithuanian born Jew Emmanuel Levinas to the Holocaust is significant. He wrote: “... the death of the other can constitute a central experience for me, whatever the resources of our perseverance in our own being may be. For me, for example (and this will hardly surprise you) the Holocaust is an event of still inexhaustible meaning.” Levinas exerted an important influence on post-war intellectuals (especially Derrida) through his work on ethics and alterity. Through his notion of “face to face”, he stressed the ethical responsibility to the other in intersubjective relations and attempted ethics from becoming a means to some end. In Jean-François Lyotard’s work Heidegger et “les juifs” (1988), translated as Heidegger and “the jews” (1990), Adorno’s category (“after Auschwitz”) manifests itself as an explicit imperative for thought. Philosophy persists and has to persist under the burden of its shadow. It tries in vain to remember the immemorial and nevertheless signifies its aims and horizons. “After Auschwitz”, thinking, writing and painting hold some value for Lyotard and his book Heidegger et “les juifs” is a testimony to that. They have value if they do not forget “the original and unremittable obligation of (and to) “the

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46 Levinas attended seminars by Heidegger and Husserl and during the war, was interned as a prisoner.
jews” but they persist in “writing” the impossibility of either remembering or forgetting it completely.”

Lyotard indicates the irreducible immemorial responsibilities of all thought and writing “after Auschwitz”. It also constitutes a demand for all forms of writing and thinking that do not forget “the fact” of the forgotten and unrepresentable. The Holocaust marks a limit of human experience and still affects our volatile present. In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), Zygmunt Bauman observes that though the Holocaust occurred half a century ago, its immediate results have receded into the past and most of its survivors have died; yet the familiar features of Western civilization, which the Holocaust made mysterious, are still with us, and therefore also the possibility of another Holocaust which we shrug off. The Western civilization has made the monstrosity of the occurrence of the Holocaust “all but incomprehensible.” According to Saul Friedländer, the opaqueness of Auschwitz would not be dispelled, even if “new forms of historical narrative were to develop or new modes of representation, and even if new literature and art were to probe the past from unexpected vantage points.” The Holocaust is synonymous with Western culture and thinking. The consistent engagement with the Holocaust and the philosophy of aesthetics after Adorno forms the affinities and the interrelationships among these different subsequent philosophers up to the present. It has fascinated the

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present researcher to take up the study of this unexplored and neglected area. The major thrust of the research is laid on the works about the Holocaust and aesthetics.

The rationale behind the present study is that it would illuminate an understanding of the Holocaust and the contemporary philosophy of aesthetics. The study would help produce aesthetics which would be capable of averting past errors. It would further stress the role of art and the task of philosophy in contemporary society. The research has great interdisciplinary potential as it imbibes disciplines such as philosophy, history, sociology and literature, and borrows insights from them to broaden the understanding the subject. As the research subject is grand in nature, for better concentration, it is narrowed by providing a general survey of the thought of each of three philosophers and their important books on the Holocaust and on aesthetics. It reflects only upon three thinkers though there are many other important ones too. The study is based on translated works hence the references to original works either in French, German or Italian are minimal or not at all. There is a separate discipline called Holocaust literature which covers the immense range and quality of books on the Holocaust. But since the research subject is philosophical in nature, there are less references to this canon. The histories of the Holocaust have been taken into account, without incorporating intricate historical details into research, due to the focus of the study on aesthetics after Auschwitz. Apart from Adorno and Derrida, the other two do not belong to Jewish community, but despite their non-Jewishness, they have stretched their thinking to reflect on the subject. The philosophers under scrutiny have radicalized philosophical thinking after Auschwitz. Through their meditations on the future of art and aesthetics and the future of humanity in the face of catastrophes, they have prepared the road for philosophy in future.
The present research work is divided into following six chapters, a summary of which is provided below:

I. Introduction: History of Philosophy of Aesthetics before Auschwitz

II. Auschwitz and Adorno’s Philosophy of Aesthetics

III. Auschwitz and Derrida’s Philosophy of Aesthetics

IV. Auschwitz and Nancy’s Philosophy of Aesthetics

V. Auschwitz and Agamben’s Philosophy of Aesthetics

VI. Conclusion: Derrida, Nancy and Agamben’s Rethinking of the Philosophy of Aesthetics after Auschwitz

Chapter I entitled “Introduction: History of Philosophy of Aesthetics before Auschwitz” is divided into three sections. The first section begins with the discussion of the origin and the meaning of the term “aesthetics” in the Western philosophical tradition. Recognizing the relevance of various non-Western philosophical traditions of aesthetics, this section concentrates on Greek and Roman classical philosophy and continental philosophy from Pre-Socratic and Socratic era to medieval, Renaissance, modern and contemporary postmodern period. It examines different perspectives on art and literature expressed by philosophers such as Thales of Miletus, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Aquinas, Alberti, Descartes, Baumgarten, Kant, Schiller, Schelling, Schlegel, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Lukács, Benjamin, Heidegger, Sartre and Adorno. The second section of the Introduction provides an overview of the Holocaust with important historical details and the canon of Holocaust literature and cinema. The establishment of the Frankfurt school and with
it, the rise of critical theory has been juxtaposed to the Holocaust. In this context, the chapter considers Adorno’s philosophy of aesthetics as an important philosophical attempt in both understanding Auschwitz and producing art and aesthetics with social conviction. In light of Adorno’s radical proposition about the impossible aesthetics after Auschwitz, the following chapters of research seek to analyze the philosophical works of Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben on the Holocaust and on the philosophy of aesthetics after the Holocaust. The philosophical concerns of key postmodern thinkers such as Maurice Blanchot, Peirre Klossowski, Georges Bataille and Jean-François Lyotard with the Holocaust have been discussed briefly too. The third and final section of the Introduction presents a summary of the remaining five chapters of research on Adorno, Derrida, Nancy and Agamben along with a conclusion.

fascist propaganda are studied with respect to these books. The development of Adorno’s philosophy of art has been examined with respect to his important writings on aesthetics after Auschwitz such as Philosophie der neuen Musik (1949), translated as Philosophy of New Music (2006); Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben (1951), translated as Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life (1974); Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft (1955), translated as Prisms (1967); Noten zur Literatur I (1957), translated as Notes to Literature vol. I (1991); Noten zur Literatur II (1961), translated as Notes to Literature vol. II (1992); and Ästhetische Theorie (posthumous, 1970) translated as Aesthetic Theory (both in 1984 and 1997). Adorno’s critique of the Holocaust is situated within his philosophy of aesthetics. The chapter concludes by reiterating Adorno’s claims that aesthetics should not be separated from any consideration of social and historical condition, and that the social and the historical specificity of artworks must carry a philosophical reflection. The subsequent three chapters on Derrida, Nancy and Agamben seek to carry forward the philosophical debate on the Holocaust and aesthetics initiated by Adorno in this manner.

Chapter III on “Auschwitz and Derrida’s Philosophy of Aesthetics” opens by presenting a personal and intellectual biography of Jacques Derrida wherein the impacts of anti-Semitism and the rise of fascism in Algeria, France and Germany can be deeply felt. Derrida’s books on the Holocaust examined here are: La Vérité en Peinture (1978), translated as The Truth in Painting (1987); Feu la cendre (1987), translated as Cinders (1991); De l’esprit (1987), translated as Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question (1989); and Mémoires pour Paul de Man (1986, revised 1989), translated as Memoires for Paul de Man (1986). In these four books, Derrida thinks

The fourth chapter “Auschwitz and Nancy’s Philosophy of Aesthetics” maps important phases in the philosophical career of the French philosopher Jean-Luc
experience and freedom, plurality of arts and of senses, violence, sacredness, finitude, 
death, deconstruction of Christianity, pleasure/desire, and nudity of being and truth. 
The chapter closes with a critique of Nancy’s contribution to the philosophy of 
aesthetics after Auschwitz.

Chapter V on “Auschwitz and Agamben’s Philosophy of Aesthetics” scrutinizes 
the intellectual history of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and discusses his 
philosophical thinking of the Holocaust enunciated by him in three of his seminal 
translated as Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998); Stato di eccezione 
(2003), translated as State of Exception (2005); and Quel che resta di Auschwitz. 
L’archivio e il testimone (Homo sacer III)(1998), translated as Remnants of 
sovereignty, biopolitics, homo sacer/sacrality of human life, state of exception, law and 
vio lence, future of democracy, Nazi death camps and the testimonies of Auschwitz 
survivors are examined. The chapter also argues that although Agamben’s writing is 
notable in the domains of politics and religion, his parallel concern with literature, art 
and aesthetics should not be seen as secondary. Agamben’s philosophy of aesthetics is 
examined in the remaining pages of the chapter with respect to his seven major works: 
Il linguaggio e la morte: Un seminario sul luogo dela negatività (1982), translated as 
Language and Death: The Place of Negativity (2006); Idea Della Prosa (1985), 
translated as Idea of Prose (1995); L’uomo senza contenuto (1994), translated as The 
Man Without Content (1999); Categorie italiane: Studi di poetica (1996), translated as 
The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics (1999); La Potenza del pensiero: Saggi e 
conferenze (2005), published in English as Potentialities: Collected Essays in
Philosophy (1999); Profanazioni (2005), translated as Profanations (2007); and Nudità (2009), translated as Nudities (2011). Through Agamben’s preoccupation with extant and simple literary forms like apology, aphorism, fable, riddle, and with modern literary forms and visual mediums like short story, photography, novel, film and painting, the chapter discusses the philosophical notions such as experience, self-annulment, ends of poetry, potentiality, memory and oblivion, messianic time, profanity and inoperativity expressed in above mentioned works. The chapter concludes with an assessment of Agamben’s contribution to the philosophy of aesthetics after Auschwitz.

The final chapter and conclusion of this research essay evaluates the respective contributions of Derrida, Nancy and Agamben in developing the philosophy of aesthetics after the Holocaust in light of Adorno and in mapping the aims of art and philosophy in future. Their contributions are also seen in light of philosophical aesthetics produced by their contemporary poststructuralist and postmodern theorists like Jacques Lacan (1901–81), Jean-François Lyotard (1924–98), Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), Roland Barthes (1915–80), Gilles Deleuze (1925–95), Julia Kristeva (1941–), Fredric Jameson (1934–), Antonio Negri (1933–) and Slavoj Žižek (1949–). The chapter concludes by considering aesthetics as an important discipline of philosophy and further claiming the necessity of philosophical and creative thinking in relation to various human predicaments, calamities or catastrophes such as the Holocaust in future.