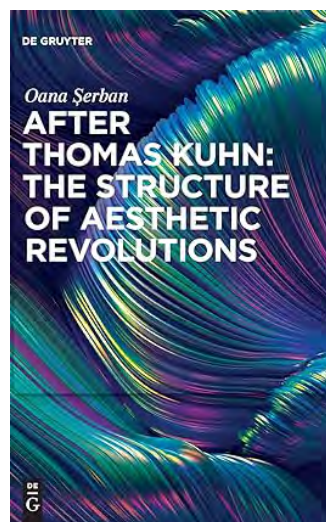


# The Ambit of Aesthetic Validity

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Şerban, O. (2022) *After Thomas Kuhn: The structure of Aesthetic Revolutions*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2022. ISBN: 9783110774696.



The ongoing discussion examining the foundations and similarities between the scientific and artistic domains as well as the distinction between the scientist and the artist – developed widely in the ‘*post-Kantian*’ philosophy – is extensively explored in Şerban’s work. This exploration involves a theoretical examination of thinkers such as Hofstadter, Clignet, and Habermas, with Habermas’ roots tracing back to Kantian influences, particularly on taste. Şerban analyzes their philosophical orientations and subsequently presents an argumentative perspective, contributing her own perspective to the historical dialogue between Kuhn and Kubler. The specificity of the paradigms valid in the sciences is confronted with the aesthetic revolutions within art. The author’s key argument is the thesis that “‘style’ and ‘paradigm’ are similar but not entirely commutable terms from art to science and vice versa [...] style must be placed in the nutshell of arts due to its iconic trajectories, whereas paradigms, from science, can be rightfully applied in aesthetics given their epistemic and ideological potential” (Şerban, 2022, p. 7).

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The most important criterion that unites the individual parts and the analysis of art historians' theories is the author's concept of *aesthetic validity*, a term which she attaches to Kuhn's analysis as the basis of aesthetic revolution. "The challenge of my critical inquiry is to sketch a theory of historical progress, radical change and predictability in aesthetics and the history of arts that explains, inspired by Kuhnian terms of revolutionary shifts, what I call – a theory of aesthetic validity" (Şerban, 2022, p. 5). An illustrative argument for the cooperation of paradigms in art and aesthetics is found in Şerban's evaluation of the axiological determinations within art and science, considered by her as a peripheral element of their structure. She emphasizes that aesthetics serves as a space submerging ideological paradigms, to which art relates either as an expression of support or rejection within its defined field of influence.

The introductory chapter is devoted to Kuhn's five standards for the selection of a theory of art, particularly the *accuracy* of the art theory (verifiable by empirical states of the art world), its *consistency* with other theories devoted to progress and change in art, its *breadth* of scope, *simplicity*, and *fruitfulness* toward expanding knowledge about art paradigms. The second chapter contains an analysis of George Kubler's incommensurable model, influenced by the Cartesian division between object and subject, which separates meaning from form in an attempt to escape the explanatory inconsistencies caused by the disjunctive principle. However, according to the author, this approach did not enhance its credibility: "my purpose is to argue, on the resumption of this epochal polemic, that Kuhn has never operated the distinction between aesthetic and artistic contents, and that the simple introduction of this difference in his argument could radically change the perspective on the plausibility and justification of a similar construction that artistic and scientific revolutions share" (Şerban, 2022, p. 91).

In chapter three, Şerban elucidates her theory of aesthetic validity and introduces Hafner's alternative commensal model, which establishes a connection between science and art through spirituality. Hafner posits that spirituality serves as a metaphorical description of the world through these forms. The subsequent chapter continues the discussion of linear and cyclical progress in revolutionary art. This is exemplified through an analysis of Hegel's thesis of the 'end of art', Borstlap's rejection of progress, and Doorman's commentary on the absence of progress in Kuhn's incommensurability of paradigms. According to Şerban, the importance of progress lies in the thesis stating that avant-gardes emerged as cultural movements out of society's mistake in incorporating experimental values alongside traditional visions and innate traditions out of the fear that humans may not achieve progress.

The penultimate chapter elucidated Şerban's interpretative explanations of aesthetic validity, drawing on theoretical inspirations from Hofstadter, Clignet, Habermas and Heidegger. Aesthetic validity comes here from the artist's visual language, serving as an expression of reality and encapsulating the relationship between ideality and actuality. The artwork represents as

a clear, necessary and complete expression within the paradigm. According to the '*axiological complementarity argument*,' the confirmation of scientific theories is tied to their consistency with the expected tools of a given branch of knowledge, and similarly, the aesthetic nature of the artwork, closely related to its style, is confirmed. Both science and art are expanding quantifiable and controllable spheres of knowledge subject to the influence of progress, allowing the assessment of the acceptance or stability of a particular paradigm in the system. These interpretations culminate in the last section of the book, which explores the political line of the avant-garde.

The broader context in which this analysis unfolds is the political interconnectedness of governing paradigms. These represent the *political* implications of cultural and artistic revolutions, which the author presents to the reader at the beginning of the book: "I rather assume that politics and arts are contingent, depending on certain historical specific occurrences and that aesthetic paradigms are 'validated' – implicitly implemented – by a society whose expectances from such paradigms are to provide solutions to categorical puzzled-problems, that are politically oriented or fall under political perspectives" (Şerban, 2022, pp. 6–7). The hermeneutical basis for Şerban's interpretation of radical changes, understood as paradigmatic, encompasses *necessity*, *predictability* and the *ideology* behind them (Şerban, 2022, p. 89). An important caveat is the author's emphasis on the influence of these aspects on the development of changes in the aesthetic, artistic and scientific spheres. What paradigm will prevail in aesthetics is determined by various political factors. Briefly, artistic revolutions are *stylistic* manifestation of aesthetic revolutions, expressing the prevailing ideology of the time through objects or symbols.

Employing the genealogical and archaeological methodological perspective of avant-gardes in the light of cultural revolutions, in the last chapter, Şerban concludes that science, art, and aesthetics share the same revolutionary patterns from a processual point of view, reduced to a paradigm-shifting mechanism. They differ in their nature of progression, with science following a linear trend of evolution that transforms into incommensurable entities, while aesthetics and art embrace a cyclical period of evolution where paradigms do not emerge concurrently (Şerban, 2022, p. 230). Simultaneously, she notes that aesthetic paradigms are mutually incomprehensible, and artistic canons or styles are incommensurable.

The philosophical-historical contribution offered by Şerban's work may extend beyond the theorists of aesthetics or those centered on Kantian aesthetics to practically-oriented philosophers. Thorough and detailed, the book provides a relevant and convincing argumentative reflection on the debate between Kubler and Kuhn. With its distinctive category of aesthetic validity, it introduces a new perspective relevant to a variety of social, aesthetic, and philosophical audiences. The outlined connection between the political ideologies of the time and their implementation in aesthetics and artistic production may have considerable implications for emerging aesthetic initiatives. In simpler terms, the artistic revolutions of a particular era can be

interpreted as a reflection of the direction of its political sphere. The future epoch can thus read today's artistic representations as a mirror of society: the kind of culturally (un)developed society at stake is currently in our hands.

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