

work cumulatively. They represent my effort to trace out a genealogy of materialist aesthetics from the struggle, spread out over the long nineteenth century, to understand how art came to exceed the power of aesthetic theory to conceptualize it. If successful, this genealogy will have the peculiar negative shape of showing how aesthetic theory came to terms with the limitations of its power. Its consequence, however, is that the recognition of the necessity of the failure of aesthetic theory to validate its conceptual coinage provides a silence in which the crisis of artistic and philosophical transmission can give voice to the claims of the dead. No one wants the prize of study to be merely negative, but the alternative, I fear, is deafness.

That the claims of the dead are at the center of modernist art, and that they are what allows art to matter still today, deserves a full-scale study in its own right. The chapters on Richter and Kabakov that bring *Sustaining Loss* to its conclusion may be considered as refugees from that study, as exiles invited into this one for the sake of uncovering the residue of suffering in aesthetic theory. I can only hope that asking them to embrace their exile does not constitute a moral hazard, although there is no doubt that it does. Equally without doubt, the thought of Kant and Hegel (less so of Freud) as materialist aestheticians will strike many readers as an act of violence against the history of aesthetic theory. Against that charge, I have no defense. Kant and Hegel are, of course, idealists, in almost every way which matters, and no less than when they deputize art in the service of systematic philosophy. That the effort to be a systematic idealist should turn out to be a way of fertilizing materialist blossoms is nothing less than the cunning of unreason. However, monstrous growths can be regarded as signs of the unexpected fertility of the best-tended garden. For the love of order, they should be weeded out. Nonetheless, a different history appears in them, a different relation between the past and the future. The tending of monsters might be tolerated for the sake of wishes as yet unclaimed.

T W O

Culture, Necessity, and Art: Kant's Discovery of Artistic Modernism

Authentic works must wipe out every memory trace of reconciliation—in the interest of reconciliation.

THEODOR ADORNO,
Aesthetic Theory

I

It is a truism about Kant that his philosophy of art is a mere corollary of the critique of taste and the philosophy of natural beauty. The *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant develops his systematic aesthetic theory, is devoted to forms of judgment first and foremost and only secondarily to the objects that are judged. In other words, the subject of critique is a power of mind—judgment—rather than an element of the world, and the question whether there is an element of the world that corresponds to judgment's claims can only be addressed through the grounding and delimiting of that power. Thus, the question whether there really is a beautiful object at all can only be broached after asking whether there is a power of mind through which such an object may be acknowledged. Further, once Kant deduces an affirmative answer to this second question, it turns out that the beautiful object which does exist can only be beautiful nature, nature appearing as beautiful, and from this it follows that art can only be beautiful if it appears at the same time to be nature. Because the critique of taste, as well as the characterization of the object of the judgment of taste which critique grounds, are philosophically complete—which is to say logically over—before the theory of art

even begins, the constraints on Kant's philosophy of artistic beauty flow from his theory of taste and natural beauty rather than from a direct encounter with art.¹

Just as it is a truism that Kant's philosophy of art is a dependent of his account of natural beauty, so too it is a commonplace of Kant interpretation that this is the central defect, the source of all the paradoxes and limitations, of Kantian philosophy of art. So powerful is the Hegelian demotion of natural beauty to dependent status in philosophical aesthetics, and so central the experience of art to contemporary thinking about aesthetic experience, that Kant's efforts to fit a theory of art into the place left available after a theory of natural beauty is completed makes his systematic aesthetics appear *prima facie* inadequate. This commonplace is buttressed by the focal belief that the work of art of which judgments of taste are made is the product not of nature but of the artist, and that therefore any theory that voids the significance of the artist in the evaluation of our experiences of art is beneath consideration. Since Kant's theory of beauty insists on purely philosophical grounds that beautiful art is beautiful in the same sense as nature is, it does not draw on artistic intentionality to explain art's beauty. However, if art is intentional while nature is not, then any philosophy of the Kantian sort which treats artistic beauty within the logical space of an account of natural beauty must entail false conclusions about art.²

It is a central aim of this chapter to defend Kant's siting of the philosophy of art within the confines of the philosophy of natural beauty. I am prepared to concede this much, however, to the critics of Kantian aesthetics: the presence of the artist makes a theoretical and practical difference to which any adequate philosophy of art must attend. However, this concession is almost too easy to make, since Kant does so himself. Indeed, it is a prime virtue of Kant's theory of art that it indicates how the activity of the artist, understood as the intentional production of the artistic artifact, is both the sine qua non of artistic beauty and its single greatest *obstacle*. The paradox of artistic beauty is that the artist must intentionally excuse himself from the site of artistic production for such beauty to arise. This, too, may well be unacceptable from the perspective of the cult of artistic authorship, but it is a view that does not absurdly deny the centrality of the artistic difference—the presence of the cultural producer—to a theory of art. Rather, it helps us to see why the notion of "artist" on which the cult of artistic authorship so much depends is itself riven by paradox. Only by insisting that a theory of art must arise out of a theory of natural beauty can Kant bring into focus the ways in which art becomes a moment of cultural production turned against itself. Further, by insisting this way, Kant also crafts, almost absurdly *avant la lettre*, the conceptual tools we need for understanding artistic modernism, that sort of artistic production that emerges when art turns against its own history for the sake of the continued possibility of art.

Lysis
speech

To say that my aim is a defense of Kant's philosophy of art needs to be restricted. First, I mean primarily to defend Kant's aesthetic theory against the charge that it fails in ignoring the artifactuality of artistic beauty. Those who argue against Kant on this matter assume that from the fact that art is intentionally made by humans—again, a fact which Kant never denies—it follows that art's beauty, or any other aesthetic property a work of art may have, is an artifact of that intentionality. It is just this inference, however, that Kant attempts to block by deriving his account of artistic beauty within the constraints imposed by the demand that artistic beauty be beautiful in the same sense as natural beauty is beautiful. The intentional work of the artist, on Kant's view, is a necessary condition for art, but it is not a sufficient condition for artistic beauty. Because I believe Kant to be correct about this—more correct, perhaps, than he knew—I will defend the premise that the work of art is best grasped within the context of a philosophy of natural beauty.

Second, my defense of Kant's account of the "natural beauty of art" is instrumental for my major goal of clarifying a specific philosophical purpose that the account serves. Late in the critique of aesthetic judgment, as Kant is comparing the relative importance of taste and genius in fine art, he makes a claim which, given the insistence of his argument to that point that fine art is an art of genius, is nothing short of astonishing: where there is conflict between taste and genius in a product of fine art, such that one or the other must be sacrificed for the work to come to completion, it is genius that must be slain. Where genius does not spontaneously submit to the demands of taste, taste must clip its wings. "[Taste] introduces clarity and order into a wealth of thought, and hence makes the ideas durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and [hence] fit for being followed by others and fit for an ever advancing culture" (*CJ* 50, p. 188). Both art's contribution to culture and its capacity to give rise to its own proper legacy—jointly, art's being historical—are explained by Kant as a function of the sacrifice of the claims of genius. This, I think, is the moment at which Kant discovers artistic modernism. Now, there may be other facets of Kant's philosophy of art which are inconsistent with this insight; indeed, given how untimely Kant's discovery is, it is practically inconceivable that the entirety of his aesthetic theory would harmonize with it. In any case, I will not be concerned with those other facets here; it almost goes without saying that Kant's premises can found other arguments than the one I believe Kant to be making. My aim is to allow the brilliance of this bit of historically displaced knowledge to cast light back on to its most important premises, key among which is the idea that artistic beauty is a species of natural beauty.³

To achieve this aim, we must first retreat into the depths of the critique of taste. I shall try to move forward from there in four steps. First, I will interpret

what?! Kant's claim about the grounding of the universality of the judgment of taste in the beauty of nature as entailing that free subjectivity can appear in the world only as an interruption of mechanical causality. I will then move to Kant's philosophy of art proper in order to interpret it as an effort to block metaphysical claims about art's transcendence of natural causality. From these two points I will move to Kant's effort to resolve the antinomy of art—that it both is and is not an interruption of mechanical causality—in a theory of genius understood as the traumatic return of nature within culture. Finally, I will return to the relation of art and culture in order to show that the very possibility of a culture befitting humanity depends on the sacrifice of the claims of genius to transcend culture. A culture suitable for human nature, it turns out, is only possible if the interruption of purposive causality by the work of the genius gives rise to a mode of historical transmission which is other than what is intended by culture itself.

II

Through the critique of taste, Kant seeks to discover what conditions justify us in asserting a judgment of the form "X is beautiful." Such a judgment begs for critique because it appears, at least in its grammatical form, to blend illicitly a subjective with an objective voice. On the one hand, it is an exclamation of happiness, an avowal of pleasure in a sensuous experience. As such, it is merely subjective, in the sense that nothing is asserted through it about the world but rather only about the pleasuring of the judge. On the other hand, in attributing to the object or event that is the occasion for the avowal of happiness some characteristic—paradigmatically beauty—in virtue of which the judge is pleased, a judgment of taste makes a claim about the world. Thus, in its avowal of pleasure the judgment has a subjective basis while in its assertoric moment it has an apparently objective basis. Taste seems to leap over the bounds of cognitive propriety, thus making critique necessary to restore its proper grounds and limits.

The easy way to do away with taste's overstepping would be to dispel the appearance of an objective basis by interpreting the grammatical form as merely a bit of runaway language. Perhaps through the use of the objective voice the judge innocently overemphasizes the uniqueness of taste's pleasure, or perhaps, more deviously, the judge uses it to hide the embarrassing fact that taste has no leg on which to stand other than the subjective basis.⁴ In either case, the appearance of an objective basis would become a mere appearance that the judge can do without. For Kant, however, while it will turn out that the objective basis is apparent only, it is no mere illusion. Rather, the ground of the normativity of the judg-

ment of taste is lodged in that appearance. Whereas "I like X" makes no claim beyond the purported fact that X pleases me, "X is beautiful" claims further that X pleases me because something about X is such as to produce pleasure. In other words, my pleasure in X is a *right* acknowledgment of X. Whereas the judge who simply likes X might have her liking explained in virtue of some feature of X, she does not invoke that feature to justify her liking; as the art appreciator scornful of the purported expertise of the connoisseur is wont to say: "I may not know art, but I know what I like." The judge who thinks X beautiful, on the other hand, invokes the beauty-making feature of X as the justification for her liking and so stands ready (in principle, at least) to defend her judgment rationally.

However, even if the apparently objective basis of the judgment of taste is not a mere illusion—that is, even if the judge would be false to a dimension of her experience if she exchanged the judgment of beauty for a mere avowal of pleasure—that basis nonetheless cannot be simply objective either. If it were, no special problem about the normativity of aesthetic judgments would arise; they would then be objective in the same sense as nonaesthetic ascriptions. Beauty, though, is no objective feature of the world. There are no objective principles of taste, no rules for inferring from any set of indubitably objective features of the world to the aesthetic "concepts" deployed in a judgment of taste (CJ 34, p. 149). Without objective principles, however, the judge of taste apparently loses the grounds for making a normative judgment. Unless some other ground can be discovered, we would be obliged to consider judgments of taste as a species of authoritarian judgment in which a merely subjective pleasure is offered as a proper reason in itself for others to have it. We would want to hand this problem over to the group psychologists at that point were it not for the fact that the problem goes deeper than the intersubjective level. If judgments of taste harbor an authoritarian force, then that force aims to rule over the judge herself. When she asserts that X's beauty is a reason to take pleasure in X, then she is prescribing intra-subjectively that her future encounters with X ought to please her also merely because a present encounter does. (I suppose we can think of this as the aesthetic equivalent of Elizabeth Taylor disease, the affliction that compels a person to marry everyone with whom she has sex.) The logical problem is one of normatively connecting two or more moments of judgment regardless of whether those moments index distinct persons. It may be no comfort to say so, but if the judge has no grounds for judgment other than private pleasure, she would be forced to be an equal-opportunity pedant.

Famously, Kant restores the ground for the normativity of aesthetic judgment by means of an analysis of the uniqueness of the pleasure it expresses. There is no need now to rehearse the entirety of Kant's much mooted argument

about disinterested pleasure, but using as our guide the danger Kant senses that judgments of taste not limited by a proper critique mask authoritarianism, we may illuminate two features of that argument that are rarely adequately analyzed: (1) The tendency toward authoritarianism which inauthentic judgments of taste voice is rooted in the very naturalness of nonaesthetic pleasure. (2) The aesthetic interruption of that tendency offers no escape from the nature of pleasure; rather, it points toward a different world hidden within this one where the necessity of pleasure would not equal the domination of the world.

A disinterested liking is a pleasure felt in a perception in circumstances in which the perceived object or event neither satisfies a need of the feeling subject nor gives rise to one. An interested liking, by contrast, is guided by a need. In fact, the phrase "interested liking" is, for Kant, almost redundant, since "interest is what we call the liking we connect with the presentation of an object's existence" (*CJ* 2, p. 45). To have an interest is just to have an affective stake in an object's existence because the object serves to fulfill (or impedes the fulfillment of) a need. When I have a need, I cannot remain indifferent about the objects toward which the need drives me; those objects interest me because they serve to quell the imperative which a need is. Liking, thus, is simply what I feel for those objects that are instrumental for my purposes.

Disinterested liking must puzzle us, therefore, since if interest and liking are so intimately connected, then disinterest should be a break in affective determination. It is worth noting that the puzzle arises not from the idea of disinterest as such; we hope that judges in courts of law will be disinterested in the sense of not being personally invested in the outcome of the cases they hear. Not being personally invested means having no interests at stake and so not having any rational grounds for preferring one outcome over another. Neither outcome, in other words, would especially please or displease a disinterested judge. There is nothing conceptually difficult about this because disinterestedness in such cases presumes that the link between judgment and pleasure is broken. However, the clarity about legal disinterest makes vivid the difficulty with Kantian disinterested *pleasure*. How is liking possible under conditions of disinterest? How can anything other than the satisfaction of interest give rise to pleasure?

Let us pursue this puzzle further by excavating the depths of the connection between pleasure and interest. This will also permit us to see why Kant thinks authoritarianism is built into interested pleasure and also how he imagines nonauthoritarian pleasure. In comparing interested with disinterested liking, Kant writes:

Only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and *free*, since we are not compelled to give our approval by any interest, whether of sense or of reason. . . . Neither an object of inclination, nor one that a law of reason

enjoins on us as an object of desire, leaves us the freedom to make an object of pleasure for ourselves out of something or other. All interest either presupposes a need or gives rise to one; and, because interest is the basis that determines approval, it makes the judgment about the object un*free*. (*CJ* 5, p. 52)

So, interested liking is compulsory liking because satisfying objects passionately move us toward them. Whom I love looks touchable to me and when I hunger food looks tasty. Indeed, we can think of the claim that persons are moved by objects of satisfaction as a synthetic a priori truth; it is discovered through experience alone yet is nonetheless the transcendental principle for any empirical psychology whatsoever.⁵ Interest is what the world has for us when it is instrumental for our purposes. Put somewhat differently, instrumental regard connects feeling to the world in lawlike patterns of regularity. He who wills the end, as the law says, wills the means. No doubt we can come to regard the world as without interest for us, as depressed people do, but then we would be living in a world of no possible use to us. To be depressed is to live in a world in which nothing in it can make one happy; from the position of depression, the world appears as that from which the depressed self has been extruded. Being needy, being alive, and finding interest in the world are simply different descriptions of the same state.

The hint above that a world of no interest is the world of the depressive, that is, that it is a world that lacks all possible satisfactions and so is painted all-over black, helps us to make our point about the internal connection between interest and pleasure in an ultimate sense. If being needy is but an alternative way to describe being alive, then being alive is a relation to the world mediated by, or as Kant would put it, presented in terms of, purposes. Depression is like being buried alive because one's purposes fail to conjure an interesting world. By contrast, in the undepressed relation to the world, neediness shapes the fit of life to the world. Needs, in short, are the psychical orientations of living creatures in the world; they are what we feel when we feel alive. Put even more strongly, needs give living creatures their world by staining objects in various hues of satisfaction that creatures then perceive as arrayed in spectra. Living creatures no more choose their satisfactions than they choose their natures; their satisfactions determine the kinds of creatures they are. Being alive mediates need and its objects in such a way that passion, or what Kant calls compulsion, carves purposive paths through what thereby is the creature's world. The demand for pleasure, the demand of need, is thus inherently authoritarian, since it does not "leave us the freedom to make an object of pleasure for ourselves out of something or other." As neediness traverses the routes of movement it has opened before the living being, it never doubts itself.

This logical imperativity of pleasure, this compulsion in virtue of which "in-

terest is the basis that determines approval" authoritatively, is the mechanical necessity of animal nature within life. Natural beings are alive because they are driven by what is unquestionable for them. Putting the point so, however, reveals immediately that Kant views natural necessity from the perspective of the autonomous subject. Natural necessity is compulsion only when it is antagonistic toward some other force which might resist it. A lion is not compelled to eat its meat raw since it would never experience its own nature as an impediment to a desire to cook it. Only for a being for whom its nature is not identical with its desire could nature become compulsion; only there could nature's authority become the seed of authoritarianism.

From the point of view of the autonomous subject, however, its nature is indeed compulsion since its nature is just its needs. The autonomous subject is in implacable conflict with natural necessity, since, again, who wills the end also wills the means. Needs are demands for satisfaction. In this light, the deliberative reflection of the autonomous subject is a moment of resistance to creaturely passions since the premise of reflection is that it is not clear which way to go. Natural pleasure thus not only needs no reflection—it positively abhors it. Reflection then repays the insult by forcing the subject to rear up on its hind legs in fear and loathing of its own nature, affects through which the subject attains its autonomy by foregoing the pleasures that it is its nature to pursue. The autonomous subject, put simply, is an interruption in the animal connectedness of need and pleasure.

Here, though, we reach a crucial crossroads in the Kantian dialectic of nature and freedom. On the one hand, the autonomous subject comes to be as an interruption of natural necessity. In this sense, the autonomous subject is free. On the other hand, this subject is free only insofar as it is compelled by the moral law, "for where the moral law speaks we are no longer objectively free to select what we must do" (*CJ* 5, p. 52). The imperative nature of morality colors the whole world of nature in deathly shades of fear and anxiety. As subject to the moral law, the autonomous subject is thus the battlefield of morality and nature on which competing necessities meet in a struggle to the death. This dire conclusion was foreshadowed when we noted that the autonomous subject is in implacable conflict with its own needy nature. The anxious denial of need's imperativity, what Kant calls in its positive formulation respect for the moral law, rends the human between two powers, leaving it never to rest until the state of dreamless sleep. It is not exactly right, therefore, to say that the autonomous subject is free; it is more precise to think of it as the site where the moral law belligerently establishes its autonomy from nature.

The autonomous subject thus never rests at home in itself. This too was fore-

shadowed in the earlier discussion of the internal connection among need, nature, and life. A living creature has a world in virtue of its needing a world. It is, we might say, at home outside itself. The autonomous subject, by contrast, is saddled with a world, the world of its own nature, in which it is not at home. Having been interrupted by the voice of the moral law, human needs, despite their power remaining undiminished, become incapable of binding us, incapable even of distinguishing the binding from the optional. The world we imagine that our nature presents us is thus no longer a world. Our world is lost, and in its place has arisen a limitless realm of meaningless ends. We gaze out, or in, at the world governed by the mechanical force of nature, freed of it yet hunched down against it for all that.

This, of course, is nothing other than a description of melancholy. When natural necessity has been denied, when the world is just the no-man's land the subject gazes on from behind its fortifications, then the force of nature becomes a disvalue. And when that has happened, it is proper to say we are disoriented.⁶ One cannot live in a world without interest or flavor, for the sheer obdurateness of its existing merely in itself is the occasion for the replenishing of melancholic despair.⁷ This melancholic regard for the world, insofar as it is a disoriented one, can also be described as the loss of normativity. The melancholic is not without needs; instead, her condition is that those needs offer no guidance in the world toward which they are inevitably turned. Put otherwise, the melancholic world with no normativity, no bearings, contains only mere objects that sustain no recognition; only dead things live there. It is also, therefore, a world of pure instrumentality in which nothing matters in itself; its inhabitants, stripped of all inherent value, might be purposively used with impunity—it could be the sadist's Eden—if only the lack of a sustainable reason for using them did not turn impunity into indifference. It is a world, in short, with no nature. Whence such a world? According to Kant, from culture, in particular from what he calls the culture of discipline.

The culture of discipline (*Zucht, Disziplin*) . . . is negative and consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires, a despotism that rivets us to certain natural things and renders us unable to do our own selecting; we allow ourselves to be fettered by the impulses that nature gave us only as guides so that we would not neglect or even injure our animal characteristics (*Tierheit*), whereas in fact we are free enough to tighten or slacken, to lengthen or shorten them, as the purposes of reason require. (*CJ* 83, p. 319)

In the culture of discipline, which is a moment on the path to a culture befitting humanity, the moral law runs amok. Under its tutelage, we regard even our own natures, our "animal characteristics," as means toward the sustaining of pur-

positiveness. The disciplined or cultivated person is free only in the negative sense of being emancipated from all needs except those useful for the execution of purposes—which is to say, simply, liberated from need. Indeed, our nature is tolerated in the culture of discipline only as an instrument useful for self-preservation; our nature is “allowed” only insofar as it protects us from harm, but our “nature” then must mean our reflexes, the rudimentary functioning of our bodies stripped of even the memory of possible satisfactions. In regard to nature, the culture of discipline is perfectly disinterested. It cleanses the natural world of pleasure, thus opening it to endless achievement.

But what, then, of disinterested *pleasure*? If disinterestedness is disorientation, how can it ground a unique pleasure? There is, I think, only one possible answer to this question: disinterestedness must be capable of becoming the site of a renewed necessity, and freedom from need thereby the occasion for the resurgence of nature within the subject. Because this is the only possible answer, it is gratifying to report that Kant develops it.

If someone likes something and is conscious that he himself does so without any interest, then he cannot help judging that it must contain a basis for being liked [that holds] for everyone. He must believe that he is justified in requiring a similar liking from everyone because he cannot discover, underlying this liking, any private conditions, on which only he might be dependent, so that he must regard it as based on what he can presuppose in everyone else as well. He cannot discover such private conditions because his liking is not based on any inclination he has (nor on any other considered interest whatever): rather, the judging person feels completely *free* as regards the liking he accords the object. Hence he will talk about the beautiful as if beauty were a characteristic of the object and the judgment were logical (namely, a cognition of the object through concepts of it) even though in fact the judgment is only aesthetic and refers the object's presentation merely to the subject. He will talk in this way because the judgment does resemble a logical judgment inasmuch as we may presuppose it to be valid for everyone. On the other hand, this universality cannot arise from concepts. For from concepts there is no transition to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (except in pure practical laws; but these carry an interest with them, while none is connected with pure judgments of taste). It follows that, since a judgment of taste involves the consciousness that all interest is kept out of it, it must also involve a claim to being valid for everyone, but without having a universality based on concepts. In other words, a judgment of taste must involve a claim to subjective universality. (*CJ* 6, pp. 53–54)

Kant is accounting in this passage for the grammatical form of the judgment of taste. The judgment is spoken in a voice that is “as-if” objective because that

is the only voice available to subjective universality—intersubjective validity must dissemble to get itself heard by pretending it is objectively grounded.⁸ However, our interest ought to be compelled also by the dialectic of freedom and necessity at work here. The disinterested judge *feels* completely free, Kant writes, while in fact she is bound by necessity on every side. Let us reconstruct this scenario. The judge roots around in her empirical ego, trying to say, “I like *X*.” However, the culturally achieved freedom from interest deprives the judge of taste of all power to claim the pleasure as her own. That is, finding that she has no interest served by *X*, the judge becomes aware that she is not the ground of her own pleasure and so cannot say “I.” Thus, the connection between need and happiness, interest and pleasure, is broken. And for just that reason the judge “cannot help judging” that . . . , “must believe” that . . . , “must regard” herself as free. In the absence of interested determination, which is to say in the state of subjectivity free of instrumental considerations, incontrovertible necessity absolutely forces the judgment that “*X* is beautiful.” Out of the rubble of the disinterested ego, out of the depths of melancholy, the voice of nature speaks, beholden to extortionate beauty: what I cannot help but judge, what renders me so instrumentally powerless that I cannot even locate myself, is beautiful to me. Beauty binds my pleasure with the force of lost nature; only what has the force of nature can be beautiful for an autonomous human subject. The pleasure in the experience of the beautiful, Kant might well say, is the subject's gratitude for the return of nature within culture.

Now, we need to be doubly careful here. The return of nature in the form of the compelled judgment of taste is not the return to life of the lost nature of the world. The formation of the autonomous subject by the culture of discipline guarantees that that nature is lost and that we (moderns) have no natural home. Put the other way around, the return of nature as a force is only possible against the background of the culture of discipline and its commensurate destruction of the nature of the animal subject; nature is a force only for a subject that would contest it. Therefore, it is the return of nature *within the subject* that Kant has in mind, its return as a force that demands immediate approval or disapproval. And being the medium of this forceful return is just the mark of the freedom of the judge of taste. The free subject, then, is neither the natural one nor the autonomous one, but only the one for whom compulsion is experienced neither as threat nor as instrument but rather as the devastating feeling of life. The free subject is postautonomous, in the sense that only after discipline has done its job does the delirious undergoing of beauty become possible. In this feeling of life, this nonpurposive affect, nature in the subject takes its revenge on culture.

Again, however, we need to be careful, for this talk of undergoing beauty can

mislead us. We must recall at this moment the central premise of Kant's argument: the judgment of taste has no real objective basis, so that beauty is not in the world. The subject in the throes of aesthetic pleasure is in the strictest sense in the grip of nothing. Because the beauty of the object does not really exist but is nonetheless a necessary presupposition of disinterested liking—because it is both necessary and unreal—the experience of it as objective is the illusory appearance “elsewhere” of living nature. Furthermore, this is an illusion that cannot be dispelled, since the free subject has no consciousness of itself as the basis of the judgment at all; because she feels completely free, the judge “will [necessarily] talk [mistakenly] about the beautiful as if beauty were [which it is not] a characteristic of the object” (*CJ* 6, p. 54). The beautiful object is the illusion the autonomous subject is compelled to generate in order to undergo pleurably the force of its own disavowed nature. What the autonomous subject cannot avow as itself, which yet makes it autonomous—what it is in its nature to not acknowledge as its nature—it inevitably confronts in the form of a necessary illusion. Hence, beautiful appearance interrupts the natural causality that is naturally dead and alien to the autonomous subject. It is the illusion that marks the place in its nature where the subject that is not impeded by nature is not yet free to go. Beauty is the impossible reconciliation of the autonomous subject and its own lost nature.

If we drop “impossible” from the preceding sentence, we get romanticism.⁹ Kant, though, is no romantic. Beauty is necessary *semblance* because no reconciliation between nature and the autonomous subject is possible. Even as we are grateful for the beautiful, the relation of nature and subject it figures forth cannot be cognitively grasped by the subject who judges it.¹⁰ The beautiful is news from another country, and it transfigures the rubble of the lost world not one bit.¹¹ Beauty, in short, does not transcend this world. Because nature emphatically must stay dead for the cultured individual, it perpetually threatens to return to life; the illusion of objective beauty only deprives nature's deadness of the veneer of exclusive and inevitable fate. If, therefore, beauty appears as a shining through this cultured world of another one, it is because it commands us, in the voice of dead nature, to change. Beauty is nature's obscene yet unapproachable afterlife.

In sum: beauty *must* appear as nature, but the necessity here expressed is the necessity of an illusion. The aesthete who orients her life by the compass of beauty is thus guilty of a philosophical error, since beauty does not reorient us in the world. Rather, it expresses the loss of the world that cannot be recovered. Because beauty sustains the loss of a binding nature that would offer orientation if it existed, the aesthete errs in taking what sustains the loss culture demands for a different culture. But beauty is not culture; it is, rather, the ghost of nature's claim against the culture of discipline. Neither disciplinary culture nor an-

imal nature, beauty is a frontier phenomenon between them. It must appear as nature in order to promise a transcendence of culture it cannot deliver, since it is an experience possible only for a cultured subject. And just as beauty is the illusion of a subjectivity befitting humanity, art is the illusion of a culture befitting humanity. We are now ready to turn to Kant's philosophy of art.

III

Kant's philosophy of fine art is derived from his account of how the disinterestedness of the judgment of taste entails abjuring considerations of real purpose. In the following passage he spins out from the idea of disinterestedness the pleasure of a purely subjective purposiveness.

Whenever a purpose is regarded as the basis of a liking, it always carries with it an interest, as the basis that determines the judgment about the object of pleasure. Hence a judgment of taste cannot be based on a subjective purpose. But a judgment of taste also cannot be determined by a presentation of an objective purpose, i.e., a presentation of the object itself as possible according to principles of connection in terms of purposes, and hence it cannot be determined by a concept of the good. For it is an aesthetic and not a cognitive judgment, and hence does not involve a *concept* of the character and internal or external possibility of the object through this or that cause; rather, it involves merely the relation of the presentational powers to each other, so far as they are determined by a presentation.

Now this relation, [present] when [judgment] determines an object as beautiful, is connected with the feeling of a pleasure, a pleasure that the judgment of taste at the same time declares to be valid for everyone. Hence neither an agreeableness accompanying the presentation, nor a presentation of the object's perfection and the concept of the good, can contain the basis that determines [such a judgment]. Therefore the liking that, without a concept, we judge to be universally communicable and hence to be the basis that determines a judgment of taste, can be nothing but the subjective purposiveness in the presentation of the object, without any purpose (whether objective or subjective), and hence the mere form of purposiveness, insofar as we are conscious of it, in the presentation by which an object is *given* us. (*CJ* 11, p. 66)

The structure of this argument is clear enough. Were there a determinate subjective or objective purpose served by the judged object or event, the judgment would be determined by either a law of nature, a practical precept, or the moral law. It would then be an unfree judgment. Therefore, considerations of purpose must be set aside and the object or event judged instead by means of

the liking it occasions for that subject who has no need of it. The judge of taste must regard the object or event that induces aesthetic pleasure apart from any concrete end it might be intended to serve. Now, since the judgment of taste ranges over both natural objects and human artifacts, for works of art to be proper objects of aesthetic judgment they too must be judged without regard to purpose. This, however, generates an antinomy: if an artifact is distinguished from a natural object in having a determinate purpose, and a work of art is an artifact made to be the object of a judgment of taste, then a work of art is an artifact made with the purpose of not seeming to have a purpose, of not seeming to be an artifact (*CJ* 43–44, pp. 170–73).

This antinomy creates both a dilemma and an opportunity for Kant. The dilemma develops as follows: an object is an artifact if it has been made as the object of a human purpose. If an object exists with no such purpose in its causal history then it is instead a natural object. Thus, for an artifact to not look like an artifact it must seem to be, without really being, nature (*CJ* 45, pp. 173–74). The object must be made through a rational choice but that choice must be made, so to speak, invisible. But this is a recipe for trickery, not fine art, and a trickery all the more deviously purposive the more successfully achieved. Kant provides the following example to illustrate the aesthetic failure of trickery:

What do poets praise more highly than the nightingale's enchantingly beautiful song in a secluded thicket on a quiet summer evening by the soft light of the moon? And yet we have cases where some jovial innkeeper, unable to find such a songster, played a trick—received with greatest satisfaction initially—on the guests staying at his inn to enjoy the country air, by hiding in a bush some roguish youngster who (with a rush or reed in his mouth) knew how to copy that song in a way very similar to nature's. But as soon as one realizes it was all deception, no one will long endure listening to this song that before he had considered so charming. (*CJ* 42, p. 169)

For the achievement of the look of nature to be an achievement of fine art, the charge of trickery must be repelled by a blindness, a nonpurposiveness on the part of the artist that corresponds to the abjuring of judgment in terms of determinate purposes on the part of the judge of art. The invisibility of purpose must be the product of a real absence of determinate intention; it must be the appearance of that absence, in the making of what is, after all, an artifact, a purposive object. That is the dilemma: Kant's theory of art demands the production of artifacts that body forth an absence of purpose in their production. But how is this possible?

Kant's answer to this question involves a radicalization of a specific bit of eighteenth-century art theory. On the one hand, his description of the hidden

artificiality of art is quite similar to the common eighteenth-century academic imperative that art should not smell of the workshop. That the artwork not appear to be produced with academic rules foremost in the artist's mind, that "the academic form must not show," is in keeping with the traditional goal of artistic illusion (*CJ* 45, p. 174). However, that the artwork not appear rule-governed, that it appear natural, because in some way it truly is not rule governed, despite, of course, still being an artifact, is an altogether different demand. Indeed, insofar as the rule for this class of artifacts—to have no determinate rule—is a contradiction, the demand is perhaps unsatisfiable. But it is just here that Kant transforms a dilemma into an opportunity by filling in the conceptual hole with a mutation in nature itself, nature in the form of genius. "Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art. Since talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature, we could also put it this way: *Genius* is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art" (*CJ* 46, p. 174).

In passages like this, the Kantian genius can far too easily seem to be the romantic genius, unconstrained by rules, magisterially creating without precedent but thereby establishing precedent for the generations which will be beholden to his original acts of creation. Since the work of the genius is performed in the absence of conscious rules of production, the genius is a force of nature, but a force which thus manifests the freedom of the genius from social convention. The genius in this sense symbolizes a reconciliation of nature and freedom. This conceptual space for the romantic idea of genius is held open by the contradictory artificiality of the artwork. However, it is crucial to remember that despite Kant's providing a positive characterization of the features of the mind he calls genius out of which the romantic reading could grow, his motivation to propose the concept at all within his aesthetics is the underlying concern, not with what genius is, but rather with how it may appear. Kant's paradox, again, is how an artifact can look like nature, so the deep problem of genius for him is how an artifact can look like a work of genius, which is to say how it can look free of determinate purpose. To understand what he is really after, we must hew closely to Kant's concern with appearance.

Despite the romantic-idealist interpretation of the concept of genius as an affirmative moment of reconciliation between freedom and nature, Kant quite explicitly recognizes that the nonpurposiveness of the work of art, that is, the work of genius, can appear only as a *lack* of reconciliation between the artist and purposive structures. The idea that genius appears when the standard relation between purpose and artificiality is swept away, when the artist ignores issues of technique, is rejected by Kant as a mistake which produces misguided proto-

cols, or a misguided lack of protocols, in artistic education. Where "genius" so-called appears *instead of* purposive activity, out of indifference to it, there we have, not art appearing like nature, but nonsense (*CJ* 50, p. 188); this version of genius reeks of the adolescent conviction that authentic selfhood depends on the liquification of the grounds of selfhood. For Kant, the work of art is an artifact, and so genius appears not instead of purposive activity but rather by means of it. That is, genius appears when the technique that guides the production of the artifact *visibly* fails to produce its appearance. An artifact thus is a work of fine art when the mechanical relation between purpose and artifact is seen to be broken, when something shows itself as the underdetermination of the artifact by any specific purpose.

Kant's acknowledgment that the appearance of genius is a moment of non-reconciliation, a lack of fit between determinate purpose and the object whose concept it is, is notable in several similar passages. Consider the following:

In [dealing with] a product of fine art we must become conscious that it is art rather than nature, and yet the purposiveness in its form must seem as free from all constraint of chosen rules as if it were a product of mere nature. (*CJ* 45, p. 173)

And:

It is advisable . . . to remind ourselves that in all the free arts there is yet a need for something in the order of a constraint, or, as it is called, a mechanism (*Mechanismus*). (In poetry, for example, it is correctness and richness of language, as well as prosody and meter.) Without this the spirit, which in art must be free, would have no body at all and would evaporate completely. This reminder is needed because some of the more recent educators believe that they promote a free art best if they remove all constraint from it and convert it from labor into mere play. (*CJ* 43, p. 171)

The spirit, Kant says, must be free in art—which is to say it must be undetermined by any purposive structure. At the same time, though, it must be constrained by a mechanism because without constraint it evaporates, turns to mere spirit, mere vapor. It appears Kant is saying that for spirit to be free it must be bound to a body, bound by a mechanism. This sounds like a contradiction plain and simple, even if it does correspond to standard practices in the training of artists. However, it is only a contradiction if we take "constraint" to mean that which imprisons; in that case, Kant would be saying something like "the free person is the one who lives in a jail cell," which, while neither an unheard of nor an unreasonable proposition from a certain otherworldly point of view, is distinctly non-Kantian. That Kant does not mean it this way is highlighted by his

qualification of what is needed as "something in the order of a constraint," which suggests something like a constraint yet not, something like a constraint that does not constrain.

To get closer to the moment of nonreconciliation Kant is imagining, let us reflect on the name he gives to the constraint that makes free spirit possible: mechanism. The oddity of the usage is patent; given arguments Kant develops elsewhere regarding heteronomous and autonomous determination of the human will, mechanism does not as such have the power to function as a constraint on freedom. Rather, the freedom of the will, that is, moral agency, is constituted by an indifference to mechanical nature, a turning away from the realm of heteronomous determination as such.¹² Kant, in short, typically treats mechanism not as a constraint on freedom, but as its opposite. Here, though, in stressing mechanism as the name of a constraint, Kant is aiming to highlight what *limits* freedom of spirit rather than what is independent of it—and one can attempt to overcome limits in interesting ways because, in contrast to metaphysical bulkheads, limits are already internally related to what they limit.

It may seem as if we are overplaying this distinction between mere mechanical nature and mechanism as constraint. After all, several times in the *Critique of Judgment* Kant identifies the merely mechanical with nature as such, so perhaps nothing special is being said here. However, since mechanism is presented in this passage and others as constraint, there is still a novelty of usage to be explained. More importantly, as Kant argues elsewhere, even if the claim that the production of material things is possible according to mechanical laws is necessarily presupposed by determinative judgment, that claim on its own cannot prevent judgment from presupposing that the production of *some* material things may also be possible according to some special nonmechanical principle (*CJ* 70, pp. 266–68). In other words, while a mechanism is a process that determines the nature of the thing produced through it, a determining mechanism cannot determine further that it is *only* through that mechanism that the thing can be produced. Reflective judgment, thus, is not mechanically constrained by the fact of mechanism; or, put differently, it is possible to imagine a world perfectly consistent with mechanical laws that nevertheless does not have those laws as its actual and only principle. Mechanism is in this sense a constraint on the free spirit, but only as the determining source of the things of the world that spirit *could* be the source of. This important implication of Kant's position can be derived only if there is a second sense of mechanism not just as a principle of natural explanation but also as a constraint on the will.

This clarifies immediately why Kant rejects the idea of genius as operating beyond mechanism. For the work of genius to appear the artist must produce some-

thing—the spirit of genius is the opposite of the renunciation of the world—and that thing must be capable of being made according to natural laws.¹³ The artist who says, “I will create what nature itself could not produce,” is speaking very strict nonsense. *That* artist's genius could never appear. Every artist thus needs constraint, a bit of pedagogy Kant derives from his metaphysics. However, this does not entail that the artist needs to regard the necessarily possible production according to mechanical law as the principle for the production of the work of art. The artist may seek—indeed, I would suggest this is Kant's point—the artist *does* seek to make the work come into existence as the product of another principle, the principle of freedom.

How, then, does the alternative principle appear? It cannot appear as an evacuation of mechanism, that is, as an artifact that could not have been produced mechanically. Thus, it must appear as the negation of mechanicity, as the denial that mechanism alone was the originating principle. Now, if mechanism is a regularity binding an effect to its cause, the point may be put thus: the free spirit appears, that is, an artifact is a work of art, not when mechanism is absent but rather when the mechanicity of mechanism, its determinative power, is visibly absent. In more commonsense aesthetic terms, the free spirit appears in the transformation of mechanism from constraint into raw materials for art.

The work of art is an apparent break in the chain of necessity, not, therefore, because the thing made could have been produced only through freedom, but because in negating the mechanical necessity of mechanism it visibly was so produced. This requires that for the artist to produce something visibly non-necessitated, he must be intimately, precisely familiar with the mechanical necessitation he must dismantle. The artist's horizon of action, his raw material, is thus the entire domain of necessity—let us call it the world—as that which may constrain him; the break in necessity then appears as the constraint not constraining, the mechanism not determining. “*That*,” the artist says, “will not force my hand.” Hence, the work of genius, the work of the free spirit, can only appear along with what in the work fails to determine it, along with its nonconstraining constraint; it can only appear as a mutation in nature that reveals nature's incompleteness as mechanism. To put the point in the terms that got this discussion moving, the work of genius appears in nature as a moment of non-reconciliation between spirit and nature.

On Kant's view, then, the work of art is an achievement of appropriative negation; more expansively, it is the negation, achieved within mechanical nature itself, of the mechanicity of melancholy nature. Hence it becomes even less of a wonder that Kant says the artist requires a mechanism without which the work would have no body and the spirit not be free. Without the constraint of

mechanism there is nothing for the artist to do, and so rather than constraint being something to be neglected in the name of artistic autonomy taken as a kind of isolation from nature, it is the very arena in which that autonomy is achieved. The work of art is the visible transformation of mechanical necessitation into incompleteness of determination and so is the manufacturing of freedom. Emphatically, then, the work of art is not the transcendence of mechanism. And to give this interpretation one final piece of support, let us recall that Kant's ultimate charge against the misguided art pedagogues is that they treat art as play rather than labor. Kant insists, which is to say reminds us of what many forget, that a work of art is called work (*opus*) for a reason. Art is the labor of remaking the world of mechanism as a world that need not be the realm of inhuman necessity.

Now, insofar as art is a kind of labor it is the production of artifacts; however, the labor of art appears as a negation of mechanicity, a break in the determinate productive chain. Hence the appearance of genius. Here we are back at the original paradox, but now I think in a substantially more comprehensible form. For Kant, the artwork appears as nature because it does not appear to have a determinate purpose, that is, it does not appear to be a production through human labor. Thus the work of art appears as the look of free labor, of labor having freed itself from what makes labor necessary. Artistic appearance is indeed the result of labor, but of “undisciplined” labor not tethered to any extrinsic goal. The artwork, in short, is the appearance of unnecessary work. In being unnecessary, the artwork is the appearance of the absence of external determination; in this way the artwork appears like nature, which is now to say that like the system of nature nothing outside it determines it. Because artistic appearance is what culture makes possible yet does not determine, it looks like nature within culture and therefore undermines the repression of nature by discipline.

IV

We can now turn to the question of what, for Kant, the work of art looks like. As we now see, for Kant this question is identical to what might seem to be a different question at first glance: What does negation look like? How does negation appear? (And this is a question of aesthetics, in contrast to the question “What is negation?” which is a question of metaphysics—or, more precisely, politics.) The normal answer to this question in post-Kantian philosophical aesthetics is that it looks like freedom, an answer that has led to the aforementioned idealist-romantic valorizations of artistic autonomy. However, despite the apparently bountiful support for this view in Kant's writings, if our interpreta-

tion of Kant is so far right, Kant's considered answer is that artistic negation looks like the failure of freedom.

The idealist misinterpretation of the autonomy of art rests on an inference from art's non-necessitation by worldly circumstances to its metaphysical isolation from the realm of necessity. The inference is false because it mistakenly takes Kant's claims about the non-necessitation of art to be about causally anomalous, metaphysically unique objects; instead, such claims are about art as working on the *external* circumstances that might have necessitated it, the dismantling of which is the appearance of another necessity. In other words, if art is work's refusal to let anything outside itself determine its form, then the artwork is just the appearance of that refusal. The work of art thus only appears as non-reconciliation with the world of external determination by reproducing or representing that world as deprived of its determinative powers. But this of course entails that the work is bound *irredeemably* to what does not determine it, is constrained to show what does not constrain it. For the work's power of negation to appear it must visibly negate something and can only appear as the negation of that thing. Thus, for the work of art to be autonomous it is bound to show what it is not bound by and so to reveal itself as incapable of escaping from the world it seeks to transcend.¹⁴ The work of art functions as a symbol of the unbridgeable abyss across which freedom has been segregated from nature, a symbol which, if true to the nature of freedom, had better not be itself free; if it were, it would cease being a symbol and take up residence in the realm beyond appearance. Freedom from mechanism, rather than the effort to negate it, would make the work of art metaphysically impossible. For the work of art to interrupt mechanical necessity, it must fail to be free, and it is just this nonreconciliation between freedom and nature in art which is the symbol of freedom.

This interpretation reveals that Kant sees set in motion in the work of art a dialectical war between nature and free spirit *that free spirit cannot win*. It is, however, just the failure to win that keeps art in motion, keeps it unreconciled and so doing battle against the realm of external determination that itself grows more obdurate with each failure. Art, far from dying of failure, would die of success. But what is this perpetual conflict between freedom and nature? What is this process of the always renewed nonreconciliation between the self-determination of spirit and external determination? Since art fails to attain the freedom it strives for it is impossible to treat it as free spirit, but because it remains unreconciled to that failure it is also impossible to treat it as mere dead nature. It is instead necessary to treat art's renewal of its commitment to failure as the story of the perpetual self-creation of life through nonreconciliation. It is necessary, in other words, to treat art as historical.

Kant's derivation of history from art's nonreconciliation can be examined most perspicuously if we first recall (a) that the nature (mere nature) to which art remains unreconciled is the dead nature of the culture of discipline, and (b) that what remains unreconciled in art is genius, that is, the spirit that art can only signify in its flight from the totality of determined appearance. Spirit's nonreconciliation is driven by the autonomous subject's already having been ejected from a nature it no longer recognizes as its own, an ejection which is the precondition for and at the same time the greatest threat to the causality of freedom. It is as if spirit's own development, its own coming into existence, were a traumatic process which, carrying its moment of greatest danger along as the continued prick of autonomy, can never end. The strife of spirit and nature thus occurs *within* cultivated subjectivity in the form of an illusory tussle with a nature that has already given up the ghost. What drives spirit's unconsolability is the inadequacy of its own, proper other which it has itself necessarily generated. It is in the nature of free spirit to find itself face to face with dead nature and to strive to keep it alive as its own alienated self. Again: "without this [mechanism] the *spirit*, which in art must be *free* and which alone animates the work, would have no body and would evaporate completely" (*CJ* 43, p. 171). Art in this light is the material struggle arising from human disorientation within the culture of discipline.

Therefore, it is necessary on Kant's view not just to treat art as historical, but *as human history*. When he writes that genius is "nature in the subject" that gives the rule to art, we must not forget that it is not nature, but its traumatizing power in the subject, which is art's lawgiver. Nature no longer gives rules to humans immediately; it does so only through culture. But the culture of discipline is the denial of nature's normativity. Therefore, nature can be normative only insofar as it appears within culture, that is, through the disciplined subject. Even if it made sense to think of genius romantically as nature *simpliciter*, it would be possible to acknowledge its bindingness only when it has been sacrificed, that is, killed. Thus, Kant writes: "Taste, like the power of judgment in general, consists in disciplining (or training) genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized or polished; but at the same time it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread while still remaining purposive" (*CJ* 50, p. 188).

Taste is the agent of culture that cultivates and domesticates genius, yet it is the only agency through which nature can come to appearance, can be normative. Nature retains its power to bind in culture by means of appearing to cultivated subjects as a self-sacrificial nature calling out for acknowledgment—only, that is, as living nature dying over and over again before our eyes. Art is history, therefore, because it is the recapitulation of the never-ending initiating moment

of culture, and the exercise of taste is the pleasure we take in nature's insistence beyond death. Kant concludes the thought begun above:

[Taste] introduces clarity and order into a wealth of thought, and hence makes the ideas durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and [hence] fit for being followed by others and fit for an ever advancing culture. Therefore, if there is conflict between [genius and taste] in a product, and something has to be sacrificed, then it should rather be on the side of genius; and judgment, which in matters of fine art bases its pronouncements on principles of its own, will sooner permit the imagination's freedom and wealth to be impaired than that the understanding be impaired. (*CJ* 50, pp. 188–89)

In this striking argument, "fit for being followed by others" and "fit for an ever advancing culture" function as synonyms for the afterlife of durable ideas. Culture's demand, executed by taste, that nature appear within it is the moment of the demand for the sacrifice of nature. Taste delights in rendering the jumble of genius fit for eternal approval by making it lucid and sober; taste, in other words, institutionalizes genius in the form of lasting markers of its once dynamic relation to the subject in which it was embodied. Taste, in other words, is *taste for memorials* that give spirit its (dead) nature. However, because these memorials are the works of genius that are fit for being followed by others, they are also the site of the renewal of the threat to culture, the renewal, that is, of the power of genius as nature in the subject. Taste creates a cemetery of art, but since this cemetery is populated with the works of genius, it is a cemetery of undead spirit fit for being followed by an ever advancing, which is to say essentially open, culture. Art thus gives rise to the afterlife of sacrifice—which is to say, to history—by occupying the frontier between disciplinary culture and nature at which deathly freedom and the living dead pass restlessly over into one another. It sustains and recapitulates the loss of nature achieved by culture in order to transmit that loss to those who follow. The loss of nature is the historical truth of disciplinary culture, the official history of which, in its perpetual and tasteful falsification of nature's sacrifice, renews the need to retell the campfire story of culture's advent on the way to a culture befitting humanity. In this sense, art is that moment when disciplinary culture turns against itself.

The distinction between the historical truth of culture and its official history, between the constantly renewed loss of nature which art sustains and the dream of the final overcoming of nature which fantastically grounds the culture of discipline, appears in Kant's thinking as the opposition between "following," on the one hand, and "copying" or "aping," on the other. These concepts represent alternative modes of coming after, or inheriting, previous cultural achievements.

The aper takes the precedent achievement as offering to culture a battery of methods that may be redeployed in the service of later purposes. The aper simply copies the work of the genius as if the achievement of genius were a technical one, thus revealing that she is under the spell of disciplinary culture's official history of endless achievement. Whereas for the aper the new rules established by the work of genius are ratified by repetition, for the follower, by contrast, the repetition that the work of genius compels violates the specificity of those rules, that is, their newness. Copying takes the rules of culture, which are the agents of nature's sacrifice, for an absolute achievement of art, but the follower, inspired by the work of genius, takes that work as exemplary of the non-iterability of artistic normativity. The follower, thus, prolongs the moment of the death of nature that the aper takes to have happened in the past. Here is how Kant puts it.

Since, then, [the artist's] natural endowment must give the rule to (fine) art, what kind of rule is this? It cannot be couched in a formula and serve as a precept, for then a judgment about the beautiful could be determined according to concepts. Rather, the rule must be abstracted from what the artist has done, i.e. from the product, which others may use to test their own talent, letting it serve them as their model, not to be *copied* but to be *imitated*. How that is possible is difficult to explain. The artist's ideas arouse similar ideas in his apprentice if nature has provided the latter with a similar proportion in his mental powers. That is why the models of fine art are the only means of transmitting these ideas to posterity. (*CJ* 47, pp. 177–78)¹⁵

And later:

The other genius [the lucky apprentice], who follows the example, is aroused to it by a feeling of his own originality, which allows him to exercise in art his freedom from the constraint of rules, and to do so in such a way that art itself acquires a new rule by this, thus showing that the talent is exemplary. (*CJ* 49, p. 187)

In treating the techniques of earlier works as if they were fully successful art, mere copying forgets the death of nature in the work of art and becomes thereby a happy mimesis of death. The follower, however, is freed by the exemplarity of the precedent from the constraint of rules, even though the invention of those very rules from which the follower is freed is what made the exemplary original worthy of being followed in the first place. It is as if the exemplary work of genius establishes a metarule—"Establish new rules!"—that cannot be executed since heeding it entails inspiring others to follow by not heeding the rules the original established. The work of genius can only establish binding conviction

in its followers if those followers fail to be bound by its artistic achievement—if, in other words, the work fails to transmute the culture to which it is sacrificed. The historical truth of artistic following thus appears to Kant as a non-narratable (“difficult to explain”) history of discontinuous exemplarity in which every follower sees the ghost of life emanating from dead nature. The history of art is an endless crisis of the transmission of cultural mediation.¹⁶

This transmissive crisis becomes pressing for Kant in the contradiction between teaching art and inheriting it. The teaching of copying to those who come after genius is easy enough, since copying simply requires abstracting from the achievement of the genius those rules of taste that enabled the genius's nature to appear in culture. However, since that appearance is just taste's clipping of the wings of genius, to teach the copying of it is the opposite of transmitting genius; it is, instead, instruction in the canons of the distaste for nature that is discipline's engine. Teaching, in other words, is at odds with following even as it is requisite for any later artistic achievement whatsoever. The capacity to follow cannot be taught—it can only be ignited by a teaching that does not teach too well. Now, this scenario of the structural failure of the teaching of art stands in stark contrast to the Vasarian academic narrative of cultural transmission in which culture is sustained by means of masterful accomplishments being taught to student-apprentices. Instead of a temporalizing coordination of the taught and the learned, Kant detects at the heart of artistic inheritance a conflict between the teaching of the purposive skills of art and the renewal of nature's sacrifice at each moment of following. In sensing this subterranean animus impeding the purposiveness of cultural transmission, Kant discovers artistic modernism.

Kant does not, to be sure, swallow his discovery readily. The interruption of the continuous official history of culture by the bond of sacrifice and loss that constitutes following leads him back again and again, like a tongue to a toothache, to the traumatic scene of artistic instruction. We have seen already several descriptions of this scene and we will shortly close our discussion by focusing on one more. The relation of master and student-apprentice is, of course, the nucleus of artistic transmission, the cell of cultural reproduction in which lineages of influence and filiation are established. In it, the past of a culture forges its future as the locus of its self-preservation. However, the trauma that incessantly draws Kant back to this scene is the crisis of mastery at its core. The master artist is licensed to teach future masters in virtue of having become a master in the past. The infinite yet determinate line of masters and students organizes cultural continuity—it is just what is traditional in premodern art. For Kant, however, the master artist is the genius whose talent “cannot be couched in a formula and serve as a precept.” What licenses a master to teach is at the same time

essentially unteachable. Every genius, that is, every master in the infinite line of masters, is also a break in the lineage. Thus, every moment of artistic instruction is an event of discontinuity logically presumed by the structure of a specifically artistic pedagogy.

The inability of the master to teach makes the scene of artistic instruction into a theater of the master's nakedness before his own mastery: he cannot be said to have properly mastered his own mastery. The embarrassing powerlessness of the master is, however, simply another name for the master's genius. That the genius's mastery cannot be grasped in a formula, that it is a cognitively groundless achievement, makes him at once both worthy of siring the next generation and impotent to do so. Looking forward to the generation of students, the master is a father actively pursuing his posterity, but looking backward to his attainment of the warrant of mastery, he is a midwife passively birthing the work of nature in the subject. The master is thus in no position to claim his achievements to the credit of his purposive work, despite such a claim serving as the basis of the entitlement to sire. Where paternity was to be, there is, traumatically, unclaimable fecundity instead. Artistic education is the scene of the unmasking of the mastery of the genius.

In the theater of artistic discipline, a generational vacancy bores through the claims of tradition. Copying can be taught to the apprentice, but that is a nongenerative reproduction of the same; what is generative, on the other hand, cannot be taught. The master's posterity is thus dependent on what he is powerless as such to produce: the power of the student to follow. This power, which, once again, is “difficult to explain,” is not however a simple little extra that nature sometimes adds to the skills that the student learns from the master; it is, more ominously, an ability to regard those skills as that from which the student must attain freedom in order to become an artist. The power to follow is just the power to deny the claim of paternity the master implicitly but groundlessly claims. Put otherwise, once skill and fine art are distinct, genius becomes a traumatogenic non-reconciliation not just to dead nature but to formal history, for the student recognizes, in the powerlessness of the master to teach, that formal history is just dead nature. Artistic transmission is, we might say, *unruly* history in which the normative force of an artistic achievement is gained only retrospectively once it has incited the overturning of the force of culture that called it into being.

That the history of art appears at the site of generational vacancy supposes that the landscape of art's past is littered with the corpses of prior moments of nonreconciliation that have become all too tasteful. The student studies the exemplary works of the past in search of their achievements, but insofar as the free spirit of the genius failed to transform dead nature into living nature, those

works are now mausoleums of vaporized spirit. They bind, if they do, not because they live on as the undying achievements of the past, but because they are records of suffering. Taste, recall, has made them fit for being followed—and following, as opposed to aping, is only possible after failure. The future of art thus becomes not the preservation of cultural achievement, but the sustaining of the endless dying of nature at culture's hands. Art is always born for Kant from the shards of the dead history of works of genius, each one whispering the same sentence in its own dead language: here a humanity intimate with its own nature once breathed its last.

This idea of a future for culture built on the ruins of its own past opens the prospect of an historical temporality different from an orientation by substantive tradition—it invites us to prospect for an orientation in the wreckage of substantive tradition. The failure of freedom in past art, its having failed to shake off the dead nature which called it into being, makes its claim on the student insofar as it appears as the master's generative disability. Past works thus take their place as sites of the necessary suffering of nature in the subject at the hand of the culture it cannot normatively transfigure. The failure of past art to sustain nature, and not its success at doing so, generates art's future by staking artistic transmission to the student's inevitable turn away from the failure of tradition and the tradition of failure. Even more strongly, as Kant's limning of the trauma of artistic instruction suggests, artistic transmission happens *just as this turning away*. The natural revulsion at the spectacle of ceaseless loss carries that loss along into a renewed effort to master it. Nature in the subject, we can say, is preserved in the necessary Oedipal repudiation, which constitutes the loss of substantive tradition as nature, of the false master.¹⁷ The student's disavowal of the teacher, justified in the name of the teacher's incapacity, is the student's non-reconciliation to the history of art and therefore is the sine qua non of the transmission of culture as lost nature. Art's history is then structured not by a strong tradition, but by its perpetual breakdown.

In teasing out the antitraditional logic of artistic transmission, Kant redescribes artistic inheritance in recognizably modernist terms. It seems odd, of course, that Kant could develop this logic half a century before the advent of the phenomenon whose logic it is. However, it is not really so surprising since Kant, like the modernism yet to come, was deeply attuned to the internal yet tense relation between the necessity that beauty appear as nature and art's function as culture's preserve for the claims of dead nature. Put another way, because of his insistence that beauty be seamless across nature and art, Kant was ready, even if not able in his own taste, to understand the necessity for art to begin tilting against its own scored history in order simply to preserve its promise of nonreconciliation.¹⁸

To say that modernist art's history is the story of its perpetual ruination is also to say that it is in art that the modern idea of history as the realm of the unreconciled takes shape. Indeed, if the idea of history is the modern gamble that a culture befitting humanity can yet be built out of the denormalizing of substantive tradition, then artistic modernism's ceaseless striving for the new, in which it exemplifies the logic of Kantian exemplary originality, is nothing but the infrathin space of nonreconciliation within disciplinary culture in which the dice are thrown.

I shall conclude this chapter shortly with a discussion of Kant's thinking about how self-differentiation within nature takes up residence in *artistic* modernism in particular, but for the moment let us note that the thought of history as the working of nonreconciliation perfectly captures the dynamic of modernism. One need not get involved here in the various debates about the periodization of modernism, but from concerns with the materiality of the artwork in Rimbaud, to concerns about the disappearance of perceptual experience in Cézanne, to concerns about cultural valorizations of handiwork in Duchamp, to concerns, in situationist art, about the social isolation of spaces of display, modernist art has been impelled to show itself to be unreconciled to what—from the point of view of its self-proclaimed newness—stands revealed as its own past failure to be free.

The extremes to which modernist art must go to hold open the project of nonreconciliation with the history of its own failure are notorious. But the only way to hold history open is, precisely, to insist ever more furiously on the necessity of the failure of art. No more poignant instance can be found than in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. The composer Adrian Leverkühn is grief-stricken over the death of his nephew Nepomuk in whom he had invested all his hope that there could yet be goodness on the earth. In his anguish, Leverkühn curses life itself to his friend Zeitblom, who narrates the composer's instructional tirade.

I was leaving when he stopped me, calling my name, my last name, Zeitblom, which sounded hard too. And when I turned round:

"I find," he said, "that it is not to be."

"What, Adrian, is not to be?"

"The good and the noble," he answered me; "what we call the human, although it is good, and noble. What human beings have fought for and stormed citadels, what the ecstasies exultantly announced—that is not to be. It will be taken back. I will take it back."

"I don't quite understand, dear man. What will you take back?"

"The Ninth Symphony," he replied. And then no more came, though I waited for it.¹⁹

That the "Ode to Joy" could not save Nepomuk makes its joyfulness a mockery, not a redemption, of human suffering: to live in a world with it but without the child is to be condemned to a life of being scorned by an eternal, yet eternally unfulfilled, promise of the redemption of pain and guilt. Hence, the Ninth failed at the pinnacle of its redemptive power and so must be repealed. But how can one repeal a failure that is part of the texture of the world? One could say in a voice of philosophical wisdom and world-weariness, as will Hegel, that art is passé, thereby removing it from *this* world. Or one could, like Leverkühn, write the "Faust Oratorio" to perpetuate Beethoven's failure within a failure of one's own and to show thereby that *of course* it had to fail—it was only art. Art's response to its own failure is to seek to negate it by incorporating it. This might yield, as it does for Leverkühn, a lamentation, but that lamentation is nonetheless a roar of protest against false reconciliation—against, that is, art's own lamentable history of failing to be free.

V

That it is art that transmits history seems a heavy burden for a single and fragile human practice to bear. Indeed, given Kant's argument that artistic beauty is the sepulcher of dead nature, it would seem as if art at least could share its load with the aesthetic experience of nature. Of course, Kant does not hold that the onus of the historical transmission of the trauma of the culture of discipline was always shouldered by art alone; however, the epoch in which the beauty of unmediated nature was a site of history is already imagined by him as passing by the late eighteenth century. As he closes his critique of aesthetic judgment, he conjures a future in which art alone is left for historical transmission. That future is our "now," and what Kant conjures is artistic modernism.

In a textually belated appendix to the *Critique of Judgment*, "On Methodology Concerning Taste," Kant ponders a pedagogical question that was anachronistic for him but surprisingly timely now: what constitutes the proper curriculum for artistic training? Because the artistic work of the master cannot be transmitted directly, there can be no method in the strict sense for art education. "The master must show by his example what the student must produce, and how," but if the aim of instruction is to encourage the student to become a master herself, then the example of the master must be followed rather than learned. Technical art instruction is mnemonically necessary for the student to remember that she is not yet a master; it is the bare bones of the pedagogical situation. However, what matters in artistic training is the development of the student's humanity. The propaedeutic for all artistry is the study of the humanities in or-

der to cultivate in the student the "universal feeling of sympathy, and the ability to engage universally in very intimate conversation." The combination of a feeling of sympathy and a capacity for intimacy in communication together constitute what Kant calls "the sociability that befits our humanity" (*CJ* 60, p. 230). Artistic training, thus, is training for the production of a culture suitable for humans. The universal feeling of sympathy for the struggle of humanity and the capacity for intimate communication, that is, for maximal closeness with others whom one nonetheless recognizes as separated from oneself across a gap, permits the artist to become unafraid of the historical nature of humanity. Artists are thus poised to take on themselves the role of historical transmission.

But take it on from where, from what other practice? Kant's brief answer is religion and politics.

There were people during one age whose strong urge to have sociability *under laws*, through which a people becomes a lasting commonwealth, wrestled with the great problems that surround the difficult task of combining freedom (and hence also equality) with some constraint (a constraint based more on respect and submission from duty than on fear). A people in such an age had to begin by discovering the art of reciprocal communication of ideas between its most educated and its cruder segments, and by discovering how to make the improvement and refinement of the first harmonize with the natural simplicity and originality of the second, finding in this way that mean between higher culture and an undemanding nature constituting the right standard, unstatable in any universal rules, even for taste, which is the universal human sense. (*CJ* 60, pp. 231–32)

Once upon a time, art's function was explicitly and entirely political. It opened relations of reciprocity between two classes which, despite occupying the same space, were nonetheless trapped in a war of nonrecognition. Because they cohabited in a shared discursive space, the classes were politically conjoined, but relations of reciprocal recognition were nonetheless lacking; the members of this polity were antagonistically bound together somewhere on the road between being a people and being citizens of a commonwealth. Under these conditions of unsociable sociality, art served "the strong *urge* to have sociability under laws." Art, thus, was the practice in which was prefigured a political norm that was in fact nowhere to be found. It was the agency of a political norm—Kant says, of legal equality as a political norm rather than a mere form of law—and thereby the legitimation by means of the imagination of a common ground between classes of a fully human politics that did not yet exist. Straddling the higher culture that repudiated nature and the cruder segments whose crudity was the life repudiated by higher culture (the higher logically depending on the lower it is

higher than), art kept the two classes from falling apart into two belligerent and separate societies by figuring forth a culture that was grounded in the interests of neither class. Art was thus the necessary supplement of divided social life without which its diremption could not be seen as a political split at all, that is, as a split internal to the constitution of society; it was the appearance of the precondition for politics with which actual politics was not synchronized. Art was for this reason the traumatic image of a politics yet to come in the alluring form of a harmony already here.

Now, it surely is just as presumptuous to saddle Kant with a radical egalitarianism as it is to find in his writings the prematurely developed logic of artistic modernism. Nonetheless, Kant here argues that art is the representative of an egalitarian political normativity without which social life is nothing but refined war. This is a subtle but vicious attack on the belief in its own refinement by higher culture, charging that, unless that culture can turn against itself by seeking to communicate reciprocally with what, from its refined perspective, is beneath contempt, it is nothing but a self-interested illusion. Insofar as art is this turning, it is also the mere appearance that discloses to higher (disciplinary) culture its interminable double bind: without art, disciplinary culture would stand revealed as a form of warfare oddly ashamed of its own bellicosity, while with art it stands revealed as false to its self-description as elevated above nature. Art, thus, is a product of cultural mastery that exhibits the illegitimacy of the masters. Because mastery needs art to arrogate its own refinement, art is just as much the site of culture's self-criticism as of its normativity: the war against crude nature turns into a culture befitting humanity only when it is turned against disciplinary refinement as an unconquered piece of culture's nature. At the heart of culture, art is an outcropping of nature's claim against those who, in warring against nature, turn it into a belligerent force. As the image, but only the image, of a political rapprochement, art transmits the normativity of nature that the culture of discipline simultaneously presumes and disavows.

The illusory objectivity of the disavowal of nature—the insistence of nature in the subject at the height of its disavowal—was the natural beauty of both nature and art. As a corpse-littered field of devastated nature, the history of beauty is the compelling residue of the human struggle, which Kant calls culture, with its own self-dirempting nature. It is, we might say with Kant, a graveyard of failed efforts to imagine the “mean between higher culture and an undemanding nature constituting the right standard . . . which is the universal human sense”; that is, the family vault of those evanescent yet shattering appearances of the *sensus communis*, which, *as a sense*, is the standard for a culture befitting humanity. However, Kant's just-so story is related in the context of advice about how to train

artists in *humaniora*, the capacity to intimately and sympathetically undergo the humanity of other people. In other words, the critique of taste closes (and, since this is an appendix, closes a second time) with one more scene of artistic instruction in which Kant tries to imaginatively reanimate for his contemporaries the historical struggle of past art, which, insofar as instruction is required, has failed in its original political function of producing the mean. That artists need instruction in humanity as an essential adjunct to their technical training presupposes that the ghosts of futures past no longer speak naturally in the form of beauty. Kant's contemporaries are we moderns who live in a *Neuzeit*, after the age of nature. Thus, the artistic models of nature—which as models rather than nature have suffered the process of acculturation—are ever more burdened.

It is not likely that peoples of any future age will make those models dispensable, for these peoples will be ever more remote from nature. Ultimately, since they will have no enduring examples of nature, they will hardly be able to form a concept of the happy combination (in one and the same people) of the law-governed constraint coming from highest culture with the force and rightness of a free nature that feels its own value. (*CJ* 60, p. 232)

In the enduring future of an ever advancing culture, no examples of nature will endure. Everything will become culture, even those islands of nature preserved for eco-tourists. As we grow remote from nature through our refinement, the claims of undead nature that traumatically interrupt the traumatic journey of cultivation will become fully dead. This is just what Rousseau feared: intimacy and sympathy will become exotic creatures from another world—which could have been ours—to be scrutinized from a curious distance traversed only by the unsettling recognition of a lost familiarity. This, of course, is simply a way of dramatizing the implosion of substantive tradition, of the determinative transmission of norms, which is the condition of our modernity. At exactly that moment, the models of exemplary art, the persistent records of a previous struggle for a culture befitting humanity, will be all that is left of disturbing nature.²⁰ History, then, will belong solely to art. For the sake of a free nature that *feels* its own value, for the sake of a lost politics befitting humanity, artists then (now) will need to be educated to turn from nature to art's own traumatogenic past. In allowing himself to be transfixed by the crisis of artistic education, Kant comes to ask if art can sustain this loss of mastery. Thereby, and perhaps accidentally, he discovers artistic modernism.