

KANT AND THE CRISIS OF SYMBOLIC RATIONALITY

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*To Lynarra Featherly, who turns tragedy into mere melodrama.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation develops a theory of symbolic rationality. It proceeds by analyzing Kant's aesthetic theory, developing out of it a conception of aesthetic judgment as a specifically social form of thought, as well as a form of thought about sociality. The argument seeks to locate Kant's aesthetic theory insofar as it emerges just as substantial forms of symbolic sociality are waning, so that his thoughts on taste turn out to be attempts to understand how we stake claims to autonomy in this new social setting. The image of community that emerges out of Kant's work on judgment is neither that of a community of autonomous (and atomized) persons, nor that of a community grounded in identity. Instead, it is the vision of a mode of community grounded in the tension between identity and differentiation, one that combines affection and respect as modes of social attachment. Works of art turn out to symbolize this alternative politics in much the same way that natural beauty symbolizes morality for Kant. Given the historical nature of his thinking, Hegel is positioned to help us theorize the emergence of modernity *as* a historical crisis, although he shares little of Kant's faith in reflective judgment's ability to meet thought's emergent needs. And, indeed, the social world appears to stand in little need of judgment insofar as the work of valuing, which looks to have become automated by the economy, seems to happen without our help. It is with the hope of finding some important, if also limited, use for reflective judgment that we turn to look finally at a specific symbolic crisis – gay marriage – in order to see what traction we might gain on both the attempts to access the institution and the resistance that seeks to block those attempts.

What, then, is new in our reading of Kant? This question helps us clarify why the role of what we're calling symbolic rationality has not garnered much attention in the secondary literature on Kant's aesthetics, and why, with that elision, the question of social and political judgment has not yet come properly to the fore. It is standard for readers of Kant's aesthetics to focus on the links between judgments of taste and either epistemological or moral questions, and these foci tend to subsume the former under the latter.<sup>1</sup> These are in fact the connections with which Kant himself seems most concerned: judgments of taste are epistemologically interesting insofar as aesthetic judgment plays a role in all reflective (and so all empirical) judgments;<sup>2</sup> they are morally interesting insofar as Kant finds beauty intrinsically suited to stand as the symbol of morality.<sup>3</sup> It further makes sense that Kant himself would be preoccupied with the relationship between taste and the understanding, on the one hand, and that between taste and reason, on the other, precisely insofar as his primary aim is a transcendental critique of judgment. That means that he seeks, above all else, to understand what our universal conditions of sensibility contribute to our empirical experience of the world. It would seem, then, that his task in the *Critique of Judgment*, and particularly in the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," is identical to that of his discussion of the schematism in the first *Critique*,<sup>4</sup> but with two differences that will be essential to our reading: first, *pleasure* comes to occupy a central place in his analysis, and, second, we find a mode of representation, namely, the *symbolic*, appearing alongside that of the schematism.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jay Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1999) 27.

<sup>2</sup> As good examples of these readings, cf. David Bell, "The Art of Judgement" (*Mind*, 96.382 (1987): 221-244), and Donald Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Henry Allison, Henry, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Bell's "The Art of Judgment" presents precisely this argument.

This dissertation focuses almost exclusively on symbolic representation, a mode that combines logical presentation with affective elements. This narrow focus certainly involves limitations, some general and some specific to our work on Kant. This is especially true when it comes to our schematic treatment of the aforementioned substantial and important work done on the epistemological and moral fronts of Kantian aesthetics. Since we will argue, however, that this grasp allows us to better approach what is specific to reflective judgment, namely the form of symbolic rationality that allows us to gather up associated contents without absorbing them, this limitation is acceptable. What is more worrisome is the absence of any nuanced consideration of forms of authority. This absence can be excused in light of the fact that this project is motivated by the disappearance of authority. We can say, however, that when we talk about the disappearance of authority, we do not mean external, coercive authority, but what we can call for now “compelling authority,” authority that makes its claims on us by way of shared and valued social symbols. This is the crisis of symbolic rationality, a crisis because it is simultaneously the production of the need for symbolic *rationality* and the establishment of conditions that seal off the materials that sustain its work. We mention this here not because it is Kant’s topic, but because it serves as the necessary background to our reading of him.

Although our interest in the social and historical dimensions of a situation Kant treats transcendently leads us to emphasize the social and empirical elements of his *Critique of Judgment*, the wealth of materials we find there to support our reading more than justifies the distortion. Even in places where Kant’s focus is clearly intra- rather than inter-subjective, he finds himself using political analogies to describe relations

among the faculties. We will look first at his portrayal of judgment as the faculty of reconciliation in terms of its “internal” role, supplementing the ideas of reason and the concepts of the understanding both by the production of the schematism (not our central focus here) and in a symbolic capacity (that is our focus). The political analogy will serve us here as additional support, but more importantly, we will see that the question of taste *actually* opens onto a question of social judgment. We will thus turn next to the question of judging judges, looking first at how the human figure (which ends up being not just the perceptible human figure, but a human taken *as* a judge) serves as the ideal of beauty, and then at the variety of figures that come to populate Kant’s account of judgment. The two most important of these figures, for our purposes, are the lover of nature and the artist, and the analysis of these figures will help us understand what we are to hope for from nature and what from artifice. Artifice presents us with a specific set of problems, since the production and reception of the work of art involves representation, genre and technique, and the mark of artist. Accordingly, the work of art and the role of the artist will receive a more extended and independent treatment, by the end of which we hope to have shown that the work of art serves as the occasion for a peculiar and socially important judgment of taste, one that constitutes its audience around a kind of compelling opacity, generating a claim for both affection and esteem (both identification and a more distanced respect).

When we turn to Hegel, what we are calling the crisis in symbolic rationality will be understood primarily insofar as it entails the loss of a symbolic connection with God – which is effectively the loss of God. In Hegel, the “divine” stands for a two-sided opacity, a command that has become convention and a sensibility that cannot be

recognized as related to affect and desire. The fact that this missing authority is still described as the divine emphasizes the way in which it serves as an opaque bond between us, renders us congregants even in our isolation. This is one meaning of Hegel's claim that the in-itself is for-us, is indeed the appearance of opacity that grounds sociality. If, however, (a) it has become impossible, for us to project the divine as a beyond that sustains us – and this is what the crisis in symbolic rationality amounts to – *and* (b) that projection, by way of shared social symbols, was what allowed that vision of authority and command to remain in contact with what resists it, what do we do now? Do we hold fast to the fragments, build a life around them and forge an explicit congregation devoted to the mystery? Do we instead celebrate the emancipation of theory from what now appears only in the guise of special pleading, committing ourselves to a formal proceduralism in politics and the enjoyment of contingency in our private lives? These both involve withdrawal, the first into the philosophical community as a consolation for the loss of genuinely mediated community, and the second a regression into the private enjoyment Kant portrays as socially uninteresting and Marx will help us understand as downright barbarous.

In the chapters on Kant, it will have become clear that his acknowledgement of the moment of pleasure in reflective judgment is likewise an acknowledgement of the way the subject stakes a claim to be recognized as needy. Hegel's characterization of reflective judgment, however, eliminates that reference to pleasure – or, rather, “reflects” that reference's elimination. Hegel attributes the end of art, in some places at least, to the historical fact that, by his time, a totality of technical and generic options have been articulated, both freeing the artist from the demands of any particular style or technique

but also rendering no style or technique more compelling than any other. We will describe this as a crippling emancipation, but once we turn to Marx we'll also be able to see that this idea of a total articulation is itself merely an appearance. Indeed, in those moments when Hegel is trumpeting the victory of the concrete concept over the merely sensuous, science over aesthetics, we can understand him to be engaged in the idealist project as Robert Pippin describes it – namely, the project of a rational reconstruction that makes satisfying sense of what must otherwise look like a bad situation. This, then, is the use we'll make of Marx's analysis of the commodity fetish, an analysis that aims to reveal what the fetish works so hard to cover up: that the driving force behind the production of commodities is in no way our happiness but indeed an impersonal (but not therefore non-repressive) economic process. Its impersonality is precisely to thank for its not needing to be loved, which is to say for the loss of a symbolic wink or nod meant to charm its subjects. The commodity world is indeed a world of symbolic values, but these are not symbols that depend on any real affective bond. They are such rarified and formalized symbols that each can stand for any other and all can be represented by a universal form of value – money. Indeed, the commodity world does nothing but recognize us as needy, *while refusing to recognize our need for mediated and specified needs.*

Lest this argument come across as a paean to lost authority, we should make clear that its aims are linked to the task of revealing that what appears to us as freedom is in fact an anxiety-producing rift between authority and need. The risk of appearing to straightforwardly mourn the loss of a religious or monarchical center comes from the fact that this dissertation has little to offer by way of philosophical mediation of modern

anxieties. The chapters on aesthetic theory suggest that the work of art might still sustain some hope insofar as the it remains a site for figuring the tension, struggle, or conflict we claim is the necessary condition for “contact” with our needs *as* needs. The chapter on the “gay marriage” debate shows how this anxiety expresses itself as a fear of excessive associative freedom, as well as the way commitment to mere convention is experienced as radical sacrifice. The philosophical attempts to intervene in this fearful debate somehow manage to combine an inability to achieve reflective distance from it with the urge to treat it at the level of logic without acknowledging the contingencies involved. In the conclusion, we will look to a theorist (David Halperin) who attempts to use aesthetic categories to gain reflective traction on the concept of “gay male culture.”

## CHAPTER I

### BEAUTY AND MATERIAL EXCESS

#### **Introduction**

Kant treats the *Critique of Judgment* as providing a kind of epistemological transition between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which is to say that he treats aesthetic (and to some degree teleological) judgments as mediating between theoretical and practical judgments. Yet otherwise put, judgment moderates between reason and the understanding, spanning as it were “the great gulf that separates the supersensible from appearances.”<sup>5</sup> The *Critique of Judgment* focuses on reflective judgment, which is, in the first place, that cognitive activity that *generates* actual empirical and moral judgments. It is reflective judgment that contends with the “given” content that goes into each of these. When it is so occupied, reflective judgment works as an assistant of sorts to the understanding and under the guidance of reason, working toward a unified experience in spite of the radical diversity of what is given it both from without and from within. This is its work as helpmate. Occasionally, however, we get glimpses of what it might mean to think that reflective judgment *also* has a project of its own, a project in which it is both guided by some kind of empirical given, *and yet* maintains something of the freedom afforded us by rationality.<sup>6</sup> This is

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<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987) 195. (Hereafter, *CJ*.)

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): “But Kant’s account of contemplative thought, or ‘reflective judgment,’ is a different sort of thinking altogether, whose function is not to subordinate theoretical to practical reason, but to negotiate the rift between them.” 81.



the case with aesthetic judgments, which thus allow us insight into the principle that is proper to reflective judgment, the principle that is active in all of its deployments but remains behind the scenes in both scientific (or everyday) and moral judgments.

Kant defines judgment as follows: “Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is *determinative*.... But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely *reflective*.”<sup>7</sup> Here, Kant suggests a variety of universals: rules, principles, and laws. These correspond to degrees of necessity, with rules as the least commanding (essentially taking the form of a hypothetical judgment), principles as slightly more rigorous but still regulative, and laws as inescapable conditions. In determinative judgments, judgment works only to subsume a given particular under a given universal, even if it is itself the partial author of that universal. This is the case when we are talking about subsumption under empirical concepts and empirical laws, which are the co-products of imagination and the understanding. The work of judgment in *reflection* is the search for a universal that can fit a given particular, and this work issues in either empirical judgments (of the everyday or scientific types, or a given moral judgment) or judgments of taste.

### **Judgment and the Legislative Limitations of Reason and the Understanding**

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant wants to pursue the thought that judgment brings its own principle to the table. Our only “experience” of that principle (using “experience” in a non-technical, non-Kantian kind of way) is a pure judgment of taste of

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<sup>7</sup> *CJ* 179.

the form “X is beautiful.” It turns out that although these pure judgments of taste are not made with the purpose of assisting us in our other cognitive endeavors,<sup>8</sup> they nonetheless do so in two specific ways: on the one hand, Kant argues that they expand the boundaries of our awareness, providing new ground for empirical investigation; on the other hand, they also serve up patterns of thought that function to symbolize Kant’s “ideas of reason.” These two functions are intimately connected. Judgments of taste are moments in which we seem to “run into” an order that precedes our own demand for order; we seem to run into this in the world, but of course we actually, on Kant’s account, run into it at the level of our imagination, our own thought-contents and figurations. This moment can be read, then, as holding out a kind of promise to the understanding that, while its concepts aren’t directly constitutive of the world it seeks to know, nothing in that world (or nothing “in us”) is *in principle* beyond its ken. The world is potentially, or so it seems in that moment, ordered in such a way that the only thing stopping us from knowing it through and through is our mortality. Of course, given Kant’s commitment to the inaccessibility of the noumenal, this moment is one in which the understanding mistakes an experience of subjective order for something objective, a moment, in other words, of a seeming-harmony between concepts and sensuous materials.

The thought of that fully unified world stands variously as a symbol for the satisfaction of each of the three ideas of reason, God, freedom, and the world as a unified totality. These ideas are really three versions of the same demand, a demand on reason’s part for the unconditioned: if the world has been produced by an understanding like our own, then we are justified in hoping both to know the world and to act successfully in it.

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<sup>8</sup> It seems clear enough to me that these other endeavors include not only our moral vocation but likewise our search for empirical order in the world; this latter is however much often discussed in the literature.

Then again, these two hopes stand in serious tension with one another, since a knowable world is a world unified by causal order, and we are empirical agents in that world, so that any appearance of freedom would seem to be impossible. As we shall see by the end of our treatment of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, it is precisely in response to this difficulty that Kant prioritizes natural beauty, and more precisely, the enjoyment of natural beauty in solitude, as a symbol of morality. All of the things that mark the work of art as a social product – the marks of history, of communication, of an author – draw us into the social world, the world where we are known and know ourselves to be complex creatures, made up not only of wants and reason, but attached to structures of authority, requiring manners and beautiful illusions in order to be presentable, and so on. These difficulties will emerge with more clarity in the second and third chapters, but for now, we will stick with the pure judgment of taste in order to see what it offers in its purity, its freedom to think the social without invoking or relying on it.

Although we will occupy ourselves in this chapter primarily with the intrasubjective role Kant assigns taste, its role in reconciling our faculties, we will simultaneously be following out the political analogy by means of which he illustrates that work. Especially in the preface and introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant organizes his thinking about the critical system around the idea of “legislation” as a hierarchical concept meant to describe both the cognitive relationship among faculties and that of each over their respective “products.” Thus, he identifies the work of the first *Critique* as figuring out in what ways the *understanding* legislates to intuition, so that when it searches for “what [each of the faculties] has contributed from its own roots to the cognition we actually possess” “nothing [is retained] except what the *understanding*

... prescribes a priori as a law to nature, as the sum total of appearances (whose form is given a priori).”<sup>9</sup> The *Critique of Pure Reason* is, at least in terms of a priori legislation, really about the legislative relationship between the pure concepts of the understanding and the intuitions. The twelve pure concepts of the understanding, or the categories, are the conditions of the possibility of all experience, meaning that without them there would be no experience, and no possible experience will turn out to “break” any of these universal laws. Reason, by contrast, contributes only regulative principles or ideas; we cannot meet with the unconditioned either in the form of pure matter or matter so fully informed as to become idea. We meet, then, with nothing that embodies or realizes the ideas of reason, but it is clear that, for Kant, beauty *symbolizes* at least one of them, and, if our reading of the disruptive symbolic capacity of works of art is right, fine art *looks* like (symbolizes) something like a counterclaim.

The second *Critique*, that of pure practical reason, is about the role that reason has in legislating over the will, which Kant calls the “power of desire.” “Similarly *reason*, which does not contain any constitutive a priori principles except [those] for the *power of desire*, was given possession [of its domain] by the critique of practical reason.”<sup>10</sup> This legislation, while no less *objectively* necessary on Kant’s account, clearly does not rule in the actual world of empirical experience with the same universality as the categories, since we are regularly faced with examples of immorality. But Kant’s claim is that *when* we take up a moral view of human agency, the demand that we then experience is precisely a necessary demand for universality, and indeed our experience of the moral law is just exactly our experience of that demand. Remembering this sets us up to think

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<sup>9</sup> *CJ* 167.

<sup>10</sup> *CJ* 168.

about what kinds of counterclaims might, then, be pressed in the disruptive moment of a work of art.

Within their realms, the understanding and reason provide the general laws that condition their objects, but they require reflective work on the part of judgment in order to bring those general conditions into contact with actual objects, whether these be the objects of empirical experience or our desirous orientations toward objects and other people. The initial argument Kant provides for thinking that judgment *has* a principle of its own, a principle of reflection, is essentially a trilemma. If it turns out that judgment's principle cannot be an objective principle of the understanding or an a posteriori principle taken from experience, then, he argues, it must be an a priori but merely subjective principle. We should note that it is this combination of an a priori principle with the conditions of human subjectivity gives rise to the thought of taste as the realm of intersubjectivity; we'll follow this out when we trace the analogy between aesthetic and logical forms. Kant presents his argument for the notion of a principle proper to judgment in the context of his discussion of the need the understanding has for judgment's reflective help:

[T]here are such diverse forms of nature, so many modifications as it were of the universal transcendental concepts of nature, which are left undetermined by [the laws of the understanding], that surely there must be laws for these forms too. Since these laws are empirical, they may indeed be contingent as far as *our* understanding can see; still, if they are to be called laws (as the concept of a nature does require), then they must be regarded as necessary by virtue of some principle of the unity of what is diverse, even though we do not know this principle. Hence reflective judgment ... requires a principle.... So this transcendental principle must be one that reflective judgment gives as a law, but only to itself: it cannot take it from somewhere else (since judgment would then be

determinative); nor can it prescribe it to nature, because our reflection on the laws of nature is governed by nature...<sup>11</sup>

There must be a principle proper to reflective judgment because neither the understanding nor experience can provide the kind of principle we're looking for. It is perhaps not immediately clear why this judgment cannot be determinative: it is because if it were determinative, then it would govern with the same necessity as the concepts of the understanding, but indeed the empirical laws that are produced with the help of reflection must be revisable. On the other hand, its products (empirical laws and concepts), even if *flexible*, have the shape of laws, which means that they cannot have been gotten out of experience. They are also the conditions of the possibility of experience, but only its *subjective* conditions of possibility, determined by the limits of our capacity to thoroughly order our experience by way of concepts. This principle is accordingly a kind of *demand*, one that does not let off even as we recognize the impossibility of fulfilling it entirely.

This demand is experienced in connection with the work of the understanding in unifying our empirical experience of the world. The *motivation* comes from the demand that reason makes for unity, order, and the completion of any series. In one sense, it looks like our completion of this task is guaranteed from the start, since the understanding's categories successfully legislate the conditions of the possibility of experience. But in the face of the innumerable variations and specifications of nature, twelve pure concepts are nowhere near (indeed, potentially infinitely far from being) "granular" enough to actually determine concrete experience, and it is impossible for us to specify all of the conditions involved in even a single instance of causality. The

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<sup>11</sup> *CJ* 179-180.

situation is even more dire when it comes to moral judgment, since there what we have is merely the idea of reason, merely the pure form of and demand for universality and unity; if twelve categories aren't granular enough, then one idea of reason is *a fortiori* not enough to yield actual pronouncements. Kant writes that insofar as theoretical cognition or "nature" is concerned, the idea of freedom "carries with it... only a negative principle."<sup>12</sup> In terms of the actual results of any particular moral judgment, we cannot determine whether it arises out of (is the result of a determination by) the moral law, but only whether or not it comes into contradiction with it. (This is why the thought of a positive counterclaim, oriented by the thought of happiness, holds such interest for us.)

The understanding and reason, then, stand in need of an additional faculty, a more responsive and flexible faculty that can give rise to empirical concepts and judgments, as well as actual moral judgments. It will be helpful to remember at this juncture that we are concerned here with the impossibility of *knowing* that what we are dealing with is an example of, say, a causal principle, or of a moral action. We can know in general, without the help of reflective judgment, that any possible object of experience is going to be governed by the law of causality, but we cannot without reflective judgment know any actual empirical law. In the same way, the categorical imperative can tell us whether a proposed action is in accordance with the moral law, but it cannot tell us if the moral law is *at work* in producing the effects we witness. We never get a fully adequate example of the law of causality (and indeed this is why it must be an a priori principle for Kant, because we cannot have gotten it *from* experience), and we cannot ever be certain that we are dealing with an enactment of the moral law in our evaluation of any proposed or

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<sup>12</sup> *CJ* 171.

completed action.<sup>13</sup> Just as we can never specify all of the conditions in any given empirical event, we can never specify the conditions – here, *motivations* – in any given action. *Conformity* is all we can be certain of in either instance, and *non-conformity* is only actually possible in the second.

It is in connection with the notion of ‘conformity’ that *both* the understanding and reason can be said to ‘legislate’ over their respective ‘realms.’ As already mentioned, Kant relies on political and juridical terms to describe the way in which our cognitive powers carve up the world. Philosophy itself is said to have a ‘domain’<sup>14</sup> in which it works. In this way, it is different from logic, which can only work on materials provided to it from elsewhere, and this according to laws that are particular to thought and so have no legislative powers at all. “Insofar as we refer concepts to objects without considering whether or not cognition of these objects is possible, they have their realm; and this realm is determined merely by the relation that the object of these concepts has to our cognitive power in general.”<sup>15</sup> This is the realm of pure reason insofar as it is occupied with the thought of objects but not yet the conditions of their possible experience.

Of the three ideas of reason, the idea of freedom (the thought of which gives rise to the law of morality) alone has the special quality of being concerned with the possibility of its object, so that practical reason will turn out to have a *domain* of its own. This is just another way of saying what we have already said above: we are able, in connection with the law of morality, to determine something about the possibility of

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<sup>13</sup> There remains much work to be done about the role of reflective judgment in “deploying” the categorical imperative, particularly with respect to the generation of maxims (subjective principles of action), but that work is beyond the scope of the current project. Here, we are merely outlining the systematic requirement that invites a critique of judgment.

<sup>14</sup> *CJ* 174.

<sup>15</sup> *CJ* 174.



empirical judgments *conforming* to its demands. The other *domain* is given shape by the pure concepts of the understanding, so that in addition to a practical domain, we have also a theoretical one, and in both cases the legislation is purely formal: “And yet the territory on which [philosophy’s] domain is set up and on which it *exercises* its legislation is still always confined to the sum total of the objects of all possible experience...”<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps confusing to think of reason and the understanding as having distinct domains, since, as Kant clearly says, “understanding and reason have two different legislations on one and the same territory of experience.”<sup>17</sup> Their compatibility is guaranteed by the fact that reason, in the form of the moral law, does not legislate in a way that gives rise to empirical examples of its work. If it did, then we would have experience of actions produced in accordance with the laws of freedom, which is to say *not governed by the laws of causality*, but the laws of causality are the conditions of the possibility of experience. All that conformity of an actual action or a proposed principle of action with the law of morality indicates is the *possibility* that the moral law is or was determinate in the production of the particular in question. Most important in all of this is that reason operates as a kind of “ghost government.”

Following Kant in this political analogy, we can think of empirical judgments, whether theoretical or practical, as something like legitimate citizens in these domains, and indeed Kant claims of “empirical concepts” that they have no domain “but only residence.”<sup>18</sup> They are in part constituted by their conditions of possibility, but they are also the product of reflective judgment, which means that they are treated *as if* they were universal and yet are subject to revision when we encounter material that demands it.

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<sup>16</sup> *CJ* 174.

<sup>17</sup> *CJ* 175.

<sup>18</sup> *CJ* 174.

These are theoretically or practically mediated particulars that live in but are not entirely *of* their respective domains – are, in other words, underdetermined. Just as they are individually the products of reflective judgment, so too are the arrangements that organize them to make experience possible.

There are, in addition to these empirical judgments, particulars that live in the territory of experience but on the fringes, as it were, which is to say that they are in some important way not subject to the legislation of reason or the understanding. Since reason and the understanding are the conditions of the possibility of experience taken in the technical sense, we have to say that this is something other than experience proper, and yet these particulars (improperly mediated though they might be) exist *for us*. The geopolitical analogy Kant uses to define the space of such partially worked-up particulars is indeed that of the *territory*, and a territory, of course, is a place in search of laws:

This is *judgment*, about which we have cause to suppose, by analogy, that it too may contain a priori, if not a legislation of its own, then at least a principle of its own, perhaps a merely subjective one, by which to search for laws. Even though such a principle would lack a realm of objects as its own domain, it might still have some territory; and this territory might be of such a character that *none but this very principle might hold in it*.<sup>19</sup>

Territories are sometimes incorporated into other political bodies, of course, and the analogy here is that reflective reason does work that contributes to the successful legislation of the understanding and of reason. It also produces residents, however, that are not quite suited to incorporation, residents of a peculiarly territorial nature, and these are the judgments of taste, which, because never brought under laws other than those of the territory, those of reflective judgment itself, give us access to judgment's own principle.

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<sup>19</sup> *CJ 177*, emphasis mine.

## The Mysterious Role of Pleasure in Reflective Judgment

We are devoting energy to tracking and extending this political analogy because the thought that it is more than an analogy is operative (in a way that will remain partly behind the scenes) in our argument. We are justified in at least following it out insofar as that same thought is clearly, if not always explicitly, at work in Kant's own thinking about the role of taste in the development of civilized political relations. For example, he assigns the education of taste a teleological role in the second half of the third *Critique*:

But we also cannot fail to notice that nature [within us] pursues the purpose of making room for the development of our humanity by making ever more headway against the crudeness and vehemence of those inclinations that belong to us primarily as animals and that interfere most with our education for our higher vocation (namely, the inclinations [to] enjoyment). [For we have] the fine art[s] and the sciences, which involve a universally communicable pleasure as well as elegance and refinement, and through these they make man, not indeed morally better for [life in] society, but still civilized for it...<sup>20</sup>

This indeed is one task of territorial government: to ready a place and its inhabitants for incorporation, and that work is different from the work of constituting citizens. Importantly, however, pure judgments of taste remain territorial in the sense that they are not directly fodder for either theoretical or practical legislation. Judgments of taste occasioned by natural objects are better suited, as far as Kant is concerned, to maintain that purity and independence, which is what makes them better symbols for morality, but for the same reason, the slight *impurity* of works of art will allow us to look at them as symbols of *political* possibility. Indeed, it will be here that we find symbolized the demand for happiness as pressing a kind of counterclaim against the demands of civilization, and indeed doing so in a public way that manages to constitute a claim not

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<sup>20</sup> *CJ* 321.

only on our attention but on our affections and esteem. It is this counterclaim too that prevents us from reading the territorial analogy as simply identifying “territory” with “colony,” with, that is, a political entity evaluated solely in terms of its ability to contribute to the motherland.

We have been outlining the way in which reason and the understanding require the work of judgment to supply a flexible and yet law-like principle in order to produce any actual mediated particulars, whether we now think of these as empirical concepts, objects, actions, or other judgments, to populate their domains. We can finally explain why, in spite of judgment’s all-important role in doing that work, that work is not at all (or only just barely) the subject matter for the *Critique of Judgment*, which is to say why *aesthetic* judgment (and, to a lesser degree – even though this matter occupies the bulk of the book, it is not its central focus – teleological judgment) is worthy of a critique. Kant writes,

Aesthetic judgment, on the other hand, contributes nothing to the cognition of its objects; hence it belongs *only* to the Critique that is the propaedeutic to all philosophy—viz., to the critique of the judging subject and his cognitive powers insofar as they are capable of [having] a priori principles, no matter what their use may be (theoretical or practical).<sup>21</sup>

The *Critique of Judgment* is thus a critique of the judging subject. A pure aesthetic judgment is not the service (or at least not in the direct service) of an objective cognition, so that when we examine pure aesthetic judgment, we get to “see” reflective judgment on its own, working in accordance with its own self-legislated principle. In judgments of taste, we get a kind of access to work that is otherwise submerged in more “successful” empirical judgments, work that issues in an empirical concept or law. This is reflective judgment operating in the territory of experience, but not contributing to or constituting

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<sup>21</sup> *CJ* 194.

citizens of the realms of theoretical or practical reason – even as it contributes in yet mysterious ways to the constitution of civilized persons. What we get is something less than theoretical or practical judgment, but something more than (following again the political analogy) cognition in a state of nature, since a territory is connected, if also in somewhat mysterious ways, to its kingdom.

Before we can fully see the importance of this political line of thought, however, we need to have understood something about the way in which this principle that is peculiar to judgment is related to the question of pleasure and displeasure. Both in the *Critique of Judgment* itself and in terms of the order of our own present argument, the appearance of “pleasure and displeasure” is somewhat abrupt, and the connection with judgment is difficult to discern. “[A]ll the soul’s powers or capacities,” Kant writes, “can be reduced to three that cannot be derived further from a common basis: the *cognitive power*, the *feeling of pleasure or displeasure*, and the *power of desire*.”<sup>22</sup> The cognitive power is the understanding, and the power of desire is the will (which means that it is comprised of reason in its practical function, as well as the stuff of our inclinations). Kant seems to be identifying, then, the power of judgment *directly* with *the feeling of pleasure or displeasure*. This comes as slightly less of a surprise in this context, since we have already identified judgments of taste as those judgments that produce occupants of the territory not suited for citizenship in the practical or theoretical realms, but we have not yet really identified what judgments of taste *are*, and we certainly have not thought about the roles of pleasure and displeasure in them, much less the submerged role these turn out to play in the production of empirical concepts.

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<sup>22</sup> *CJ* 177.

As we've begun to see, the faculty of judgment is the faculty of reconciliation in general. It serves to reconcile the categories of the understanding with the overly diverse stuff of sensibility, the moral law with the overly diverse and potentially also contradictory stuff of desire, the two realms of philosophy (the theoretical and the practical), and now we find that the faculty of judgment, or at least its primary principle, consists in the feeling of pleasure or displeasure.

It is no surprise that judgments of taste refer us to these feelings, but it is indeed a novel idea that the feelings play a role in *all* empirical judgment. In the case of successful<sup>23</sup> instances of empirical judgments, Kant portrays the pleasure as the result of the fact that a need arising in the understanding is met, or seems to have been met, by the object or law in question: "This is ... why we rejoice (actually we are relieved of a need) when, just as if it were a lucky chance favoring our aim, we do find such systematic unity among merely empirical laws..."<sup>24</sup> There is no guarantee, since the principle of reflective judgment is merely subjective, that the objective world will spontaneously gratify this need. But since this is a need universally shared by all rational beings fortunate enough not to be favored with intuitive understanding, the same spontaneous order ought to gratify all who encounter it. Thus, "the feeling of pleasure is determined a priori and validly for everyone."<sup>25</sup>

This already sounds like a pure judgment of taste, but in fact it is a pleasure that Kant thinks accompanies every advance in empirical understanding, although "we have gradually come to mix it in with mere cognition and no longer take any special notice of

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<sup>23</sup> Although here "successful" does not mean *certain*, since these are always revisable.

<sup>24</sup> *CJ* 184.

<sup>25</sup> *CJ* 187.

it.”<sup>26</sup> Pure judgments of taste, on the other hand, are those that do not end in an empirical judgment, which is to say in the successful elaboration of and then subsumption under a universal law that suits the particular in question. In any given presentation, what “cannot at all become an element of cognition is the pleasure or displeasure connected with that presentation.”<sup>27</sup> This pleasure or displeasure arises when a need is met or fails to be met. In a case of empirical judgment, then, pleasure arises when the need of the understanding is met, and displeasure arises when it turns out that we are trying to use an empirical concept (say, the product of some earlier reflective judgment) which turns out *not* to make sense of what is presented to us; displeasure, then, is an indication that our concept is in need of revision.

Pleasure and displeasure, in those cases at least, seem to have to do with the degree of “fit” between the empirical concepts and laws we’ve developed and the particulars we seek to understand by means of these concepts and laws. If any adjustment is called for, it is an adjustment *in us*, i.e., in our concepts and laws, rather than in the things we seek to understand. At the same time, and perhaps only when we meet with success in our endeavors, we ascribe the suitability to the *object*, treating it as a *purposiveness* belonging to the thing. However, a “thing’s purposiveness, insofar as it is presented in the perception of the thing, is ... not a characteristic of the object itself.... Therefore, the subjective [feature] of the presentation which cannot at all become an element of cognition is the purposiveness that precedes the cognition of an object...”<sup>28</sup> Purposiveness is the term we use to describe the pleasure (or displeasure) we connect with the apprehension of an object. “Therefore, [when we are not seeking to use the

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<sup>26</sup> *CJ* 187.

<sup>27</sup> *CJ* 189.

<sup>28</sup> *CJ* 189.

presentation of the object for cognition] we call the object purposive only because its presentation is directly connected with the feeling of pleasure, and this presentation itself is an aesthetic presentation of purposiveness.”<sup>29</sup> A pure aesthetic judgment, then, places in our “view,” so to speak, or presents to us, what cannot otherwise be encountered, which is the principle peculiar to the faculty of judgment, which is a measure of fit between what we demand and what we get. One way of characterizing the principle of judgment is simply as the demand for fit generally, and in any particular instance of a pure judgment of taste, it is unclear whether it is a sign that we are well-suited to understand (or act in) the world, or whether the world is well-suited to be understood (or acted in).

Given that demand for fit, the conditions of a judgment of taste *look* more like they should be the cause of frustration than of pleasure: in such a judgment, it seems that we cannot find a concept or universal adequate to our particular. Kant writes that

we would certainly dislike it if nature were presented in a way that told us in advance that if we investigated nature slightly beyond the commonest experience we would find its laws so heterogeneous that our understanding could not unify nature’s particular laws under universal empirical law. For this would conflict with the principle of nature’s subjectively purposive specification in its genera, and with the principle that our reflective judgment follows in dealing with nature.<sup>30</sup>

With an object of taste, we encounter a pleasing excess of particularity, pleasing perhaps just on account of our *inability* to bind it using a concept, since that is the condition under which the pleasure that is at the core of all reflective thinking is not submerged. The fact that we do not *succeed* means also that we do not *fail*, since every reflectively generated empirical law or concept contains a moment of contingency, a marker of the degree to

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<sup>29</sup> *CJ* 189.

<sup>30</sup> *CJ* 188.



which that law or concept fails to specify the conditions of an event or moments of an object. Every successful empirical law involves a reference to its own limit (since otherwise it will not be the kind of revisable law needed). Although the emphasis in discussion of Kant's account of taste is so often on the ideals of harmony and/or unity, we seem to be dealing here with a special kind of pleasurable failure. Since the pleasure seems tied to the absence of explicit limitations, an openness that does not foreclose unity as an ideal, it can serve as a kind of promise of future success.

In the field of natural science, for example, Kant sees that it is possible to come to "love diversity," to value it over unity, so that we get a kind of scientific analog to the pleasurable disunity we will encounter in art. The tension between these competing loves appears in connection with Kant's discussion of the work of the understanding in systematizing its view of nature, so that in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant hypothesizes two hostile camps of naturalists, working by way of two different principles of order:

The logical principle of genera, which postulates identity, is balanced by another principle, namely, that of *species*, which calls for manifoldness and diversity in things, notwithstanding their agreement as coming under the same genus, and which prescribes to the understanding that it attend to the diversity no less than to the identity. [...] This twofold interest manifests itself also among students of nature in the diversity of their ways of thinking. Those who are more especially speculative are, we almost say, hostile to heterogeneity, and are always on the watch for the unity of the genus; those, on the other hand, who are more especially empirical, are constantly endeavoring to differentiate nature in such manifold fashion as almost to extinguish the hope of every being able to determine its appearances in accordance with the universal principles.<sup>31</sup>

Here, Kant's sympathies seem to lie primarily with those hostile to heterogeneity, since their work promises progress in our attempts to unify nature. Those who dedicate

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<sup>31</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Trans. Norman Kemp-Smith. London: Macmillan, 1933) A654-5/B683-4. (Hereafter *CPR*.)

themselves to differentiation, on the other hand, are the enemies of hope. The tension between these projects prevents us from imagining this as the site of a utopian scientific community, and yet we likewise cannot imagine a community of scientists *without* the productive tension between an emphasis on particularity or emergent properties and the search for higher laws that depend on these for their material, between the laboratory technician or naturalist and the theoretician. These different orientations are not, then, community-building, but they are community-sustaining.

As we have said, this pursuit of unity is not confined to our efforts to bring the external world under systematic coordination; indeed, as Kant explains clearly in the following passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we pursue it in connection with the diversity of our faculties as well:

The various appearances of one and the same substance show at first sight so great a diversity, that at the start we have to assume just as many different powers as there are different effects. For instance, in the human mind we have sensation, consciousness, imagination, memory, wit, power of discrimination, pleasure, desire, etc. Now there is a logical maxim which requires that we should reduce, so far as may be possible, this seeming diversity, by comparing them to one another and detecting their hidden identity. [...] Though logic is not capable of deciding whether a *fundamental power* actually exists, the idea of such a power is the problem involved in a systematic representation of the multiplicity of powers.<sup>32</sup>

Here, we see that the diversity in the object is experienced as a diversity in the subject, since for each “kind” of object, we have to posit a power responsible for its presentation. Thus, when we search, in accordance with our “logical maxim” – which just is the principle of reflective judgment – to “reduce, so far as may be possible, this seeming diversity” of objects, we are likewise searching to reduce the seeming diversity of powers or faculties. But as Kant makes clear in the “Encyclopaedic Introduction” to the third

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<sup>32</sup> CPR A649/B677.

*Critique*, we encounter a fundamental limit to that unification, so that “all of the powers of the mind can be reduced to the following three: [the] *cognitive power*, [the] *feeling of pleasure and displeasure*, [and the] *power of desire*.”<sup>33</sup> If that is the case, then the moments of reconciliation we are seeking would, at least insofar as the faculties are concerned, seem to be limited to the mere promise of reconciliation, a symbolic representation of it.<sup>34</sup> The frustrations we experience as the limits of our powers of presentation, which includes then our power to represent ourselves as unified, give rise to a demand for satisfaction, for pleasure. Beauty, as we will see, can be understood as the *form* of that demand in general.

### **The Analogy Between Symbolization and Schematism**

For a treatise on judgment, which turns out to be then also a treatise on *pleasure*, Kant devotes inordinate energy to the pleasure involved in the gratification of the demands of the understanding, and such a correspondingly limited amount of energy on the question of desire, that the avoidance seems almost studied. It is true that since his aim is a transcendental critique of judgment, he is looking for judgments that demand universal assent, so that his investigation is not primarily concerned with this or that contingent desire. But he does write freely about the ways in which reflective judgment formulates its demand for lawfulness and unity in the face of (and as a way of dealing

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<sup>33</sup> *CJ* 245.

<sup>34</sup> On the danger Kant foresees in connection with this search: “This unity, although it is a mere idea, has been at all times so eagerly sought, that there has been need to moderate the desire for it, not to encourage it. For in conformity with the idea everyone presupposes that this unity of reason accords with nature itself, and that reason—although indeed unable to determine the limits of this unity—does not here beg but command.” (*CPR* A652/B681.) If the pure judgment of taste falls somewhere between begging and commanding, demanding but not securing recognition, then the work of art might be understood to make visible the limits of the unity, putting the brakes on the command of reason and allowing something else to stake a tiny claim.

with) limitations encountered in *external* nature, limitations that must likewise be contingent from the vantage of the understanding. Why then avoid the diversity encountered in our *internal* nature? It is especially striking that Kant avoids this topic since it is thanks to that latter diversity that morality first stands in *need* of a symbol, something that can bring it closer to intuition just because we can never find a sure example of its effect. Although the situations are not exactly parallel, we find ourselves similarly limited in both: just as we cannot enumerate all of the conditions and specifications of any given object or law, we cannot enumerate all of the influences that condition our desires well enough to be sure that any given action is motivated by the moral law. In addition to treating aesthetic judgments as symbols of a spontaneous fit between our cognitive needs and the given world, why doesn't Kant explicitly also treat them as a symbol of the spontaneous fit between the demands of desire and that of morality?

If that is not an option, then we are stuck ascribing all of the pleasure on which a judgment of taste is based to a spontaneous meeting of the understanding's need for unity, so that the judgment of taste really is just symbolic of morality insofar as, in it, a faculty finds itself in a world that accords with its needs. Certainly, this is Kant's primary and most explicit preoccupation:

In a critique of judgment, the part that deals with aesthetic judgment belongs to it essentially. For this power alone contains a principle that judgment lays completely a priori at the basis of its reflection on nature: the principle of a formal purposiveness of nature, in terms of its particular (empirical) laws, for our cognitive power, without which principle the understanding could not find its way about in nature.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *CJ* 193. Meredith uses the phrase here: "without which understanding could not feel itself at home in nature." (Meredith, *CJ* 21)

Thus, the primary value assigned to judgments of taste in the third *Critique* is their capacity to make *understanding* at ease in its environs, to make sure that *understanding* can find its way about in nature. But is the understanding's anxiety about encountering what it cannot compass really about (or really only about) our *cognitive* limitations? Isn't it at least plausible that this is an anxiety about finitude more generally, about the possibility that we might not have *all* our needs met (no matter their source) by the world, whether the world in question is the natural world or social worlds?<sup>36</sup> It is at least plausible that, even if this the anxiety belongs properly to the understanding, it arises not within the understanding but from other pressing sources – from, for example, cultural demands, or the needs these demands serve to frustrate. In regard to the anxiety from the vantage of the understanding, Kant assigns the schematism as the understanding's proper mediator, leaving us to sort out the work done by the symbolization that is the product of aesthetic cognition.

Kant describes the analogy between symbols and schemata as follows: “All *hypotyposis* (exhibition, *subiectio ad adspectum*) consists in making [a concept] sensible, and is either *schematic* or *symbolic*.”<sup>37</sup> This is what schematism and symbolization have in common: they both attempt to give shape to forms of thought. Kant contrasts these functions with what we might call the purely mechanical or associative function of a sign.<sup>38</sup> There, a given material marker is meant to evoke a basically unrelated concept. In both the schematism and symbolization, on the other hand, there is supposed to be some

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<sup>36</sup> Slavoj Žižek describes the source of the understanding's understandable anxiety thus: “Kant himself is in fact unique with regard to this topic: in his transcendental philosophy, homelessness remains irreducible; we remain forever split, condemned to a fragile position between the two positions, and to a ‘leap of faith’ without any guarantee.” *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006) 9.

<sup>37</sup> *CJ* 351.

<sup>38</sup> *CJ* 352.

more “organic” or “internal” relationship between the form of thought and the intuitive supplement, although it is hard to work out just what that relationship is.

We opened this chapter on reflective judgment with a discussion of the inevitable gap between the pure categories of the understanding and the stuff of experience. This gap is not bridged with the schematism of the categories, but these latter are at least represented in Kant’s account as in some important sense “fitted” for deployment by means of the schematism. Although the pure concepts of the understanding can never be presented directly *to* the understanding, the schematism is supposed to bring them some kind of content, not by providing any specific material but rather by thinking them in connection with the most basic conditions of our subjective experience – time and space. Whatever is meant by that – the detailed mechanics of the schematism are of only peripheral interest in this context – in somewhat the same way that the schematism readies the categories for deployment, symbolization allows us to give something like subjectively important “shape” to the ideas of reason.

Kant’s primary focus is on the way in which these modes of hypotyposis bring content to concepts and ideas, but clearly the reverse must be true as well: the categories and our empirical concepts make possible the synthesis of material which is the condition of our conscious access to what would otherwise be mere matter. We will follow Kant in his claim that we have no access to mere matter, no way to bring the raw stuff of sensibility into consciousness, and we will make more of the thought that symbolic reflection is the initial mode of orientation to what would otherwise elude us entirely. We might call this initial mode of orientation “awareness,” something that falls short of (indeed, subtends) Kantian “experience.” But all object-relating also involves some kind

of awareness of the self for Kant. In the first *Critique*, this is the transcendental unity of apperception: “this unitary consciousness is what combines the manifold, successively intuited, and thereupon also reproduced, into one representation. [...] [S]uch consciousness, however indistinct, must always be present; without it, concepts, and therewith knowledge objects, are altogether impossible.”<sup>39</sup> Unitary consciousness is the condition of the possibility for experience, and the harmony or disunity accompanying aesthetic judgments is what ensures that these will not issue in an extension of representative or synthetic object-knowledge. We might expect, then, that they likewise would not issue in an extension of “subject-knowledge” either; this is however not quite the case. Kant’s claim in this passage seems to be that it must always be possible to become aware of oneself as a unitary consciousness, but it is clear that our reading of the third *Critique* will undermine the universality of that claim. We form our experience synthetically, and this synthetic activity *is* our sense of self as much as it is the formation of our sense of a world. This process is one whereby what starts out as associative and mechanical connections are transformed into an order that is objective and shareable.

Again, Kant’s focus is on the question how symbolization and schematism work to bring content to ideas and concepts, but if they are functions that mediate between form and content, they are involved in working up the latter as much as in giving flesh to the former. As Kant famously says, “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”<sup>40</sup> It is easy to think of thoughts as empty, since we take these to be basically formal. It is more difficult to understand what a blind intuition might be, other than that it is the representation *to the understanding* of indefinite and opaque

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<sup>39</sup> CPR A104.

<sup>40</sup> CPR A51/B75.

contents.<sup>41</sup> The claim then is that such contents cannot *appear* to us or for consciousness. That thought rules out the possibility of purely mechanical association, since there would be no stopping a function that indiscriminately brought everything into the manifold – no way to explain what of it should be connected, how we should forge combinations, what we should pay attention to, perceive, remember. Pure mechanical association, if it *were* possible, would be the ordering of our intuitions with nothing but a pure self (as an ordering activity) as its principle. What we are trying to understand here, then, is how the schematism and symbolization function as ordering principles, as or in lieu of rules<sup>42</sup> that we can apply to our intuitions in order to give them a shape amenable to conceptual mediation or to stand in for the ideas of reason.

Kant explains the analogy between symbolic and schematic hypotyposis as follows:

In symbolic hypotyposis there is a concept which only reason can think and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, and this concept is supplied with an intuition that judgment treats in a way merely analogous to the procedure it follows in schematizing; i.e., the treatment agrees with this procedure merely in the rule followed rather than in terms of the intuition itself, and hence merely in terms of the form of the reflection than in its content.<sup>43</sup>

We will turn momentarily to the mechanics of the processes described, but first we should pay some attention to the *fact* of this analogy between symbolization and schematism. Kant gets at the former function by way of the latter, but this is not merely *an* analogy, like any other analogy. Instead, it is an analogy meant to describe the

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<sup>41</sup> The attribution of a certain blindness to intuition already treats it as potentially productive and active, an idea that will shortly become of even greater interest to us.

<sup>42</sup> The problem of the schematism arises precisely because judgment is the deployment of concepts, which are rules for ordering and constituting objects. If this deployment itself were a matter of rule-following, we would need yet more rules to govern the deployment of *these* rules, and so on. Cf. Daniel Bell's "The Art of Judgment."

<sup>43</sup> *CJ* 351.



workings of analogy itself, the operation of analogical thought. This, then, is not merely one analogy between two modes of thought, among many possible, but the only two modes of “exhibition” that are available to us. That there are just two modes is itself not a contingent psychological fact of our constitution, a lucky harmony between the faculties. This is how analogy works: it borrows shape and form from what is better known to bring to life what is less well known. Symbolic hypotyposis borrows its shape from the understanding, which we might take to be a strategy for appearing *to* the understanding at all.

Analogical thinking comes to be by borrowing the rule that conditions the possibility of object appearance. What does that mean? Certainly not that there is a second order of objects out there, independently vying for our attention. Indeed, it is in accord with an internal demand, which Kant primarily characterizes (in line with his transcendental focus) as the *demand of reason*, that we require this secondary mode of exhibition. That means that even for Kant symbolic hypotyposis is about bringing something internal into appearance, that it is some part of *ourselves* that is vying for our own attention (and, as the work of art will reveal, for the attention of others) in the guise of an object. The insight that nears the surface in this section of the *Critique of Judgment* is that that content can do so only by disguising itself as an appropriate content for the attention from and mediation by the understanding. The counterpart to the demands of reason, as we make clear in our description of the powers of cognition, is the power of desire, which we might think of as providing the stuff of our representation, the stuff that takes on the shapes of the understanding.

Now, as we turn to the mechanics of exhibition, we can do so with a sense of their importance. The moment of analogy with schematism is that symbolization likewise involves the application of a rule to an intuition, or its instantiation by way of an intuition, which is to say that they are both ordering functions. The moment of *disanalogy* (there is at least one in every analogy) is found in the relationship between the rule and what it is supposed to order. Often, this difference is cast thus: symbols involve a purely formal mode of cognition while schemata sustain an internal connection between the rule and the intuition to which it is applied. But we already have the category “sign” to describe a purely formal relationship between a contingent intuition and the concept it is meant to evoke. On this reading, schemata are successful attempts to ‘combine’ or ‘join’ in some manner intuition with concept, producing a ‘fleshed-out’ rule for reflection, while symbols communicate *only* a rule, one that can find no proper body and so takes us from the arena of bodies altogether (and into that, say, of concepts or ideas alone). Then symbols would indeed be *more* formal than schemata, and symbolic cognition altogether *more* abstract than theoretical, because it would turn out that while we could make some sense of or lend some meaning to the ideas symbolized by bringing some (any, really) intuitions to them; they in turn could never help us make sense of our intuitions.

The “deficiency” of symbols is, however, two-sided: the ideas they instantiate are too abstract *and* the materials brought to them too intractable. Far from being an instance where what is to be thought bears only a formal relationship to what is supposed to allow us to think on it, where the intuition is unimportant and entirely passive, here we have a mode of cognition where what is to be thought stands in an antagonistic relationship to

what refuses to allow us to think it. One could argue that Kant's entire transcendental philosophy is oriented by the question: What kind of concepts can be thought but not known? But what we have to ask in light of his account of symbols is: What kind of material is so intractable that it prevents knowledge? What kind of material puts up a fight? What kind of intuition raises a ruckus?

### **What the Schematism Leaves Unaccounted For**

Concepts are rules of synthesis, and schemata are the thought-products that allow the application of these rules to intuition. Prior to the order brought by this procedure, the only organizing principles that belong to intuitions are those of our forms of intuition, namely space and time. Insofar as we can talk, then, about preconceptual order at all, we mean the order of encounter or relation with the sensible individual. Kant writes:

Space and time contain a manifold of pure *a priori* intuition, but at the same time are conditions of the receptivity of our mind—conditions under which alone it can receive representations of objects, and which therefore must always affect the concept of these objects. But if this manifold is to be known, the spontaneity of our thought requires that it be gone through, taken up, and connected.<sup>44</sup>

Here, we can see that the manifold of pure *a priori* intuition is contrasted with the conditions of space and time as they inform empirical experience; this will be important when we touch on the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding, which involves only the pure form of intuition, leaving it at least formally free from the dependence on received content. It is the idea of such a freedom that lets us think of the world as both unified and shared, since it guarantees thought's ability to re-order

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<sup>44</sup> CPR A77/B102.

experience in accordance with universal laws, to replace mechanical (or, one assumes, otherwise determined) association with conceptualization.<sup>45</sup>

In the passage with which we introduced the topic, Kant describes the difference between schematic and symbolic hypotyposis in terms of intuitional “adequacy.” No intuition, it seems, is adequate to instantiate the ideas of reason; as we mentioned, this is just the definition of an idea of reason. As was clear in our discussion of Kant’s moral thought, for example, although we can judge moral *compliance* with some degree of success, we cannot ever tell if an action is performed from duty alone, since that action and its agent are, like all appearances, bound by the laws of nature. It must always in principle (if not, due to our finitude, also in fact) be possible to give a causal account of every appearance. In fact, this is the function of the pure concepts of the understanding with respect to our empirical experience. In a passage describing the four principles of necessity governing that experience (all of which have to do with causality and which are modeled on the four groupings of categories), Kant writes:

They are all entirely at one in this, that they allow of nothing in the empirical synthesis which may do violence or detriment to the understanding and to the continuous connection of all appearances—that is, to the unity of the concepts of the understanding.<sup>46</sup>

So, the pure concepts or categories act as a kind of protective limit on our experiences and allow for the unity of consciousness. Now, as we’ve said, Kant’s conception of freedom involves the stipulation that its effects do not break any laws of nature – freedom and its effects are not to be classed miracles – but that also means that within our experience we cannot distinguish a free act from one that satisfies but is not motivated by

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<sup>45</sup> Kant does acknowledge the possibility of intuitional content not amenable to organization by the categories, but since his understanding of the self relies on synthetic activity, it could not be meaningful to the subject to whom it thus cannot properly speaking appear then at all.

<sup>46</sup> *CPR* A230/B282.

duty. But then Kant's use of the term "adequacy" to evaluate intuitions related to the pure ideas of reason seems like a kind of category mistake on his part. It is not that our intuitions of freedom in the world are inadequate but that they are non-existent; even if we ran into one, we wouldn't know it since it would bear no marks to distinguish it from events governed by the laws of nature. This is what makes the moral law categorical: like the categories of the understanding, this idea of reason has nothing figurative about it, meaning that it does not provide us with a rule by which we might *see* (or find an instantiation of) it. The reason we don't have that trouble with the categories is that they are the conditions of all of our experience, according to Kant, and so instead of finding them *nowhere*, we find them everywhere, but "experience" them, therefore, nowhere.<sup>47</sup>

If we can't ever perceive anything that might be taken as an instantiation of the moral law, why then speak of intuitions as *inadequate*? Inadequacy implies partial or less than total success, or at least that we have in hand a suitable criterion for criticizing the object we judge to be inadequate. It is Kant's commitment to the absolute unrepresentability of the ideas of reason that drives him to lay alongside the charge of inadequacy, which suggests a mode of connection, the claim that the relationship between symbol and symbolized, intuition and idea, is purely formal. That latter claim jars with the notion of inadequacy by suggesting an absolute break between the specificity of a symbolic intuition and the pure formality of the concept or idea it is meant to represent. This same problematic can be seen with Kant's use of the notion of "indirect

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<sup>47</sup> That doesn't mean, of course, that Kant thinks we can't distinguish between an event ordered causally and an experience ordered merely associatively or sequentially – this is the argument of the Second Analogy. I will raise some questions about "mere" associative or sequential order, but for Kant this is not an explicit issue. Even in his terms, however, the sequential order in which the subject of the Second Analogy encounters the faces of a house must at least owe *something* to the subject's own causality as she directs her attention first to this side and then to the other.

representation,” which suggests something less than total opacity in the representational relationship. But even if the relationship between symbol and symbolized were totally opaque, in which case we’d still have to wonder at the use of ‘indirect,’ that by itself would seem to be enough to violate the conditions of empirical experience as articulated in the first *Critique*.

In the context of the discussion just cited, Kant also writes:

The principle of continuity forbids any leap in the series of appearances...; it also forbids, in respect of the sum of all empirical intuitions in space, any gaps or cleft between two appearances; for so we may express the proposition, that nothing which proves a vacuum, or which even admits it as a part of empirical synthesis, can enter into experience. As regards a void which may be conceived to lie beyond the field of possible experience, that is, outside the world, such a question does not come within the jurisdiction of the mere understanding...<sup>48</sup>

What is at stake here is the possibility of theoretical reason registering the appearance of opacity, and the further possibility that even if “the opaque” resists synthesis, there might indeed be some mode of address that, if not entirely, then at least somehow, is suited to the material. The fact that Kant *wants* to connect up the intuition involved in symbolization to the idea symbolized, even if he simultaneously rejects that connection as non-synthetic, suggests that this is at least a possibility.<sup>49</sup> Although Kant rules out vacuums in thought, he later not only allows for it but sees it as a problem that can only be mitigated by taste. Compare the language of the above passage to that used by Kant in a passage we will turn to again later: “Taste enables us, as it were, to make the transition

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<sup>48</sup> CPR A228-229/B281.

<sup>49</sup> Some degree of opacity is necessary to facilitate appearance at all; we will see that shortly with our discussion of schematism and the relationship between concept, schema, and image. The opacity does not, however, always properly “register” as such, so that in conceptual cognition synthesis operates on seemingly passive material. We have already suggested that this seeming-passivity will be troubled later, when we return to the question of the connection between scientific and symbolic communication.

from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest without making *too violent* a leap...”<sup>50</sup>  
This is a moment in which the causal order fails to prevent leaps altogether, but where taste steps in to give some amount of “shape” to the gap. It is this function that suits beauty to stand in as a symbol of morality.

Ultimately, we will remain allied with Kant insofar as his account implies the impossibility of *total* opacity (although we must leave open the possibility of at least partial-opacity in the case of symptoms, which are private opacities as opposed to public, and which might turn out to depend on some minimal intersubjective figuration in order to be susceptible to interpretation). Symbols, on the other hand, *are*, in some essential way, moments of public opacity. Kant is right to maintain that nothing entirely without form can make an appearance to us, that there is no such thing as an epistemological vacuum. But this also suggests that the appearance of anything “leftover” in his idealist account of synthetic understanding should have raised a flag for him, and that this is a flag that is not only raised but also waved by symbols.

In order to make that case, we need to show that the problem of material excess is not specific to aesthetic thought. We can track its appearance in the first *Critique* in the problematic description Kant gives of the relationship between a concept and its schema. If we turn briefly to the passage in which Kant compares the respective schemata of our empirical and our *a priori* concepts, we can see that he treats “the image” in two incompatible ways: he treats it, on the one hand, as the material *for* schematization, but he also treats it, on the other, as if it were the product *of* schematization. He writes:

[T]he image is a product of the empirical faculty of reproductive imagination; the *schema* of sensible concepts, such as figures in space, is a product and, as it were, a monogram, of pure *a priori* imagination, through

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<sup>50</sup> *CJ* 354.

which, and in accordance with which, images themselves first become possible. These images can be connected with the concept only by means of the schema to which they belong. In themselves they are never completely congruent with the concepts. On the other hand, the schema of a *pure* concept of the understanding can never be brought into any image whatever. It is simply a pure synthesis, determined by a rule of that unity, in accordance with concepts, to which the category gives expression.<sup>51</sup>

The schemata of sensible concepts are supposed to make possible and render intelligible the images (re)produced by our imagination. Sensible concepts are those that involve a moment of figuration but not of empirical intuition, so that a line, a triangle, etc., are examples. Kant's description here of the process whereby these sensible concepts are generated is complicated,<sup>52</sup> but for our purposes we can think of pure schematism as a synthesis of time and space such that we represent time in space, not as given but as an activity – we *draw* the line. Thus even the representation of geometrical figures is to be understood on the model of synthesis, not of empirical intuitions, but of pure formal intuitions. Kant can only maintain that this kind of thinking *precedes* empirical experience because he insists that we have such things, pure formal intuitions of time and space, so that there is already something “there” to synthesize, something out of which to generate the monograms that will allow us to make sense of real intuitive contents. But if the monograms precede and make possible reproduced images, then why should it be the case that the images “in themselves” are “never completely congruent” with the concept? What accounts for the way the specter of an ‘in-itself’ attaches to any representation of an empirical object, given the way our understanding thoroughly informs perception? Another way of asking this is: why is our perception, or why are our intuitions, broader

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<sup>51</sup> CPR A141-142/B181.

<sup>52</sup> As is its function in the schematism debate more generally; cf. Béatrice Longuenesse, Kant and the Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 200; Sebastian Gardner, Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason.N(ew York: Routledge, 1999) 171.



than either the monograms or the concepts that make them possible? If intuitions without concepts are really and truly blind, if some minimal level of conceptuality is the condition of the possibility of appearances, of images, generally, then why is it that Kant's theory has to contend with extra content that should not "appear" at all? All of this suggests that the pure forms of the understanding and of our intuitions are not the only things guiding us in our empirical encounters. This brings us too to the need for symbols: if schemata are figurative representations of the conceptual determinations of the image, we need a different mode of representation to understand our contributions to the sensible remainder.

We have already argued that Kant's commitment to the unrepresentability of pure ideas makes it odd for him to describe the intuitions connected symbolically with them as "inadequate." It is also odd that this is a way of distinguishing *those* intuitions from the ones linked schematically with concepts, because there is on Kant's own account no such thing as an adequate intuition. If there were such a thing as adequate intuitions, they would be intuitions for which we would not require schemata. We could only have adequate intuitions, in other words, if we were capable of intuitive understanding, understanding in which there is no gap between faculties, where intuition is understanding and vice versa. Kant writes:

Now the understanding in us men is not itself a faculty of intuitions, and cannot, even if intuitions be given in sensibility, take them up *into itself* in such manner as to combine them as the manifold of its *own* intuition.<sup>53</sup>

In general, inadequacy is the lot of intuitions and is what generates the need "we men" have for schematization. In other words, even if we are passive in our reception of intuitive *content*, that content is never self-ordering. Even if the world really is a well-

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<sup>53</sup> CPR B153.

ordered place, we require first reflection and then determinative judgment to make sense of it for ourselves. In producing determinative judgments, however, we also produce a remainder, which we treat as the stuff of sensibility, given in intuition and not accounted for in the schematism. This is a good place to repeat the set of questions we articulated at the end of the last section: What kind of material is so intractable that it prevents knowledge? What kind of material puts up a fight? What kind of intuition raises a ruckus? One branch of Kantian interpretation thinks these questions admit of an entirely theoretical answer, but in the next section we will begin to see that the sociality of symbolic forms connects the appearance of opacity with the question of social authority.

### **Symbolization as the Representation of Shared Inadequacy**

Kant has claimed two differences between symbols and schemata, and these two differences are in tension with one another. On the one hand, symbols are supposed to differ from schemata insofar as they leave the intuition that occasions the reflection behind, rather than taking it up and connecting it with the form of thought. On the other hand, the intuition that supports a symbolic relation is said to be less adequate to its concept than that which supports a schematic relation. In the former case, the difference is *qualitative*: where there is in schematism a *connection* between the concept or rule and what it orders (or vice versa), a connection we call the concept's schema, there is with symbolization a *disconnect* between the idea and rule and what it fails to order, or what fails to live up to its order, and *we picture that disconnection as a symbol*. If that disconnect is really total, so that the symbol bears no relationship to what it represents, then the symbol would in fact be a sign. The material, in other words, of the intuition

would be entirely conventional, and the merely conventional is what has no authority. In the latter case, where the difference is a matter of degrees of (in)adequacy, the difference is *quantitative*. In that case, we might wonder whether “symbol” isn’t a superfluous category, especially since we find, in the world of schemata, a similar distinction in degree of adequacy between those that serve to make possible images and those that serve the more complete function of intellectual synthesis. Why, then, should symbolization receive independent treatment? Why, especially, should it be marked out as a different function when Kant sometimes incorporates aesthetic judgment into the developmental story where they play the part of proto-schemata? Why, indeed, except that they must play some such part in order to gain entrance *to* that developmental story, just as (as we’ll see in the next section) we too can only gain entrance to better society by playing the part of judges of taste.

Before we get there, however, let us finish with the discussion of the analogy between symbolic and schematic thought. Although its associative “content” is not the same as an everyday determinative judgment, the recognition of something as a symbol does *involve* the determination of an object as belonging to a certain kind. The concept that allows us to make that determination is experienced as inadequate to its object. Kant takes as an example the use of an eagle to symbolize Jupiter.<sup>54</sup> In recognizing the eagle, we rely on both the pure schematism that allows for object constitution in general and the figurative schema developed up out of empirical experience. Instead, however, of referring only to the variety of empirical experiences that make up the associative content of the concept “eagle,” this particular eagle manages to both stand for *without instantiating* something much more. It stands for Jupiter. Perhaps the eagle is suited to

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<sup>54</sup> *CJ* 315.

stand for a god because we can connect one or more of its attributes to our idea of the god – its strength and ability to see from on-high, for example. But those two attributes aren't enough to account for the specificity of the representation, since they could be found in numerous other animals. If the eagle were a *sign* for Jupiter, then its specificity would not matter: it would be pure particularity, evacuated of any claim to stand for itself, to convey a meaning that exceeds its standing for Jupiter. But the eagle in question remains an eagle, with many concomitant attributes beyond strength and vision: it flies, has feathers, hunts rodents – none of these things we are likely to associate with our thought of Jupiter. On the flip side, the idea of Jupiter gathers up a wider variety of attributes than the two that connect him with his symbol. Further complicating matters, Kant does not treat the analogical relationship between Jupiter and the eagle, in which we think of them as sharing certain attributes, as the substance of the symbolic relationship. Instead, he treats the eagle *as an attribute of Jupiter*, although clearly since it continues to assert its eagle-hood, it doesn't behave like a normal attribute, doesn't belong properly to its object.

Even when we are not treating an eagle as a symbol, our thought of it involves some notion of the real object as excessive to its concept. That excess is just the difference between the concept and its image, a difference mitigated but also made evident by the need for schematism. Somehow, when we are hot in pursuit of synthetic knowledge, that excess is unproblematic for us. It is “content” to play a supporting role, neither disappearing like the contingent particularity of a sign nor disturbing us in our work of integrating it into our experience. The excess that marks a thing as “real” or as at least more than a concept prevents us from making a clear and simple distinction between

passive and active material or content, between that which is uninvested with interest and that which is so invested. But in the case of the symbolic representation, that excess lays claim to our attention in a special way, or perhaps “lays claim to our attention” is enough. From this vantage, the idea of reason is something like a placeholder in thought for that laying claim. Without the idea of reason that sustains the understanding in its search not just to comprehend but to extend its knowledge and attentions, the concept might have succeeded in rendering the excess uninteresting. Symbolic thought makes interesting the distinction between the empirical concept and its figurative intuition. To put it figuratively, this just means that there is a connection of sorts between the excessive figuration – the rest of the bird, its claim to independent objectivity – and the reason it is experienced *as excessive*, without that rendering the presentation unsuited to symbolize the missing object. We might say that the excess gives definite shape, explicitly the wrong shape, to what we do not know.

It is no accident that concepts would fail to render figurative or sensible excesses uninteresting just where we are concerned with the function of thought that relates us to social forms of authorities – Jupiter, God, kings and queens, churches, priests, and so on. This is a question of relating the need these figures have (either a real need, in the case of real authorities, or a projected social need in the case of the less-than-real) for some symbolic bling to support their authority with the way in which those symbolic supports also reveal a failure of authority to finally and totally determine its objects, which is to say to constitute its subjects. Authority is only experienced as such, of course, where its forms fail to perfectly inform our contents, where there is some gap between the available social forms and the desires and needs of the individuals expected to live them.

Likewise, however, the achievement of a reflective relationship to their own desires on the part of those same individuals *requires* that these be formed in connection with forms of authority. A disappearance of authority would thus look, on the one hand, like emancipation, and on the other like a loss of freedom, a loss of the awareness of contents sustained by symbolic mediation. Thus, symbolization is the name for that function of reflective judgment which both reconciles and fails to reconcile us to authority.

Here, we have been speaking about a religious symbol, which is a symbol that joins with one another those for whom it *is* a symbol, to constitute a social space. We have not gotten any deep sense of the mechanics of the process, but we might imagine that it works something like this: the very idea of authority, whose underbelly is all that authority seeks to constrain, is given a figure or form that serves as a substitute expression for that which would seek other, perhaps more destructive forms. This is not so different from the kinds of reconciliation Kant makes the object of his explicit attentions, namely, between reason and the power of desire and between the understanding and the potentially overwhelming diversity of our intuitions. It is also, I think, no accident that this question of authority and authority's symbolic representation never gets explicitly asked by Kant. Indeed, as we shall see as we turn next to the problematic role played specifically by judgments of taste in constituting a social space, the issue seems much less to be about orienting ourselves to and by way of authority than about orienting ourselves and one another in its apparent absence. This makes sense of the fact that Kant uses a political analogy to describe the relationship between the faculties, since, indeed, their reconciliation (or non-reconciliation) requires that we

operate beyond the bounds of theory, a requirement symbolized precisely by the excess we cannot claim to have authored.

### **The Emergence of a Political Landscape**

So, even when Kant's focus is on our intrasubjective constitution, on the relationship between our various faculties and the mapping of their various products, we discover that we are dealing with a kind of political landscape. "Taste" is the name for the principle that is supposed to enable us to work up what remains outside the scope of theoretical and moral reasoning in a way that appears friendly, as annexed to if not incorporated into rational order. The criteria for appearing friendly to the understanding and reason arise from these faculties themselves, forms borrowed from the determining and regulating functions respectively. This idea helps us make sense of the way Kant describes the understanding as a faculty that is susceptible to anxiety: the source of that anxiety is the as-yet unbound remainder of sensibility that threatens to disorient it. And, once we locate this as an historical situation, we can think of this remainder as a *no-longer* bound remainder of sensibility.

A political landscape is needed, of course, precisely because the symbolic landscape is on its way to disappearing. Insofar as this is an historical claim, Kant does not have the necessary concepts and context (especially in his critical writings) to make the point himself. But if social symbols have always served as a repository for repressed desires and suppressed contents, and so too as a source for the affective bond between people by way of authority, then the disappearance of symbolically mediated authority – religious and royal – brings with it new representational needs. The anxieties of the

understanding are symptomatic, however, not merely of a disorientation (which might be read as emancipation, even if we're not sure *into what*), but of a loss of meaningful contact with the materials that continue to haunt it in its function. Thus, the process of political and religious emancipation, which involves the loss of a shared and substantive symbolic order, involves too a kind of break between the understanding and its materials.

Although he does not grasp entirely the historical context – his preoccupation with the question of enlightenment shows that he does have a sense of it – Kant is keenly aware of the fact that the problem is related to the question of social order. If we respond to the taint of contingency in social mores by rejecting altogether the task of reflectively mediating them, then we become mere libertines:

At this point, the authorities intervene to ensure that civil affairs are not themselves plunged into complete disorder; and since they regard the most expeditious and forceful measures as the most appropriate, they may even abolish freedom of thought altogether, and make thought itself, like other professions, subject to the laws of the land. Hence freedom of thought, if it tries to act independently even of the laws of reason, eventually destroys itself.<sup>55</sup>

We can see that the loss of an internal guide (here called “reason”) results in the need for an entirely external and coercive authority. The *Critiques* of pure and practical reason give us insight into the sources of determinative judgment, and so with the *Critique of Judgment*, we strive to encounter whatever it is that guides us in reflection. Kant’s official (but finally perplexing) answer to that question is: pleasure. What he finds himself unable to say, even though it is clearly at play in his text, is that this pleasure is connected with the thought (and sometimes even the reality) of other people, not as potentially coercive forces but as judges in their own right. It is to the socially-orienting role of taste, then, that we turn next.

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<sup>55</sup> “What is Orientation in Thinking?” *Kant: Political Writings*, eds. Hans Siegbert Reiss, H. B. Nisbet, tr. H. B. Nisbet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 249. (Hereafter *PW*.)



## CHAPTER II

### JUDGES AND EXCESS

#### **Logical Form and the Claim to Intersubjectivity**

Kant organizes his initial investigation of judgments of taste around an analogy to his table of logical judgments.<sup>56</sup> It would be easy to dismiss this as a function of Kant's love for architectonic, a love that demands that he organize his thinking always in connection with one table or another. But we might respond that exactly that love is the object, or at least *a* central object, of our current investigation. When Kant claims that reflective judgment proceeds by way of "analogy," applying a kind of rule that is peculiar to the subject to objects that are beyond all possible experience, he means that we are using the rules of thought (those of logic) to understand what thought itself has not produced, i.e., that which has not been produced according to concepts. The urge to apply shared subjective rules of thought, formal rules, to what we cannot know seems at the very least to be an attempt to coordinate our orientation to what remains opaque.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant compares determinative and reflective judgment as follows:

If reason is a faculty of deducing the particular from the universal, and if the universal is already *certain in itself* and given, only *judgment* is required to execute the process of subsumption, and the particular is thereby determined in a necessary manner. [...] If, however, the universal is admitted as *problematic* only, and is a mere idea, the particular is certain, but the universality of the rule of which it is a consequence is still

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<sup>56</sup> cf. Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason, Trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 4:403; and *CPR* A70/B95.

a problem. Several particular instances, which are one and all certain, are scrutinized in view of the rule, to see whether they follow from it.<sup>57</sup>

Here, we can see that Kant is comparing the process whereby we *derive* a particular from an established universal to one where the universal is given only as *problematic*; this is then the kind of “revisable” universal produced by reflective judgment. In a judgment of taste whereby we declare an object to be beautiful, it will turn out that the object presents us with a particular that *seems* as if it could have been derived from a universal, giving us the appearance of a real unity between a given particular and a certain universal. When we turn finally to works of art, we can understand the appearance of disunity as what marks them sites of *problematic* judgment, the kind that instead of reinforcing the universal puts it, however slightly, into question. If we take the term “problematic” seriously, we can follow it through to see how the work of art sets us a certain kind of problem, representing not the promise of future success but rather a task or struggle, so that in addition to the moment of “play” we get the “work” in “work of art.” More immediately, however, we should notice that when we deploy the rules of thought beyond their legislative bounds, we are using the logical forms of judgment.<sup>58</sup>

In the case of a pure judgment of taste – “This is beautiful” – we make a claim that seems to be about an object but which, although it gestures at the object as the “this” in question, does not further specify anything about it. “This power does not contribute anything to the cognition, but merely compares the given presentation in the subject with the entire presentational power, of which the mind becomes conscious when it feels its

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<sup>57</sup> CPR A646/B674.

<sup>58</sup> The logical forms of judgment are, of course, merely subjectively necessary, since they are the rules that govern thought rather than things. They are not then directly determinative, although their a priori synthetic cousins, the concepts of the understanding, condition the possibility of all experience. These latter concepts are both everywhere in evidence and nowhere immediately to be found. The mode of exhibition for the concepts of the understanding is what Kant calls “schematic,” and we have already seen that he takes symbolic exhibition to operate by way of an analogy to the schematism.

own state.”<sup>59</sup> We have not enlarged our knowledge of the building when we connect the presentation of it to a feeling; instead, we have “become conscious” of our own presentational power. That means that we learn something about ourselves rather than something about the building. A logical judgment would take the results of two other judgments and connect them together, making one the predicate of the other. When we identify a building or house as beautiful, however, we connect the unity or harmony that we seem to encounter in the object with a unity or harmony it seems to occasion within us, a unity or harmony of our “entire presentational power.” As we know from the “Encyclopaedic Introduction,” however, our presentational power is actually and irreducibly comprised of *three* presentational powers: cognition, judgment, and the will. The irreducibility of these three marks ways in which these powers do in actual fact limit one another, but those limits disappear, for the moment, in a pure judgment of taste. The dis-appearance of those limits serves, then, to symbolize an actual (and impossible) reconciliation.

In order to better understand why only some aesthetic judgments take on a logical form, we will compare the pure judgment of taste with those that do not, namely, judgments of agreeability, which Kant also calls judgment of sense. The primary marker of a judgment of taste is its disinterested orientation toward the object in question. “Interest is what we call the liking we connect with the presentation of an object’s existence.”<sup>60</sup> Kant treats this as a fairly straightforward claim and so quickly moves on to what he takes to be the more contentious claim that taste involves a *disinterested* liking. But insofar as we are dealing with a philosophical system in which all of our claims apply

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<sup>59</sup> *CJ* 204.

<sup>60</sup> *CJ* 204.

only to the appearances and not at all to objects in themselves, the question of existence is necessarily a complicated one. The existence of the object is clearly important insofar as an empirical encounter underlies all judgments of taste (with one possible exception which we'll outline later), so the idea must be that we do not *further* take into account the reality of the thing. But what *is* the existence of a thing, since we know existence is not, for Kant, a predicate?<sup>61</sup> What is it that we turn away from in our pure interest in pure form? It must be that in the thing that exceeds our cognition of it, both on the side of the object (what strikes us as “material”) and on the side of the subject (what compels us as “need”). Indeed, this is generally what we mean when we speak of the “material” element of a given presentation: what has not been conceptually mediated, what exceeds our knowledge of it, or at least what can only be conceptualized in terms of causality, whether to account for its having come to be or its future in terms of a purpose we bring to it. That is how we know, indeed, that a given thing is real: it is given in *intuition*, in a way that subtends but also exceeds conceptualization. When we are interested in that remainder, we are materially interested in an object, which is to say that we take it to offer some possibility of material satisfaction.

This is not the case with a pure judgment of taste: “But if the question is whether something is beautiful, what we want to know is not whether we or anyone cares, or so much as might care, in any way, about the thing’s existence, but rather how we judge it in our mere contemplation of it (intuition or reflection).”<sup>62</sup> That is to say, a thing has to exist in order to be judged aesthetically, but its existence is not interesting to us. We do not plan to connect our representation of it to some concept or purpose, but merely to

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. *CPR* A594/B622.

<sup>62</sup> *CJ* 204.

compare that presentation with our response to it. Already, however, we can see that there is something *social* happening here with judgments of taste. Someone has asked us a question, and we find we want to be able to answer it in the right way. The condition of the possibility for both question and answer is in fact the *existence* of an object, a common point of reference. When we go on to answer the question, we want to “prove” that we have taste: “[I]n order for me to say that the object is *beautiful*, and to prove that I have taste, what matters is what I do with this presentation within myself...”<sup>63</sup> This is a very strange situation indeed: we rely on a thing that exists as a common point of reference, and then we have a conversation about it the aim of which is to prove something about what we do with the presentation *within* ourselves. That means that we are interested not only in the fact that aesthetic judgments allow us to become conscious of something that is normally out of reach, namely, our own respective powers of presentation, but also in arriving at a moment of recognition that involves finding in others, and having found in ourselves, a kind of presentational identity or commonality. If this were *all* we were after, however, we would need only the contingent and empirical fact that we do often agree about what we find agreeable. We could, in other words, surround ourselves with the hobbyists and enthusiasts that share our passion for, say, model trains. Model train enthusiast is a social identity, but it is not necessarily a socially mediated or negotiated identity. As we’ll argue in the following, what we are looking for from judgments of taste – looking for *in* judgments of taste – is not mere presentational identity whereby we can affirm one another and ourselves, but something that likewise grounds a more distanced, less affirmative form of sociality.

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<sup>63</sup> *CJ* 205.

## The Agreeable as an Aesthetic But Also Mechanical Judgment

Kant makes it clear that an interest in disinterest arises only in society, and that it consists of disregarding the object's existence: "In order to *play the judge in matters of taste*, we must not be in the least biased in favor of the thing's existence but must be wholly indifferent about it."<sup>64</sup> To play the judge at all, one must have an audience, and the task of the performance is to convince that audience of our disinterest in the object's existence. To underscore this last point, Kant imagines the following scenario: "I might, finally, quite easily convince myself that, if I were on some uninhabited island with no hope of ever again coming among people, and could conjure up such a splendid edifice by a mere wish, I would not even take that much trouble for it if I had already a sufficiently comfortable hut."<sup>65</sup> Here, we imagine convincing even ourselves that the point of contact is essentially and totally social, that I am pleased only insofar as I can compare my response to the thing with that of other people, so that on my uninhabited island, I should have no use for it at all. Later in the text, this is what Kant will think of as the "empirical interest" we can take in beautiful objects, where that empirical interest always has to do with the sociality of judgments of taste. Really pure, sustainably pure, judgments of taste will always involve natural objects, and we will always be alone in our encounters with them. (These too give rise to an interest, but that is what Kant calls a "rational interest." We'll get back to this.) The idea that we should not conjure up even enough effort, by ourselves, to *wish* a splendid castle into being, suggests that even

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<sup>64</sup> *CJ* 205, emphasis mine.

<sup>65</sup> *CJ* 204-205.

judgments of sense (of the agreeable) have something social about them, since even when beauty is not an issue, there is much that is agreeable to the senses in luxuries.

And so we have arrived back at the question of “existence,” since existence is related to sensation. We call something material or sensory insofar as we have not finally or thoroughly mediated it conceptually, so that sensory materials are the mark of the object’s reality. From the vantage point of the understanding, then, what is sensory is uninteresting. Without interest, however, we might wonder how it appears to us at all. An interest in the sensible materials of a presentation is exactly what Kant calls a judgment of the agreeable: “Agreeable is what the senses like in sensation.”<sup>66</sup> This is by definition not a social kind of liking, since what hasn’t been conceptually mediated is also that about which we cannot communicate.<sup>67</sup> If we collapse the distinction between the various kinds of liking, for the agreeable, the beautiful, and the good, which is the division Kant is proposing between various forms of aesthetic orientation, then

we could not require [our powers] to estimate things and their value in any other way than by the gratification they promise.... And since all that could make a difference in that promised gratification would be what means we select, people could no longer blame one another for baseness and malice, but only for foolishness and ignorance, since all of them, each according to his own way of viewing things, would be pursuing one and the same goal: gratification.<sup>68</sup>

First, we should notice that what we find “agreeable” is not what directly gratifies us but what we like in *sensing* (rather than using or directly, materially enjoying) an object, which is to say that we treat the agreeable in some sense symbolically as well, since we

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<sup>66</sup> *CJ* 205.

<sup>67</sup> This distinction is thus qualitative. Cf. Guyer 121: “Without the intention of universality, the distinction between ‘beautiful’ and ‘agreeable’ would collapse.” Here, Guyer looks to be saying that the difference between the two judgments is merely the singularity or universality of the judgment’s “voice,” but he turns out to be arguing that this is the *criteria* on which we distinguish the two judgments. The deployment of the term “beautiful” requires its own independent justification.

<sup>68</sup> *CJ* 206.

are still concerned with a presentation or representation that *promises* (rather than delivers) gratification, or, more confusingly, delivers gratification to the senses “at a distance,” so to speak. If “the agreeable” were our only mode of aesthetic judgment, then we would judge all objects by way of a connection to what Kant elsewhere calls “counsels of prudence,”<sup>69</sup> so that we would refer them solely to the purpose of happiness.<sup>70</sup> Counsels of prudence try to guide us along general lines, to allow us to order our lives in ways that are likely to lead to good “outcomes,” and the agreeable, we might say, is a kind of informed sensory judgment (and we should remark here that the very concept of a ‘sensory judgment’ is surprising) that works at a correspondingly general level. We could make *mistakes* in making these judgments, but others could not fault us for our mistakes, and we likewise seem to make no demands that others respond in like ways to like things.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Edit. Christine M. Korsgaard. Trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 29. (Hereafter *GW*.)

<sup>70</sup> My reading of “the agreeable,” tying it to counsels of prudence rather than some more immediate notion of gratification, diverges here fairly sharply from the standard interpretation. “In order fully to exploit the contrast between agreeable and good, Kant exaggerates the unfortunate characteristics of the former. It dispenses with judgment and gratifies desire, and as mere enjoyment it offers a delight ‘pathologically conditioned (by stimuli) (§5). Even worse, it is a significant factor ‘even with irrational animals’, a ‘private feeling’, essentially asocial. This form of argument has been taken as an example of the deleterious effects upon philosophical analysis of thinking in terms of dichotomies.” Howard Caygill. A Kant Dictionary (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995) 61-62. On the other extreme, however, it has been argued that the category of “the agreeable” holds some promise of liberation from what is taken as the harsh formalism of Kantian aesthetics: “The agreeable, with its gravitational pull toward irrational, sensual pleasure, threatens to undermine ‘pure’ judgments of taste.” Pease, Allison. Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 22. Although some examples, like that of hunger serving as the best sauce, make it sound as though we find things agreeable in direct proportion to our basic needs, we have suggested that this is indeed a form of aesthetic *judgment*, about sorting the world into kinds of objects, reinforcing our orientation toward certain kinds of objects, and so on. If we are right, then the agreeable is not the appearance of our true and irrational sensuous being but rather the product of training and the social mediation of sensuous excess. This will become important again when we turn to discuss the cultural (technical and generic) mediation of forms of art, since we will take the work of cultural mediation to be something like the pathological taming of the excesses of sensibility.

<sup>71</sup> This, at least, is Kant’s take on judgments about the agreeable, calling them as we’ll see later “modest” sorts of judgments. Given my interest in social attempts to organize us politically with respect to what I’ve called in the introduction ‘overly concrete’ shared objects of value, these supposedly modest and therefore ‘safe’ judgments would seem to harbor more danger than Kant thought to expect.



Somehow, then, these judgments about the agreeable also fail to hold out the same *epistemological* promise as pure judgments of taste. Kant writes,

When [something determines the feeling of pleasure or displeasure and this] determination of that feeling is called sensation, this term means something quite different from what it means when I apply it to the presentation of a thing... For in the second case the presentation is referred to the object, but in the first it is referred solely to the subject and is not used for cognition at all, not even for that by which the subject *cognizes* himself.<sup>72</sup>

Instead of the promise of knowing, what we get is the promise of future gratification. Here, we are clearly not, on Kant's account, in "control" of the situation. While reflective judgment is, at least thus far, never itself determinative, here, the determination comes from a source foreign to us. The relationship is a causal one between two objects, or between an object and a subject in need of that object. We are metaphorically *attracted to* that object, and our liking (or disliking) is, at least in that moment, compulsory. The connection between subject and object happens below the radar, so to speak, so that the liking that occurs is beyond mediation by the understanding or reason.<sup>73</sup> It is a liking that is here represented as occurring between unmediated nature without (the stuff of sensation, the material aspect of the object) and unmediated, or less-than-satisfyingly-mediated, nature within (our desires and material needs).<sup>74</sup> Insofar as this is a relation of sensation to the sensory, it is private or even secret, beyond articulation in terms of concepts, and it is thus that it does not serve to "tell" us any more or anything new about ourselves, even as we might take it to reveal "something old"

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<sup>72</sup> *CJ* 206.

<sup>73</sup> It is the seemingly mechanical nature of these judgments that accounts for the danger I mentioned.

<sup>74</sup> I am hedging here, with phrases like "at least in that moment compulsory" and "less-than-satisfyingly-mediated" because it seems that one of the functions of the advance of taste, one of its civilizing functions, must be to provide some kind of other and 'better' orientation even with respect to what we find 'agreeable,' since this would have to cover our socially-mediated proclivity for the cooked over the raw, for comforts above and beyond what needs could demand, etc.

about ourselves, i.e., something already established. In other words, judgments of objects as agreeable are symptomatic of the mechanization of the pleasure-response to the sensory excesses of conceptual judgment. They are thus not a sign of autonomy, which is what renders them unfit for social interest.

Insofar as they forge ready-to-hand associations, judgments about the agreeable are analogous to empirical judgments:

Now, that a judgment by which I declare an object to be agreeable expresses an interest in that object is already obvious from the fact that, by means of sensation, the judgment arouses a desire for objects of that kind: it presupposes that I have referred the existence of the object to my state insofar as that state is affected by such an object.<sup>75</sup>

The judgment that an object is “agreeable” is not directly a judgment, “I desire that object,” but a judgment at a higher level of generality, one where a given object “arouses a desire for objects of *that kind*.” It is thus that a judgment of the agreeable is the aesthetic analog to a maxim in Kantian moral thought. Indeed, it seems at least plausible that to find an object “agreeable,” I have to *already* be disposed to be thus oriented to objects of the kind, so that the education of taste is at least in part an education of just such a disposition. Thus we might think too that a judgment of agreeableness is the epistemological analog to an empirical judgment that makes use of a reflectively generated empirical concept, where what is at issue is a matter of subsumption. Just as empirical concepts are themselves the result of a development in thought but their deployment simply a matter of the subsumption of a particular under the concept, we (again) do not learn anything new about ourselves but merely deploy our taste in the judgment of an object as agreeable. This deployment results in an inclination, rather than cognition. This is why Kant criticizes the “people who aim at nothing but enjoyment” by

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<sup>75</sup> *CJ* 206.

saying that “they like to dispense with all judging.”<sup>76</sup> Of course, this is a “judgment” of sorts, but it is one that requires no (or very little) new work from us, since the agreeable is described as “a liking that is conditioned pathologically by stimuli.”<sup>77</sup> Taste for the agreeable must still be the result of a certain kind of socialization (indeed, nowhere else except in the work of art is that so obvious), but if it is telling about us, it is also simply that: it is a confessional judgment.

Unless we clearly distinguish judgments about the agreeable from instrumental judgment, treating only the former as aesthetic, Kant’s comments comparing the agreeable to the good will merely serve to make the former all the more mysterious. Kant makes it clear that “these terms are in no way interchangeable.”<sup>78</sup> We call things either “good for” or “good, period.” As we know from the *Groundwork*,<sup>79</sup> the only thing good in itself is a good will. If we think of a thing as good for something else, as a means to an end, then we are interested in it for a given purpose. Or, rather, we are interested in it for the sake of a *possible* purpose. Given that one has a certain purpose, then a thing is good when it is suited to that purpose. A pen is good for writing, so if one’s aim is to write, the pen is good. Given another purpose, say, changing a tire, a pen is no good at all. This makes good simple sense, but the category of the “agreeable” appears to make even less sense in the face of it. The good “contains the concept of a purpose,”<sup>80</sup> whether that purpose is technical or moral. That means that the judgment that a given object is agreeable must have no reference to a given purpose, so that our orientation toward the object is, in spite of its being an orientation toward the *materiality* of the object, not

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<sup>76</sup> *CJ* 206.

<sup>77</sup> *CJ* 209.

<sup>78</sup> *CJ* 208.

<sup>79</sup> *GW* 16.

<sup>80</sup> *CJ* 207.

precisely an instrumental orientation. (This is why we connect the agreeable with counsels of prudence, since these are counsels at a higher level of generalization.) Again, we're taking judgments of the agreeable as rather *symbolic* of instrumental orientation, promising (but not specifying) satisfaction, gesturing at but not orienting us directly toward use. We find even more support for this reading insofar as Kant defines happiness in this context as "the greatest sum (in number as well as duration) of what is agreeable in life."<sup>81</sup> What we find agreeable is what promises happiness, and it seems that we find enjoyment in that very promise, rather than in the actual satisfaction of whatever needs must underlie our orientation toward the material, sensible world. Since our argument will be, at least in part, that in the work of art, the senses and thereby the needs get to stake a claim, which is not a claim demanding satisfaction but rather a claim on *recognition*, this line of thought seems crucial. So, however, does the fact that this claim can only be staked in *connection* with or as *mediated by* taste. Looking ahead, we can already see that only by placing what in ourselves is beyond conceptual articulation in connection with some kind of cognitive work can we also hope for a meaningful relationship to it, for some degree of independence from it, but an independence that does not just seek to obliterate all signs of our material and needy condition. The question is whether or not we might achieve something on the order of an independent or autonomous relationship to our own dependence.

### **Playing the Judge of Taste**

Kant makes it clear once again that at least a part of what we're after here is convincing reason of our intrinsic worth, which is to say judging not only objects but

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<sup>81</sup> *CJ* 208.

achieving too a second order judgment of aesthetic judgment. This second order judgment turns out to compass more than a critical evaluation of a judgment: it turns out to be an evaluation of the figure of the judge.

[R]eason can never be persuaded that there is any intrinsic value in the existence of a human being who lives merely for *enjoyment* (no matter how industrious he may be in pursuing that aim)... Only by what he does without concern for enjoyment, in complete freedom and independently of whatever he could also receive passively from nature, does he give his existence an absolute value, as the existence of a person.<sup>82</sup>

It is clear that Kant primarily has in mind the judgment of oneself or another as *moral*, which is to say the judgment that asserts the good will as the only object worthy of our unconditioned esteem. And yet this precisely is a judgment we cannot make, since we can only prove, for all our trying, that such a being is *possible*, never *actual*, since it is impossible to accurately identify even one example of a moral act, much less an example of a moral person. But we can see that the judgment of taste begins to fulfill some of these same requirements: it is a judgment free from concern for enjoyment, made independently of all interest. Not only will *beauty* turn out to be symbolic of morality, but our ability to judge and love the beautiful, at least beautiful nature, will turn *us* into symbols of moral agents. By contrast, “Many things may be charming and agreeable to [a given judge]; no one cares about that.”<sup>83</sup>

We have already suggested that, in casting about for judges of taste, we are looking for people who can take up an autonomous stance toward their own dependency. Now, then, we must ask in what sense and to what degree a judgment of taste is free. We can approach the question negatively, looking first at the two varieties of apparent unfreedom Kant associates with both the agreeable and the good:

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<sup>82</sup> *CJ* 208-209.

<sup>83</sup> *CJ* 212.

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 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 unfree.<sup>84</sup>

We are, of course, at our freest in Kant's estimation when we are giving the law to ourselves, acting autonomously, and yet we never get an *example* of that freedom, a given empirical instantiation of it; it is something that, if it happens at all, happens behind our phenomenal backs. Indeed, only when we feel most *constrained* by duty can we even begin to think that we just might actually be motivated by the moral law and so imposing a law on ourselves. In a pure aesthetic judgment, however, "the judging person *feels* completely free as regards the liking he accords the object."<sup>85</sup>

As we have seen, a judgment of the agreeable gives rise to the kind of interest Kant has just portrayed as pathological. Kant cites the adage that "hunger is the best sauce,"<sup>86</sup> which illustrates precisely how, when a need is too directly involved in our object-selection, we are not free to "make an object of pleasure out of something or other." Indeed, our selection there is constrained to a certain class of objects, the "edible." "Only," Kant writes, "when their need has been satisfied *can we tell who in a multitude of people has taste and who does not.*"<sup>87</sup> Yet again, we see that we are interested in sorting the tasteful from those lacking in taste, and that we hold the former in some kind of social esteem. That this esteem is social is especially clear from the fact that Kant so often slips into the first person plural, so that the specter of a panel of observers arises. In the same way that we seek out as would-be moral examples (if such there could be) those who act without inclination, Kant treats as potential examples of the

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<sup>84</sup> *CJ* 210.

<sup>85</sup> *CJ* 211.

<sup>86</sup> *CJ* 210.

<sup>87</sup> *CJ* 210, emphasis mine.

tasteful those who have “manners without virtue, politeness without benevolence, propriety without integrity, and so on. ...[T]o show our taste in conduct (or in judging other people’s conduct) is very different from expressing our moral way of thinking. For this contains a command and gives rise to a need, whereas moral taste only plays with the objects of liking without committing itself to any of them.”<sup>88</sup> This excursion into the realm of *manners* occurs rather suddenly, as does the descriptive phrase “moral taste,” and it is surprising to see “politeness without benevolence” treated as a matter of play, since the absence of benevolence would seem a strict violation of duty. And yet there is something fitting about it too, since what are manners, politeness, and propriety unless they are ways of enjoying one another’s company precisely in the absence of virtue, benevolence, and integrity? Aren’t these “social niceties” really in lieu of adequately realized moral virtues? That suggestion goes perhaps altogether too far, since there are many cases where manners are called for that go above and beyond virtue, where they are purely matters of form, and perhaps Kant’s claim here is that even pure matters of form have some important social, even if no important moral, role to play. (We will return to this below with our discussion of the naïf.)

In fact, Kant’s entire analysis of judgments of taste hinges on the form we use to communicate about it. Because the judge cannot “discover, underlying this liking, any private conditions, on which he might be dependent,” “he will talk about the beautiful as if beauty were a characteristic of the object and the judgment were logical...”<sup>89</sup> We do not make reference to ourselves in articulating our judgments of taste. Again, instead of “I like X,” we say, “X is beautiful,” giving the judgment the form of a logical judgment,

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<sup>88</sup> *CJ* 210.

<sup>89</sup> *CJ* 211.

which is to say positing an objective connection between the subject and the predicate, and yet “beautiful” stands in for a certain and strange feeling, one that does not seem at all private or personal.

The search for private conditions here is analogous to the search for conditions in our other judgments, whether in moral judgments (where we seek the “secret springs of action”)<sup>90</sup> or the innumerable conditions that could be specified in an empirical concept or law. When we run into a stopping point with respect to the moral law, when we can, for example, find no “private conditions” that can serve as an incentive, and even when in our search we rack up a big pile of *disincentives*, we see there only the possibility and never the certainty that we are acting out of duty. With respect to our theorization of empirical nature, on the other hand, we do not expect anything on the order of “private conditions,” anything that is specifically local and does not fall under general laws. In a moral judgment, we do not trust our seeming to have run out of plausible motivations in our search; something sustains our suspicions about secret springs of action, ends so private we do not share them even with ourselves. But the judgment of taste, even though it (and its judge) are subject to critical scrutiny from the outside, allows us some private assurance of its purity. That private assurance in turn leads to a certain kind of public presentation.

In proclaiming something beautiful, we make a claim on *everyone* for their agreement. We attempt to legislate, ironically just where we feel ourselves to be free in our liking, that everyone else should follow our example or, since there can be no rules for the production of a judgment of taste, take us as exemplary judges. “But if he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then

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<sup>90</sup> *GW* 57.



judges not just for himself but for everyone...”<sup>91</sup> Indeed, he “does not count on other people to agree with his judgment...; rather, he *demand*s that they agree.”<sup>92</sup> The term *demand* is an important one, since it falls somewhere between a suggestion (“try this, you’ll like it”) and a *command*, which is the form of the moral law. The moral law has, on Kant’s account, objective necessity without thereby also achieving subjective necessity. A judgment of taste, on the other hand, has subjective necessity without achieving objective necessity. We *demand* that others agree with us, but that demand does not at all have the force of law: it is just one citizen talking to another, rather than a sovereign talking to a subject.

The fact that such a demand gets made leads us back to the question: what exactly is the demand a demand *for*, if not for simple, affirmative agreement? Kant again compares the pure judgment of taste with judgments about the agreeable.

And yet, even about the agreeable we can find people standing in agreement, and because of this we do, after all, deny that some people have taste while granting it to others; in speaking of taste here we do not mean the sense of taste, which involves an organ, but an ability to judge the agreeable in general. [...] But here it is understood that the universality is only comparative, so that the rules are only *general* (as all empirical rules are), not *universal*, as are the rules that a judgment about the beautiful presupposes or lays claim to. Such a judgment of taste about the agreeable refers to sociability as far as that rests on empirical rules.<sup>93</sup>

The fact that these judgments refer to sociability as far as this rests on empirical rules makes it look like the agreeable is what we’re after. That is, the agreeable looks promising if what we’re after is a principle of communication that binds particular groups of people on the basis of a particular set of objects or symbols. But neither in this dissertation nor in issuing our judgments in public are we setting out to establish the fact

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<sup>91</sup> *CJ* 212.

<sup>92</sup> *CJ* 213.

<sup>93</sup> *CJ* 213.

*that* people are so bound; all it would take to establish that would be to look at shared tastes among particular groups, and all it would take for that would be to look around. We're interested in how people *become* bound to one another by shared tastes, to what degree and in what ways these serve as a ground for sociality, and what are the particular possibilities for transformation, political transformation, in the process of the mediation of social symbols by individuals and of individuals by way of social symbols. In other words, we need something between a pure judgment of taste and a socially-organized judgment about the agreeable: we need more people, which is to say more judges.

### **Judgments of Taste and Questions of Community**

A pure judgment of taste works *toward* a concept or purpose under which it might successfully subsume the object in question, but failing that, it connects the object (borrowing the form of a logical judgment) to the pleasure the judge feels in that work. The fact that it is pleasurable work that also aims at no particular end (even though it is in some sense the search for an end) makes it play. If it is play, however, it is also serious; this is clear from the fact that it makes demands, and makes them in public. As we've noted, Kant (normally so suspicious of sensible attachments) treats judgments of sense as "modest":

In the case of a taste of sense, ... people, of their own accord, are modest enough not even to require others to agree (even though there actually is, at times, very widespread agreement in these judgments too). Now, experience teaches us that the taste of reflection, with its claim that its judgment (about the beautiful) is universally valid for everyone, is also rejected often enough. What is strange is that the taste of reflection should nonetheless find itself able (as it actually does) to conceive of judgments that can demand such agreement, and that it does in fact require this agreement from everyone for each of its judgments. What the people who make these judgments dispute about is not whether such a claim is

possible; they are merely unable to agree, in particular cases, on the correct way to apply this ability.<sup>94</sup>

As is clear from the introduction and various footnotes, we have reason to be dubious about this claim to modesty on the part of taste of sense, and worried at the thought of over-coordinated concrete attachments; they will not always result in mild bands of hobbyists and enthusiasts. At the same time, although there is indeed a danger that looms for us just on the horizon of this problematic, it is also true that only potentially immodest claims on behalf of sense can disrupt the tendency toward unity, which is to say that *taste*, for now, represents the dangerous faculty. If this is where danger lies, it is also where we seek some hope, and the difference, to forecast work yet to be done, lies in the *source* of the demand for recognition – the attempt to give public shape to what is private, an attempt that “comes from below” as it were, in contrast to the attempt to give private shape to what is public, to supply the sense of taste from above.

For now, however, we will focus on the work that a judgment of taste does in *ordering*, whether it seeks to order people (or order them around, legislate to them) or order the objects that occasion judgments of taste. If, instead of gathering up people, the judgment gets united with other such judgments into a generalized judgment about a certain type of object (Kant’s example in this case is the judgment “Roses are beautiful”),<sup>95</sup> then we are dealing with a logical judgment that constitutes a class or connects classes of objects. This is a logical judgment even though it is based on an aesthetic judgment.<sup>96</sup> By analogy, we can think of the judgment of taste as seeking to

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<sup>94</sup> *CJ* 214.

<sup>95</sup> *CJ* 215.

<sup>96</sup> Indeed, it is hard for me to distinguish between a logical judgment based on an aesthetic one, such as that “roses are beautiful,” from a judgment of sense, which expresses an orientation toward a given *kind* of object, each example of which we take to be agreeable. The question is this: in what does the difference between “roses are beautiful” and “roses are agreeable” consist? Certainly, it must have something to do

gather up a class of people, people united in their disinterested reflection on the object in question. That gathering up depends, however, on the existence of the object and the proximity of the people, each of whom makes her own special demand to be present as judge:

We want to submit the object to our own eyes, just as if our liking of it depended on that sensation. And yet, if we then call the object beautiful, we believe we have a universal voice, and lay claim to the agreement of everyone, whereas any private sensation would decide solely for the observer himself and his liking.<sup>97</sup>

The role of sensation in a “pure” judgment of taste is a mystery at the heart of Kant’s undertaking here, and although he does not finally work the mystery out (and hence is always lauded or criticized as a pure formalist), neither does he shy away from this demand for an empirical encounter with the object. It is perhaps this mystery that prevents the demand for universal assent from becoming too imperious, from posing as a given concept or a purpose, so that “universal voice is only an idea,”<sup>98</sup> a regulative idea like the ideas of reason. As in the case of moral judgment, we can only postulate the possibility that we are in fact pure and disinterested in any given instance. Still, and this is where the claim to universality gets its force, a material force it lacks in the moral sphere, this claim is subtended by or rooted in a feeling. By contrast, we seek out potential examples (knowing even these fall short) of moral judgment by seeking a feeling of displeasure, a struggle between the moral law and the inclinations it seeks to overcome. In judgments of taste, by contrast, we have a seeming-example of the

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with the demand for agreement, so that in the former we’re making a demand that everyone agree that this kind of object always and invariably serves as an occasion for a universal judgment of taste, but in that case we are prescribing a rule to judgments of taste. When we encounter an object of this certain type, we will respond with pleasure. But “that kind of pleasure would be none other than mere agreeableness in the sensation, so that by its very nature it could have only private validity, because it would depend directly on the presentation by which the object *is given*.” (CJ 217) Recognizing this object as a rose would be enough.

<sup>97</sup> CJ 216.

<sup>98</sup> CJ 216.

reconciliation between the demand for universality and the inclinations, just as if those inclinations were, on their own, in accord with the demand. Even if this claim is universal in its voice, it is inescapably local in its working.

It is, then, this seeming-accord *within us* that we are communicating when we articulate a judgment of taste. Kant writes, “Hence it must be the universal communicability of the mental state, in the given presentation, which underlies the judgment of taste as its subjective condition, and the pleasure in the object must be its consequence.”<sup>99</sup> We feel pleasure in the seeming-accord, which makes it seem, for a moment at least, as though what normally remains private could be an object of communication. As it turns out, however, we call the object beautiful *in lieu* of communicating something about ourselves. “Nothing... can be communicated universally except cognition, as well as presentation insofar as it pertains to cognition... [T]he basis can be nothing other than the mental state that we find in the relation between the presentational powers [imagination and understanding] insofar as they refer a given presentation to *cognition in general*.”<sup>100</sup> This leaves open the question what precisely is meant by “pertains to cognition.” Kant seems to be claiming here that what gets communicated in this process is a state, but, insofar as he has also described this state as *play*, it is more accurate to think of this as the communication of an activity.

The judgment of taste is a kind of playful mediation of the sensory materials provided us. This, Kant claims, we are aware of aesthetically (rather than intellectually) and the sensation “is the quickening of the two powers (imagination and the understanding) to an activity that is indeterminate but, as a result of the prompting of the

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<sup>99</sup> *CJ* 217.

<sup>100</sup> *CJ* 217.

given presentation, nonetheless accordant...”<sup>101</sup> This quickening is experienced as pleasurable, an invitation to attention, so that we “*linger* in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself.”<sup>102</sup> Although the term ‘quickenings’ suggests the analogy of a stimulus, this is not just a lingering in sensation but a rational lingering, a lingering that reinforces and reproduces itself. That means that it is not merely a response but an enlivening of thought.

This activity is not, however, solely rational. It is linked, by way of Kant’s concept of ‘purposiveness,’ to our practical lives. Before we turn to our own question, in what way this purposiveness is linked to our sociality, we need to make clear Kant’s own transcendental use of the term in the *Critique of Judgment*.<sup>103</sup> Remembering that his focus on the a priori subjective conditions of thought helps us make sense of his otherwise surprising identification of “purpose” with “concept.” The idea that such an identification is possible is at the root of his taking aesthetic judgment to be a moment of reconciliation between theoretical reason (which operates by means of concepts) and practical reason (which operates in terms of purposes). Kant takes himself to be justified in making the identification precisely insofar as he is engaged in a transcendental critique, a project that abstracts from given materials. He writes, “If we try to explicate [purpose] in terms of its transcendental attributes (without presupposing anything empirical, such as the feeling of pleasure), then a purpose is the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept to be the object’s cause (the real basis of its possibility);

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<sup>101</sup> *CJ* 219.

<sup>102</sup> *CJ* 222.

<sup>103</sup> As Dieter Henrich describes Kant’s project, “critical philosophy is the determination of the origin, the scope, and the limits of any possible *a priori* insight into objects. [...] [T]hat means the anticipation of formal structures of empirical insight.” Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 46. This provides us with a helpful formulation for our own project, which is to look at the ways in which aesthetic judgment arouses our interest in the social and material structures of empirical insight.

and the causality that a *concept* has with regard to its object is purposiveness (*forma finalis*).”<sup>104</sup> The only a priori need that we have is, as we saw earlier, the need that belongs to the understanding to find that the world works in lawlike ways, and it is this need that guides reflective judgment in its search for concepts and laws with which to order what is given it. This is a general need for conceptuality, and it is here that concepts also become purposes that satisfy the need of the understanding. All purposes are of course concepts, namely concepts determined in connection with the will, but only in this case is the purpose itself *to be* a concept. When this need of the understanding is met, it is as if the object were made for contemplation, provided to give sustenance to the very project of conceptualization. But conceptuality serves a social purpose as well, allowing us to live in a shared and coordinated world, to communicate with one another.

We saw that Kant is impressed with the “modesty” of judgments of sense, but he will later worry about their potential immodesty in relation to the work of art, an immodesty that seems to consist in their claim to public recognition. In this context, however, he is more concerned to describe the public claims of a pure judgment of taste, a taste that, if we read carefully, not only demands recognition but seeks to unite a public, to, in a strange sense, unify an audience in the same way that a concept might subsume its particulars. If reflective judgment is what subtends a logical judgment, acting as the copula that unites sensibly what cannot be united synthetically (so that we connect a given predicate with a given subject, or given subjects into a class or species), in its free use in a judgment of taste it subtends sociality.<sup>105</sup> Kant writes, “[F]or although it does not connect the predicate of beauty with the concept of the *object*, considered in its entire

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<sup>104</sup> *CJ* 219-220.

<sup>105</sup> We will return to just this issue below, when we compare logical with aesthetic ideas.

logical sphere, yet it extends that predicate over the entire sphere *of judging persons*.”<sup>106</sup> Instead of gathering up predicates under a given concept in order to constitute an object, it constitutes a public (or at least demands that one be constituted). Although Kant regularly expresses his disapproval for the taste of sense (remember his unkind comments about those who seek only enjoyment and so would dispense with judgment altogether), he is in this section on the verge of worrying about the imperious demands of the judgment of taste, demands which lack a certain modesty. For it is here that the seeming-accord *within us* is supposed to ground, “ought” to ground, an accord *among us*.

There is a key moment in the *Critique of Judgment* where it looks like we might be able to approach the question of social coordination without entering the social realm, at the level, that is, of the intrasubjective faculties alone; if this were possible, then the conditions for sociality would have to do solely with the reconciliation among the faculties. This moment comes in Kant’s discussion of the standard idea and the ideal of beauty.<sup>107</sup> Kant offers a perhaps surprising psychological account of the conditions for the empirical use of reflective judgment in formulating a judgment of taste. He postulates the psychological production of what he calls the standard idea of beauty, by means of which the bare parameters of what can be considered beautiful are set. The process involves the superimposition by the imagination of all of the examples of a given object and results in a kind of mean. If this actually occurs, it is clear that it will be different for everyone, since the imagination works here only with the images it has actually encountered and depends therefore on a contingent background of empirical

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<sup>106</sup> *CJ* 215.

<sup>107</sup> “An ideal is an individual object completely adequate to an idea.” Rudolf Makkreel. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 116.



experience. He writes, “The standard idea is by no means the entire *archetype of beauty* within this kind, but is only the form that constitutes the indispensable condition of all beauty, and hence merely the *correctness* in the exhibition of the kind. It is the *rule...*”<sup>108</sup> We can think of Kant’s effort to offer a possible psychological explanation for the generation of this rule as a model for the kind of work that reflective judgment does *whenever* it searches for a rule, concept, principle, or law that could subsume a certain particular. The limitations on this kind of empirical, psychological production begin to explain the fact that judgments of taste, their demands notwithstanding, regularly fail to agree with one another. This would also explain why we are able to produce conviction within ourselves, since clearly the judgment will meet with our individual standards.

There can be no rule that determines the beauty of an object, which is to say no rule by which we as judges might judge an object beautiful. Kant seems to account for what agreement there is among us by claiming that we relate this empirical product, this psychological compilation, to an idea of reason. Indeed, it is the fact that the ideas of reason, unlike the standard (empirical) ideas, are shared by all rational beings lacking intuitive understanding that can account for what *motivates* us in the project of establishing standard ideas at all. The standard idea has to be connected to what admits of no exhibition whatever, something like an idea of reason, resulting in an *ideal* of beauty, which Kant (rather mysteriously, it seems to me) claims can be “expected solely in the human figure.”<sup>109</sup> Although we’ve been emphasizing those moments in which Kant posits a social interest we exhibit with regard to other people as judges of taste, this is the

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<sup>108</sup> *CJ* 235.

<sup>109</sup> *CJ* 235.

first time he seems poised to describe how our second order relationship to them in that capacity is itself a kind of judgment of taste.

Before we go on to try to understand what Kant might mean by our interest in “the human figure,” we can at least begin to get a sense of the way this “ideal of beauty” involves relating the reflective work of the imagination with an idea of reason, which indeed should go part of the way toward making clear why it is a *mystery*, an opacity, that makes the claim on us. The standard idea is related to “the rational idea, which makes the purposes of humanity, insofar as they cannot be presented in sensibility, the principle for judging his figure...”<sup>110</sup> This other “standard” of, or “principle” for, judging a figure takes recourse to “the purposes of humanity, insofar as they cannot be presented in sensibility.”<sup>111</sup> It is of course very hard to imagine what might be meant when we say that we judge something that is *only* presented in sensibility, namely, a figure, by way of a relation to what *cannot* be presented in sensibility, namely the purposes of humanity.

When Kant discusses the production of the “standard idea,” it is clear that we might be judging any object of a given kind, setting some parameters for the judgment of roses, horses, or humans. When we turn to the “ideal of beauty,” it becomes clear that we are judging a person, and no real explanation is attempted for the transition. Indeed, it seems that we have once again moved on from the question of a judgment of taste to a second order judgment of taste, a secondary judgment of taste that involves witnessing taste in another. If that is right, and we will find supplementary support for it in the next section, then what Kant has in mind is the figure not only of a person, but of a judge, and not only a successful judge of beauty, but already specifically the character we’ll come to

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<sup>110</sup> *CJ* 233.

<sup>111</sup> *CJ* 233.

know as the lover of beautiful nature, a judge who invariably connects the pure judgment of taste with the idea of reason for which it is a symbol. Kant writes:

[I]n order for this connection to be made visible, as it were, in bodily expression (as an effect of what is inward), pure ideas of reason must be united with a very strong imagination in someone who seeks so much as to judge, let alone exhibit, it. The correctness of such an ideal of beauty is proved by not permitting any charm of sense to be mingled with the liking for its object, while yet making us take great interest in it.<sup>112</sup>

This section of the text is complicated almost to the point of confusion, but if our reading is right, then the object in question is a person whom we take to be exhibiting taste; in other words, we use taste to judge another person we also take to be exhibiting taste. This judgment of taste subsequently grounds an interest in the person. If this *is* right, then the connection between beauty and morality seems even stronger than a merely symbolic connection between structurally homologous judgments. Indeed, the value of taste serves to orient us to other people insofar as their *existence* is concerned, taking that person as an end in herself, by “watching” her take herself as such an end. This is especially interesting insofar as we remember that our judge feels not only as though she were legislating for herself but for all of us. Kant is offering us here the beginnings of a theory that tries to account for the empirical interest we take in other people, an interest that is not based merely on natural proclivities or inclinations (i.e., because they give us what we need) but on something more mysterious, and yet not quite so mysterious as the mere thought of them as ends in themselves.

Whenever we actually encounter a judge of taste, both the pronounced judgment and our second order judgment of the judge are beyond verification. “For if taste did not have a priori principles, it could not possibly pronounce on the judgments of others and

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<sup>112</sup> *CJ* 236.

pass verdicts approving or repudiating them with even the slightest semblance of having the right to do so.”<sup>113</sup> This turns out to be what we have, the slightest semblance of the right to pronounce on the judgments of others. Here, as with empirical judgments, we cannot be certain that we are correctly subsuming the particular in question (the pronounced judgment of taste) under the correct universal (“actual” pure judgment of taste). But yet once again it becomes clear that we are *interested* in pursuing the judgment, which is to say engaged not just in elaborating what is involved in a judgment of taste, but in actually judging people insofar as they seem to deploy their taste. Confusingly but consequentially, this second order judging seems itself to be a kind of judgment of taste, although not a pure one, since it is connected in our minds to the idea of reason.

In the *Groundwork*, Kant claims that the moral law can only command that we promote the happiness of others from duty, not at all from inclination. He writes,

It is undoubtedly in this way, again, that we are to understand the passages from scripture in which we are commanded to love our neighbor, even our enemy. For, love as an inclination cannot be commanded, but beneficence from duty – even though no inclination impels us to it and, indeed, *natural and unconquerable aversion opposes it* – is *practical* and not *pathological* love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of feeling, in principles of action and not in melting sympathy; and it alone can be commanded.<sup>114</sup>

Love cannot be commanded, but it seems that it can be, and is, demanded; indeed, this is one version of the claim we make every time we judge something to be beautiful. Interestingly, the empirical and social interest we take in the taste of others seems to imply that we do respond, if not quite with love, with either social joy or some lesser feeling; the direct interest we take in theorizing about the lover of nature likewise mirrors

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<sup>113</sup> *CJ* 278.

<sup>114</sup> *GW* 13, emphasis mine.

the intellectual interest he takes in the objects over which he lingers. Since he is alone, both in reality and in our theorizing his undertakings, this feeling also cannot be called love, and it a fortiori cannot be called pathological love, but it is a respect tinged with a kind of delicacy not encountered in our moral speculations.

### **The Lover of Nature and Other Notable Characters**

Although in this section and the next we will devote most of our energies to tracking the emergence and movements of a “character” who undoubtedly serves for Kant as the hero of aesthetic theory – the lover of nature – we will also pay attention to other characters appearing along the way. These include the sycophant, the rogue, the naïf, and the artist – as well as a few lesser figures, the innkeeper, the poet, etc. Essentially, these are the characters Kant judges, as well as characters that let him investigate social judgment more generally. One of these characters, however, is not like the others, precisely by being more than a character, which is to say more than simply the symbol of a social figure. I refer to the artist, who will turn out to be both symbol and symbol-maker.

As we have seen, the question of whether one is in society or alone is hugely important to Kant. Remembering this can help us make sense of Kant’s somewhat peculiar usage, at least in some passages, of the term ‘a priori,’ a usage that is especially striking for readers of the first and second *Critiques*. There, of course, it means those concepts are the conditions of the possibility of objects, which is to say concepts that are prior to any particular experience. In the *Critique of Judgment*, it seems to describe not what we might ascribe to an inborn faculty, but an ability that has been socially and

historically *developed*. In the following, Kant seems to mean that the judgment must occur not before any empirical experience (which must by now be obvious, since all judgments of taste depend on a particular empirical experience) but before any empirical experience of the assent or dissent of our fellows: “How is a judgment possible in which the subject, merely on the basis of his *own* feeling of pleasure in an object, independently of the object’s concept, judges this pleasure as one attaching to the presentation of that same object *in all other subjects*, and does so a priori, i.e., *without being allowed to wait for other people’s assent?*”<sup>115</sup> Here, the experience to which our principle of judgment is prior is that of a *conversation*, and Kant describes it as if what the judge *really* wanted was to be “allowed” to wait for that assent before being required to pass judgment. This description, combined with the fact that Kant is concerned throughout not just to describe judgments of taste but to connect these in various ways with judgments of character, reveals that what we are looking for is evidence of an internalization of the standpoints of others. The fact that we are looking for a certain inscrutability in our judges – disinterest, absence of explicit purposes – means too that we do not want to meet with evidence of an uncritical internalization of the standpoints of others

As we have said, the hero of this section is the lover of nature, whom Kant compares to those attached to artifice:

[Some] have, with the best intention, regarded it as a sign of a good moral character to take an interest in the beautiful generally. But others have, not without grounds, contradicted them by appealing to the [fact of] experience that virtuosi of taste, who not just occasionally but apparently as a rule are vain, obstinate, and given to ruinous passions... [...] Now I am indeed quite willing to concede that an interest in the *beautiful in art* (in which I include the artistic use of natural beauties for our adornment, and hence for vanity’s sake) provides no proof whatever that [someone’s] way of thinking is attached to the morally good, or even inclined to it. On

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<sup>115</sup> *CJ* 288, emphasis mine.

the other hand, I do maintain that to take a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* (not merely to have the taste needed to judge it) is always the mark of a good soul...<sup>116</sup>

Here, we see that the “virtuoso of taste” – henceforth called the sycophant – gets treated rather roughly. He is not to be identified, however, with all who take an interest in the beautiful in art. The latter interest is, as we shall shortly see, perfectly compatible with an interest in natural beauty, although only if it turns out to rank lower than natural beauty. Kant’s use of the term ‘virtuosi’ to describe the lover of art already gives us a sense of the criticism this character is in for: the sycophant, more than any other character we’ll encounter, *plays* the judge in matters of taste, performs judgment in a way that strives to produce the illusion of autonomy and, in so striving, engages the work of art heteronomously. The sycophant’s tastes are attuned to the fashions of the moment, the objects one ought to be seen taking as objects of disinterest; the engagement is motivated by, rather than producing, an interest in sociality.

If an object of natural beauty should give rise to an interest, the interest in it is pure, unrelated to any purpose we might have in mind, and it is an interest made possible by connecting the judgment of taste with the idea that its object is a product of nature. “[T]he thought that the beauty in question was produced by nature must accompany the intuition and the reflection, and the direct interest we take in that beauty is based on that thought alone.”<sup>117</sup> Causality is, of course, how we distinguish purely subjective order from necessary and universal order. Causal order is not only the mode of synthesis proper to but also constitutive of the world insofar as we take it to be shared; necessity and universality are the marks of an intersubjective natural world, and the world is

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<sup>116</sup> *CJ* 298.

<sup>117</sup> *CJ* 299.

intersubjective or “objective” just insofar as we’ve organized it in those terms. When, then, we talk about the attempt to synthetically unite our aesthetic judgment of beautiful nature with our regular, objective or scientific judgments, the ideal regulating that attempt is a fully integrated world not only of objects but of subjects. We need to note right away, however, that also for Kant this attempt to integrate an aesthetic judgment of beautiful nature into our experience of the natural world fails, since we can never be done with the aesthetic judgment, never arrive at an object fit for integration. But what we can do, according to Kant, is to take an interest in the possibility of success, to take an interest in what exceeds our conceptual judgment; this interest, even if it cannot integrate the excess, binds it to the concept it exceeds.

When we pair the judgment of taste with the thought of natural causality, then, rather than subsuming the former under the latter, we are capable of taking a direct interest in beauty. The interest is characterized by Kant as “intellectual,” in contrast to an “empirical” interest reserved for objects of artifice. “Empirical,” for Kant, generally means that we are talking about something worked up into appearance, which is to say an object of human making. But this is what remains indeterminable in the case of natural beauty: we do not know if *we* are the source of the spontaneous “fit” between the understanding and the imagination, or if it is an act of God. As we saw earlier, the presentation of an object is always also the presentation of the subject, but here it seems that the trace of the subject disappears. In other words, when interest in an object is direct and intellectual, the empirical self disappears from the relationship – and here we really mean dis-appears. Here we have then the clear contrast between the lover of nature and the sycophant, but one that is rooted in a similarity of project: the sycophant wants to



appear as disappearing, but the lover of nature is directly interested in his objects, and this in a way that purifies the image of self. Kant clearly maintains that the interest described belongs to the lover of beautiful nature, and its purity is connected to his purity and the unconditionality of his love for his object, a love not tainted by thought of empirical (material) use for the object or even by any thought of potential harm from it. But nonetheless, “we” take an interest in the very idea of the lover of nature (who, not to be too cute about it, is on his way to becoming that very idea), without any empirical encounter at all.

It remains unclear who “we” are in this formulation, for Kant does not give an explanation for the sudden rise of speculative observers at this juncture. Kant describes “our” reaction to a situation in which a man with taste enough to judge art nonetheless is “glad to leave a room ... and to turn instead to the beautiful in nature.” “If that is how he chooses, we shall ourselves regard this choice of his with esteem and assume that he has a beautiful soul, such as no connoisseur and lover of art can claim to have because of the interest he takes in his objects [of art].”<sup>118</sup> This is the one single judgment of taste in the entire Kantian corpus that does not involve an empirical encounter with the occasioning object. Without *seeing* anything at all, “we” infer that he has a beautiful soul. In a strange reversal of the symbolic relationship between beauty and the morally good, Kant writes as if beauty were what remained hidden and goodness were what appeared when

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<sup>118</sup> *CJ* 299-300. Although the relationship between beauty and morality *within* the lover of nature is much discussed, commentators rarely take notice of the implied second order relationship “we” have to him. For an interesting counterexample, however, look at Jane Kneller’s discussion of “Intellectual Interests in Nature, Art, and Other People,” where she focuses her attention on the fact that, for Kant, love of nature and respect for humanity are intimately conjoined, and goes on to link that conjunction with the respect we have for moral order in one another. (Longuenesse 67.) Kneller’s project is a defense of aesthetic judgment as contemplative, as, that is, not directly practical or theoretical, but she does not anchor her analysis on either symbolic rationality or politics.

he claims an interest in the beauty of nature as the “*mark* of a good soul.”<sup>119</sup> We do not need an empirical encounter with the lover of nature precisely because we have a rule by which to judge him: if a man should leave the galleries and head for the woods, then he has a beautiful soul. For us, then, which is to say in the context of aesthetic theory, the lover of nature is exclusively a social symbol, a kind of ideal.

Whoever we are, the lover of nature cannot be concerned about us, since our approval will only be granted if it is not sought. When Kant writes about the lover of nature, he sets up the situation as follows:

Consider someone who is all by himself (and has no intention of communicating his observation to others) and who contemplates the beautiful shape of a wild flower, a bird, an insect, etc., out of admiration and love for them, and would not want nature to be entirely without them even if they provided him no prospect of benefit but instead perhaps even some harm.<sup>120</sup>

It is more than interesting that the ideal conditions for this kind of judgment of taste – a judgment we have otherwise described as interesting exactly because it makes possible the universal *communication* of *feeling* – involve being alone, without actual communication and without even the intention to communicate with others. On the reading we are pursuing, these conditions turn out to be something like the negative register in which the social moment in all judgments of taste appears.

In a judgment of natural beauty, the occasioning object continues to assert its independence of us, an independence one might expect us to find disturbing. Certainly, it disturbs our ability to conceptualize the object before us: for, even if we know that this thing we are enjoying is the song of a nightingale, or a sunset, or a mountain, we are also aware of what exceeds those characterizations, ripe with potential connections but not

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<sup>119</sup> *CJ* 299, my emphasis.

<sup>120</sup> *CJ* 299.

finally determined by any of them. But in connection with natural beauty, that excess is experienced as a future for thought. Not only that, but the idea that thought might come to comprehensive terms with the world – an idea paradoxically made possible by the experience of the world outstripping thought – portends a future or at least an ideal coincidence of concept and purpose, a coincidence that would mean that our mode of theoretical engagement might not be at odds with our modes of practical engagement. If it were possible, the achievement of such a coincidence would guarantee that all activities we might suggest would necessarily meet the standards of the categorical imperative, since we would no longer be oriented in or by means of our particularity; it must also be said that the actual attainment of such a state would also mean the loss of freedom, the loss of the antagonism between the causal laws of the world and the idea of reason. Kant describes the connection as follows:

But in view of the analogy between a pure judgment of taste, which depends on no interest whatever and [yet] makes us feel a liking that it also presents a priori as proper for mankind generally, on the one hand, and a moral judgment, which does the same from concepts, on the other hand, someone with that way of thinking [the moral training or receptiveness thereto] does not need to engage in distinct, subtle, and deliberate meditation in order to be led by the analogy to an interest in the object of the pure judgment of taste which is just as strong and direct as his interest in the object of moral judgment; the only difference is that the first interest is free while the second is based on objective laws.<sup>121</sup>

A moral judgment is made under the idea of freedom but experienced as constraint (duty), which is to say it is *objectively* free and *subjectively* unfree; aesthetic judgment is undergone as if *subjectively* free but is then projected as *objectively* unfree (in the sense that we dictate our liking to be proper to mankind generally and proclaim that others should find as we do). It is the coincidence of our respective likings with what others

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<sup>121</sup> *CJ* 302.

might only experience as a constrained liking that makes the experience of natural beauty an experience of the world as if we held some kind of exceptional position in it, either because our goodness suits us to serve as the standard or because when we are alone in the woods, we could imagine that our likings just *are* the standard.<sup>122</sup> The absence of other people, i.e., the absence of the signs of inherited or enforced norms, allows our imaginations to run wild. In addition, the purity of the activity, the never-coming-to-rest, the fact that a further determination of the object in terms of either concepts or purposes is never finally achieved, preserves the purity of the possibilities it engenders. Since as agents we require a determinate representation of our object and purpose in order to actually act, the incompleteness of such a judgment guarantees an inability to make any transient moment of it into an object of desire. All of those moments are, then, “safe” contents of thought.

This is not to say that the visit to the woods is an actual return to nature. As we’ve said, it takes a certain kind of training, or perhaps (Kant is on the fence here) a natural receptiveness to such a training, in order to be able to sustain this experience, and it is only insofar as it is sustained that it yields an *interest* in the reality of the objects occasioning our judgment. Again: to “take a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* (not merely to have the taste needed to judge it) is always the mark of a good soul; and ... if this interest is habitual, if it readily associates itself with a *contemplation of nature*, this [fact] indicates at least a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling.”<sup>123</sup> And “whoever takes such an interest in the beautiful in nature can only do so to the extent that he has beforehand already solidly established an interest in the morally good. Hence if someone

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<sup>122</sup> This is the option *not* explored by Kant and so must be confessed to be the result of our indulging in a bit of speculation.

<sup>123</sup> *CJ* 299.

is directly interested in the beauty of nature, we have cause to suppose that he has at least a predisposition to a good moral attitude.”<sup>124</sup> *Something* about our lover of nature has to have been solidly disciplined before coming to the woods; otherwise there is no telling what the voluptuousness before him might produce by way of thoughts.

Kant thus wants something along the lines of two different and conflicting guarantees that this train of thought will not encounter resistance: on the one hand, the lover of nature must be (or believe himself to be) alone; on the other hand, the material from which he produces his train of thoughts has to already have been oriented toward the good. But if that were the case, then he should also have nothing to fear in the presence of other people. (Indeed, we will see an example shortly of just such a phenomenon in Kant’s presentation of naiveté, which we can understand as the character of a person who is the same whether in the woods or at a cocktail party, a fate that would be a disaster for most of us.) The moments of excess in beauties of nature are not rebarbative. Natural beauty thus gives rise to visions of goodness that can accommodate multiple contents or desires. In judging natural beauty, Kant claims that we do not need to know what kind of thing we are judging, what its concept is, but of course, we do *have* some conception: “This is a sunset.” “This is the song of nightingale.” The conception is not experienced as a sufficient concept of the object of our *judgment*, however, because we include in our field of reference, or in our referent, what exceeds the concept but which we nonetheless assign to the object as the blanket attribute “beauty.” On this reading, the purity of the interest in a beautiful object of nature is not a purity of identity but of non-exclusion, of a happy diversity *among* various possible contents, an affinity of what nonetheless remains distinct.

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<sup>124</sup> *CJ* 300.

Not only, then, aren't the moments of excess in natural beauty rebarbative: we are *pleased* to find them. The lover of natural beauty "is taking a direct interest in the beauty of nature, and this interest is intellectual. That is, not only does he like nature's product for its form, but he also likes its existence, even though no charm of sense is involved; and he also does not connect that existence with any purpose whatever."<sup>125</sup> Given the fact that Kant's aesthetics are almost always taken to be purely formal, the claim here that it is possible to have a *pure* liking not only for form but for content as well is surprising. The form of the object is what is enjoyed in the judgment of taste proper, and the "existence" is that in which the lover of natural beauty becomes interested when he couples that first judgment with the thought that this is a product of nature. When Kant claims that "no charm of sense is involved," we can see that existence is tied to sensibility, to what exceeds the form enjoyed in the judgment of taste.

In this ability [taste], judgment does not find itself subjected to a heteronomy from empirical laws, as it does elsewhere in empirical judging—concerning objects of such a pure liking it legislates to itself, just as reason does regarding the power of desire. And because the subject has this possibility within him, while outside him there is also the possibility that nature will harmonize with it, judgment finds itself referred to something that is both in the subject and outside him, something that is neither nature nor freedom and yet is linked with the basis of freedom, the supersensible, in which the theoretical and the practical power are in an unknown manner combined and joined into a unity.<sup>126</sup>

This is the unity of concept and purpose, conjoined in "an unknown manner" of which we nonetheless are aware; it is, of course, neither concept nor purpose but 'purposiveness' which is a concept that is not dissociated from its relationship to and dependence on desire. It is a vision of conciliation involved in all judgments of taste but preserved or sustained only in nature.

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<sup>125</sup> *CJ* 300.

<sup>126</sup> *CJ* 353.

Again, whatever account we give for the harmony between the understanding and the imagination in the lover of nature, it is not the accidental harmony Kant ascribes between to the relation between the naïf and the forms of social decorum. In the latter case, instead of feeling esteem or respect for the figure of our judgment, we feel a certain condescending affection:

We laugh at such simplicity as does not yet know how to dissemble, and yet we also rejoice in the natural simplicity here thwarting that art of dissimulation. We were expecting the usual custom, the artificial utterance carefully aimed at creating a beautiful illusion—and lo! there is uncorrupted, innocent nature, which we did not at all expect to find... Here the beautiful but false illusion, which usually has great significance in our judgment, is suddenly transformed into nothing, so that, as it were, the rogue within ourselves is exposed...<sup>127</sup>

The tension that precedes the enjoyment of naïveté stems from the fact that we expect to find with every lapse in convention something not to our liking. The pleasure we feel when that expectation is thwarted is accompanied by a moment of displeasure, since that expectation itself reveals the rogue within ourselves, which is to say the unsuitability of the author of our own beautiful illusions (of our sociability) to be revealed in the light of day. An instance of naïveté does not reveal something about the person to whom it is ascribed but about those who ascribe it to him, giving everyone a vision of momentary release from convention but simultaneously revealing the conventions to be both merely conventional *and* nonetheless the necessary conditions of sociability. In other words, what we expect to find mirrored back at us in every lapse of convention is something not fit for viewing; that is why we have to be alone in the woods, away from convention altogether, in order to get pure enjoyment unmarred by worry or criticism. Since fine art involves the transformation of convention (its augmentation when Kant treats it as

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<sup>127</sup> *CJ* 335.

progressive, and its overturning when revolutionary), the enjoyment of works of fine art always involves a similar moment of displeasure, although Kant is very clear that the “nature” at the center of a work of fine art is in no sense naïve. Naiveté does not depend on a knowledge of and engagement with convention but rather on a lack of knowledge of the conventions in the first place. The artist, like the rest of us non-innocents when we are in public, finds it necessary, by contrast, to keep her transgression in check.

Kant’s rogue is always connected with the effort at true illusion, at duping its audience, at successful dissemblance. In addition to the lover of nature, the well-mannered cocktail partygoer, and the naïf, we also occasionally run into the rogue as an independent character, the rogue personified.<sup>128</sup> In this first example, Kant places “us” in the position of rogue and trickster:

Suppose we had played a trick on this lover of the beautiful, sticking in the ground artificial flowers ... or perching artfully carved birds on the branches of trees, and suppose he then discovered the deceit. The direct interest he previously took in these things would promptly vanish, thought perhaps it would be replaced by a different interest, an interest of vanity, to use these things to decorate his room for the eyes of others.<sup>129</sup>

Our lover of the beautiful in nature undergoes a swift transformation, or perhaps it is rather a revelation: the mere fact of artificiality in the woods reveals a vanity in that lover of nature that would have remained hidden if only we’d left him in peace or allowed him an “authentic” experience of nature. Almost immediately, unless he returns himself to the purity of the original judgment in which the source of the object makes no difference, his thoughts are drawn back to his room and the decorating possibilities. More

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<sup>128</sup> Confession: it is the translator who repeats the term rogue, when in fact only the rogue within ourselves is properly a rogue, or “Schalk;” the rogue we are about to meet is rather a willing “Bursche” or bloke. I understand why the translator uses the term rogue in the second case as well, however, since “Bursche” is a slang term for young man, a term that, at least in contemporary German, most definitely carries with it at the very least connotations of mischievousness.

<sup>129</sup> *CJ* 299.



importantly, he thinks of decorating his room *for the eyes of others*. Our lover of nature has been transformed into the sycophant. Although Kant claims here two possible responses, a return to the purely formal judgment of taste or a co-optation of the object for vanity, both of which involve the effort to sustain or rekindle the pleasure taken in the object, he claims only a few paragraphs later that such a revelation effectively extinguishes the possibility of enjoyment:

But in order for us to take this interest in beauty, this beauty must always be that of nature: our interest vanishes completely as soon as we notice that we have been deceived, that only art was involved; it vanishes so completely that at that point even taste can no longer find anything beautiful, nor sight anything charming. 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 the greatest satisfaction [initially]—on the guests staying at his inn to enjoy the country air, by hiding in the bush some roguish youngster who (with a reed or rush in his mouth) knew how to copy that song... But as soon as one realizes that it was all deception, no one will long endure listening...; and this is how it is with the song of any other bird.<sup>130</sup>

Even with some details excised, we can see that the very idea of such a trick inspires a kind of hyperbolic poetic response in Kant: on the one hand, there is the poet's enjoyment of birdsong in isolation, "in a secluded thicket;" on the other, an innkeeper who clearly means no harm (but also clearly wants to make a buck) and who stashes a roguish youngster in the thicket in order to please his guests. This is the moment where a rogue is revealed in nature, as the author of its charms, and the revelation absolutely *destroys* all possible enjoyment. The description of that destruction is clearly in tension with either of the possible responses predicted for our lover of nature above: a quick break with any interest in the sensible existence of the object, i.e., a return to the purity of taste, or a vain

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<sup>130</sup> *CJ* 303.

interest in the technical reproduction of the natural object. Kant says here in no uncertain terms that “even taste” – and it is unclear whether that ‘even’ is intended to stress taste’s normal commitment to formality or to mark it as a libertine faculty – has to look away.

It is the peculiar relation in which the supposedly purely formal judgment of taste stands to its content, content capable of entering into the form, re-shaping it, and so on, that leads to Kant’s ambivalence here: on the one hand, he wants to claim that our enjoyment is purely formal, since this is what preserves its purity; on the other hand, the formality sometimes appears to belong not to the understanding but to sensibility itself. One of the strangest turns in this passage is the moment when Kant feels it necessary to append to his anecdote the claim that we are not satisfied or entertained by human reproductions of “the song of any other bird” either, as if the reader were in danger of mistaking this to be a claim about the song of the nightingale in particular. The *poet’s* identification of the song as that of the nightingale does nothing to prevent it from raising thoughts of a thicket, a warm summer night, the moon – all of these are somehow extensions of that song, a subjective response that nonetheless augments and gives reality to the objective world, linking bird with thicket with sky. But the *reproduction* of birdsong, not a linguistic allusion or even musical variation, but the attempt at perfect reproduction, is experienced as limiting – or, actually, as *destructive* of the aesthetic pleasure, while the possibility of species-song identification remains. This must have to do with the fact that what is revealed here is the imagination not in its freedom but in its reproductive capacity, where its activity is determined by concept or purpose: the birdsong is reproduced according to our conception of it, and the reproduction is deployed with the aim of gratifying the guests and making a profit. For both duped and

duper, then, the moment has become confessional, making it publicly known that the one wants birdsong and the other money. Empirical concepts do not only involve a constitution of an object in accordance with rules but also of the subject as a knower, and when these concepts are purposes, their development also involves a constitution of the subject as a desirer. This is the reason why reproductions aimed at gratification either extinguish aesthetic enjoyment or lead to vain interest. Judgments of an object as both beautiful and natural “succeed,” then, because they leave us with an awareness of ourselves as active without thereby also revealing *us* as any particular kind of thing.

In our catalogue of characters, however, we have seen that the interest aesthetic theory takes in all of these judgments is not in their objects but in the *subjects*. Our judgments of taste have the character of a demonstration, one that not only takes place in but to a degree also constitutes a social space, a more constrained sphere of intersubjectivity than that projected by the thought of an objective natural world. By way of objects, we are relating to other subjects and perhaps to ourselves. The judgment of a judgment of taste is, then, never *merely* about the attempt to synthesize it with our experience in general; it also involves either a real judgment or a projected judgment of the original judge by still other (real or projected) judges. This is true, as we have seen even in the case of natural beauty, which might seem counter-intuitive given the fact that it is by definition something not social. In an earlier footnote, Kant writes that a “judgment we make about an object of our liking may be wholly *disinterested* but still very interesting... Only in society does it become *interesting* to have taste.”<sup>131</sup> Although it looks very similar, this is not the same claim as the one he makes in connection with

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<sup>131</sup> *CJ* 205, n10.

“artificial” beauty: “Only in *society* is the beautiful of empirical interest.”<sup>132</sup> Kant does not qualify the kind of interest in the first passage as empirical, hence he leaves open the questions: to what does this interest attach? For *whom* is *what* interesting? Although natural beauty is not meant to be enjoyed in society, our lover of nature (who, we will remember, must have had moral training or be exceptionally susceptible to such training) has to have *left* society for the woods, meaning that even that intellectual interest in beautiful nature is related (negatively) to sociality.

### **Taste and Social Judgment**

The political landscape first developed by Kant in connection with the faculties has thus eventually come to be populated by a variety of figures, none of whom is a figure of authority, even if some of them are likeable and others even heroic: the lover of nature, the naïf, the rogue, the sycophant, and the artist. Each of these characters serves to personify a different relationship to the crisis in symbolic mediation. The lover of nature is able to do without representations of authority and cultural order, although the surprise there is that he in fact conjures up thoughts of the ultimate authorities: God and/or the kingdom of ends. The naïf is a lesser figure, a kind of accidental hero who manages to break the rules of decorum without thereby exceeding the bounds of taste. The rogue, on the other hand, knows just what is called for and why, and the ends that direct his activities are always aimed at gratification, vanity, profit. The sycophant is likewise a vain figure, a lover of culture and, even more so, a lover of being known to love culture. The artist is, besides the lover of nature, the only other true hero in this landscape. The artist could be said to represent the struggle for autonomy, not only

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<sup>132</sup> *CJ* 297.

against nature but also against the demands of culture. This allows her to represent the demands of sensibility over and against, but also in mediated tension with, the demands of culture. The fact that a work of fine art represents not success but struggle is precisely what makes it a work. The figure of the artist within Kant's aesthetic theory, like the work of art in our encounter with it, serves to symbolize a kind of political ideal: that we might encounter the concrete struggles of others in ways that combine recognition and opacity such that the result is an affective bond. The artist and the work of art are thus the topic of our next and final chapter on Kant.

All of these figures are, in a sense, political types, ways of articulating various possible orientations to both the now-diffused social authority and the materials its diffusal renders opaque. It would be too much, perhaps, to claim that, as the moral law and the categories of the understanding set the parameter for moral and theoretical reasoning, these categories function to organize our social and political judgments. The disanalogies are patent. Kant's characters are not objective and transhistorical categories; they are products of social judgment rather than conditions of its possibility. They are by no means set in number, and our list may thus be incomplete or include too many figures. Further, they do not apply directly to the political scene; instead, these are second order judgments of judges, attempts perhaps by these means to make sense of our own orientation to the world of possible objects of aesthetic pleasure. They are social schemata, or, rather, social symbols.

Although I have not seen it formulated in terms of the production of anything like *aesthetic* identity, the idea that *something* like a midlevel "identity" is needed to supplement our moral vocation is not new. In her *Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard, for

example, tries to work up a notion of practical identity<sup>133</sup> as a way of putting to rest worries over the formality of Kantian moral theory. In this context, she makes the apt point that an unwillingness to deal with the fact that so much of who and what we are is contingent is a sign of “a kind of immaturity.”<sup>134</sup> We might add to her observation here, however, that contentment with contingency is a symptom of a somewhat defeated practical reason. Indeed, the problem that Korsgaard means to address ends up, I would argue, simply re-inscribed in her treatment of it onto the concept of identity itself, which is to say reiterated at a higher level of generality. The divide between the moral law as necessary and universal and the given social and natural conditions of our agency as contingent and local makes it difficult for Korsgaard to ground her concept of practical identity in any meaningful standard. The fact that our particular practical identities have to be read over and against our commitment to humanity in general means that, just as with the evaluation of individual actions, we have a standard of rejection, but not yet a standard of adoption or embrace.<sup>135</sup>

As Kant himself points out in his essay on “Theory and Practice,” the standard for moral acceptability is absolute, but those for judging counsels of prudence are quantitative, matters of better and worse. He writes:

[T]wo opposing actions might both be relatively good, with one better than the other, which would then count as comparatively evil. For they would differ only in *degree*, not in *kind*. And it is the same with all actions whose motive is not the absolute law of reason (duty), but an end which we have arbitrarily taken as a basis. For this end will be part of the

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. also her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* footnote on 215, where she connects her discussion of practical identity with a discussion of desire, identity, and marriage.

<sup>134</sup> cited as *Sources of Normativity* 241 in Gowan 552.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Christopher W. Gowans, “Practical Identities and Autonomy: Korsgaard’s Reformation of Kant’s Moral Philosophy” (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (May, 2002), 546-570.)

total of ends whose attainment we call happiness, and one action may contribute more, and another less to my happiness...”<sup>136</sup> This is, of course, Kant’s problem with utilitarian ethics. Happiness is notoriously hard to predict, and, as we’ll be making the case over the course of the rest of the dissertation, it has “lately” become much, much harder. But with his reference to “the total of ends whose attainment we call happiness,” Kant also makes it clear that, for him, happiness is a concept that admits of totalization, that the problem really *is* one of prediction.<sup>137</sup> This conception is importantly different from the one we are developing, and it involves an illusion that might itself be said to be a symptom of the disappearance of compelling authority. That phrase, “compelling authority,” involves a kind of contradiction, since it refers to an authority – that which makes demands of us that we would not make of ourselves – but an authority to which we are also affectively bound. It is this complex of affect and resistance that prevents “happiness” from serving as a general concept under which we might gather, if only we could specify them, the sum of all of our ends.<sup>138</sup> To satisfy authority, an end we must have if we are affectively bound to it, is to disappoint some other set of ends. This disappointment or frustration results in the specification, however, of these *as* ends, unless, of course, the authority itself remains unspecified.

Korsgaard recognizes that with the expectation of moral autonomy, praise and blame – social affirmation and condemnation – are essentially evicted from the moral

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<sup>136</sup> *PW* 67.

<sup>137</sup> We might on this view think that the commands of happiness are opaque for each of us because we cannot correctly predict the surest path, given our respective and different commitments, or that the differences between our commitments are due to the opacity caused by our failure to predict. Neither conception, however, involves the acknowledgement contradictory aims *within* those sets of ends and commitments.

<sup>138</sup> Although I have just suggested that Kant’s notion of happiness serves as evidence of his failure to understand the *source* of the opacity surrounding our selection of ends, the fact that he organizes his critique of judgment around the subjective experience of *pleasure* means that he remains on other levels aware of it. It is the moment of pleasure that Hegel fails to regard when he castigates Kant for his commitment to reflective judgment.

sphere, but she does not recognize that they take up their function again in the aesthetic one. The new requirement that we reflectively evaluate our goods is accompanied by the loss of the standards by which we once did so, except, of course, for the purely formal standard provided by the categorical imperative, which cannot of itself suggest ends.<sup>139</sup> This is the problem of modernity, and it appears within philosophy as the problem of taste. Since no final standard of taste can be provided, we might imagine that it is the *sociality* of the judgment that matters most. Indeed, if the problem of modernity is judgment's loss of contact with the secret springs that motivate it, it is hard to imagine what *besides* sociality can matter, in which case Korsgaard would be right to conceive of those social norms and conventions into which we're born as essentially contingent except insofar as they are subject to scrutiny in terms of moral acceptability.

Even within Kant's aesthetics, it might be argued that an aesthetic version of Korsgaard's fundamental "moral identity" serves as the final arbiter, since it is the thought of humanity itself, "mankind in general"<sup>140</sup> that arises out of the experience of the beauty of nature. But the negotiation of practical identities does not take place in the woods. It takes place in the city. When we praise the lover of nature, it is for choosing *that* identity over that of art-lover, for leaving the gallery – not out of frustration, since Kant hypothesizes a character educated enough to appreciate its offerings – for the woods. But Kant gives us at least two empirical versions of this pleasure in sociality,

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<sup>139</sup> Although Kant himself acknowledges this issue, the following line from "Theory and Practice" seem to suggest that his theory might suffer from a priority problem: "Only then [once I'm motivated by the moral law] am I entitled to look round for happiness..." However, in this essay he describes something not unlike Korsgaard's notion of a fundamental moral identity, an identity forged by the cultivation of a certain orientation to action in general by way of moral feeling. The connection between that fundamental identity and any midlevel practical identity, the kind that leads us to take on less-than-universal but more-than-private commitments, remains obscure however. Further, interesting work could be done around the "sublimity of man's moral vocation" (TP 71) insofar as our awe depends precisely on the pure formality of, i.e., absence of sensible content 'in', the moral law.

<sup>140</sup> *CJ* 301.



which take the names in the *Critique of Judgment* of vanity and social joy. “Vanity” names an interested orientation that is masked as disinterested, that is, indeed, interested in having others take him to be disinterested. This is confusing enough, but it makes some sense when we connect it with the question of *appearing* autonomous. “Social joy” is harder to figure out. Although Kant is unwilling to link it directly with the pleasure to be had in art, which is no sign of a good soul and perhaps even suggests a certain depravity, he regularly discusses it in connection with artifacts and ornamentation. Kant describes the social element in taste as follows:

For we judge someone refined if he has the inclination and the skill to communicate his pleasure to others, and if he is not satisfied with an object unless he can feel his liking for it in community with others. [...] But in the end, when civilization has reached its peak, it makes this communication almost the principal activity of refined inclination, and sensations are valued only to the extent that they are universally communicable.<sup>141</sup>

First, it is clear that the refined man at the start of this passage, the man who is not satisfied with his own liking unless it is felt in community, is also pleased by the object insofar as it serves as a grounds *for* community. That makes good sense of the term “social joy,” although leaves as a mystery in what way objects of aesthetic enjoyment can serve to ground community. By the end of this passage, this joy in community has come to dominate the enjoyment of the object, almost to the exclusion of any other, sensible, source of pleasure.

This passage, and indeed all of those in which Kant addresses the progressive civilization of taste, makes it appear as though social joy were simply another name for an increasing coordination of taste, a process in which, moreover, the act of coordination comes to serve as the primary *object* of taste and source of pleasure. Kant’s analysis of

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<sup>141</sup> *CJ* 297.

the work of art, however, sustains a very different vision of social joy, one not aimed at *overcoming* the role of sensation per se but at acknowledging it as a representation of our shared need for specific objects of pleasure. In this “vision,” then, sensation is acknowledged as the mark of a needy subject, and neediness itself is taken to be a source of an affective bond and an invitation to esteem. Although it won’t be our primary focus here, it is important to note the presence of both affection and respect, since it is only when both of these are present that we can be said to identify with, without demanding identity from, another.

Vanity seeks, it seems, the affirmation of identity, which means that the object-selection made on its behalf lacks the specificity to mitigate the formality of the moral law. The sycophant (our social symbol of vanity) is, then, defeated practical reason embodied. Social joy as Kant generally describes it maintains some ever-diminishing reference to sensation, but it is on its way to becoming purely formal, so even social joy can’t be quite what we’re after either if we wish to revive practical reason. Let us turn next, then, to the artist and the work of art.

## CHAPTER III

### SYMBOL-MAKERS

#### **Introduction**

In the last chapter, we found ourselves predisposed to respect the lover of nature, to hold his orientation to its products in a certain esteem. Insofar as this was a predisposition, however, it required no empirical encounter; indeed, since it precludes an empirical encounter, we did not call this mode of attachment “love.” We found ourselves feeling affection for the naïf, disdain for the sycophant, and perhaps a kind of tolerant exasperation with the rogue. As promised, we turn now to the artist and the work of art, and we will see that our encounters here will invoke a more complex response, respect mingling with affection (as well as confusion and perhaps even exasperation). Since we will argue that theoretical abstraction and even symbolic representation necessarily miss something key about both artist and work, however, we should whenever practical replace talk of the artist” and “the work of art” with references to artists and works of art.

We will orient this discussion by way of the concept of “empirical interest” we introduced in the last chapter. There, it will be remembered, we saw that judgments of taste occasioned by a natural object can, in special cases, give rise to an intellectual interest in the reality of the object in question. We noted the peculiarity that, at the level of the second order judgment whereby we pronounce the interested judge to be a lover of nature, we do not require any empirical encounter with him. Kant seems to suggest that we are nonetheless “interested” in this judge, but this interest seems more like the respect

produced in us by the moral law than the empirically-oriented social interest we take in the other figures from the last chapter. This is especially true when we remember that interest is always interest in the reality of the object, in its existence, that is connected with the demand for an empirical encounter with the object – or, since in this case we’re discussing a subject, a social encounter with what interests us. This judgment of the lover of nature as worthy of respect does not seek to place him socially but rather to imagine him in the woods, and it does not seem to acknowledge him in his materiality or neediness so much as for his ability to dissociate himself from his own needs. The judgment treats him formally, and it is the absence of the need to deploy genuinely reflective judgment in this case that allows us to simply express our judgment *as* a rule. Other than in that special case, however, we saw that the pleasure of a pure judgment of taste was in form as subtended by content or matter, so that the subsequent “interest” served to orient us to the sensible excess as a mark of the existence of the object – or subject – in question. But there are different modes of interested orientation to the excess. We might say that the judgments of others as sycophants, rogues, or naïfs treat the subjects they thus classify like the objects of regular empirical judgments – as contingently constituted even so far as their materiality (wants and needs) are concerned, and as subject to judgment without direct empirical encounter. These are not precisely social judgments of taste, then, but are instead social judgments predicated on judgments of taste.

Both questions of form and materiality are more complicated when it comes to artists and their products. Starting with the latter, in works of art – so long as we’re dealing with representational art at least – “form” is given by both the object of the

representation (its articulation in time and space) and the culture in which it is made (by way of the artistic forms, rhythm, style, genre, etc. that further specify the works articulation in time and space). This means that we have to ask, first, what it means to appreciate the form of a work in a judgment of taste, and, second, to what precisely in or about the work we're oriented in terms of the empirical interest to which that judgment can give rise. In order to take such an interest, we have to be able to recognize the object to be the product of artifice, and there are two "marks" that indicate its artificial status: first, the presentation is mediated by the aforementioned cultural forms, and, second, it bears the mark of the particular artist. Insofar as this latter mark, however, arises from neither the represented object nor the surrounding culture, it is an indication of a failure of determination. At the same time, because it is also the condition of the possibility of our judging the work to be one of fine art and so a suitable occasion for a judgment of taste, this is the failure upon which depends the work's success. If the artist had been overly correct in her deployment of cultural forms, we would have experienced the work as merely academic. If she had been overly correct in her replication of the natural form, we would have been fooled into mistaking the object directly for a natural object (and, if the subject matter were something we could not find beautiful in nature, we would have been disgusted by it). We have already discussed the failure of works that mechanically reproduce objects of nature (create, essentially, fakes), and we will have occasion to discuss both academic work and art's capacity to disgust in what follows. Our central target, however, is the mark of the artist, since on this depends the function works of art have in symbolizing the courageous efforts at (and inevitable failures of) reflective judgment in a time of crisis. If the demand is that we now author our own symbols, no

symbol can stake a claim without making an appeal to our judgment, and such an appeal can only be made by way of inevitably failed representations.

We have already seen that reflection functions as the copula in determinative judgments. The pure judgment of taste, and its purest representation in the figure of the solitary lover of nature, is pure precisely insofar as it takes the form of an expansive copulation between the object and the rest of our imaginative and conceptual contents. This in turn raises the specter of an audience of identical knowers, so that the projected synthesis of the world of objects is also a projected synthesis of the world of subject. There are, however, those other less pure forms of aesthetic judgment, the “sensory” judgment of objects as agreeable and then those judgments of taste deployed in connection with artificial objects, works of art and ornamentation. The impurities of these other aesthetic judgments have turned out to be intimately connected to the sociality of judgment. This connection is related to the way they seem to simultaneously represent unity and disunity. It is the appearance of disunity within the field of aesthetic judgment that interests us in particular, and its function can be interpreted in various ways. Disunity might represent merely a *task* for the understanding (a revision of our given concepts or laws, for example, in the way even pure judgments of taste might also provide materials or incentive for the understanding). More importantly in terms of this project, it might embody the disunity either *in* or *among* us, which would present us with a kind of *psychological* or *political* task. The thought, in its most general form, is this: judgments of taste are supposed to symbolize the promise of unity, and this seems to hold insofar as we keep our attention carefully focused on the *form* of the judgments rather than their content. They have, however, something of a seedy empirical underbelly, and

as we turn our attention to the *content* of the judgments, our pleasurable and unpleasurable orientations to material objects in the world, we find an otherwise hidden potential to represent *disunity*. Indeed, already implicit in their seeming to *promise* or project unity, all judgments of taste emblemize moments of disunity. Only in connection with works of art, however, do we rely on the disruption itself as a condition of the possibility for a judgment of taste. This disruption in form is required in order to appreciate an object *as* a work of art. More generally, insofar as we encounter disruption in our judgments, they mark either a limitation within our empirical judgment (which could arise from either our concept falling short of the object or vice versa) or, more intriguingly, the bounds of knowledge insofar as we find ourselves referring the case to the ideas of reason, reading the failure, in other words, against the demands of reason. The object, in that case, appears as explicitly *not* the product of a being fitted with an intuitive understanding, as made by an author *not* free from causal constraint, etc. The judgment thus gets referred to our ideas of God, freedom, and the soul, but the reference is negative. In terms of the idea of reason which interests us most here, that of freedom, this is the flip side of beauty's capacity to symbolize morality.

From the fact that this negative reference relates to morality, we can already identify the threat to the demands that idea of reason makes on us, at least in its most general shape: it is the equally weighty demand for happiness. Kant writes, "There is, however, *one* end that can be presupposed in the case of all rational beings (insofar as imperatives apply to them, namely as dependent beings), and therefore one purpose that they not merely *could* have but that we can safely presuppose they all actually *do* have,

and that purpose is happiness.”<sup>142</sup> The beautiful work of art represents, in a small way, a mediation between the competing demands for happiness and morality, but it simultaneously represents to us the tension between them, a tension that is both within and among us. Even more importantly, from an empirical standpoint at least, the work of art represents the tension between the *social* demands which both seek to give shape to and meet with resistance in the form of our desires. It is the social and historical work of these other demands that remains, however, under the surface in Kant’s writing, coming closer only when he occupies himself with questions about manners and the education of taste. Here we can already see, however, that for any work to be recognized as an artifact is also to cast suspicion upon its origins, for, although the work is beautiful only insofar as and to the degree that it lacks a purpose, every human maker is known to have at least one general and always-functional purpose: happiness. Thus, the mark of the author, which lends force and expressive capacity to the work of art, is a confession of base, material constraint not only because it is a failure of conceptual determination to become entirely causal (to make paint look like objects, a sculpture look like a living being, and so on) but symbolizes also the failure of reason to fully determine the imagination and the power of desire.

### **Art as the Vehicle for Aesthetic Education**

Insofar as Kant treats the history of art, and the education it provides its audiences, as progressive, it seems as though the excesses in works of art could be treated as purposive for future socialization in roughly the same way that the excess in natural beauty provides material for future understanding. In fact, and without actually arguing

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<sup>142</sup> GW 26.



for it here, we will take the historical emergence of the cultural forms, genres, and rules that govern the production of works of fine art, at least insofar as their academic correctness is concerned, as an attempt to address but also pacify or civilize the material excesses of all artistic representation. When Kant treats this trajectory as progressive, he portrays it as one that aims ultimately at coordinated liking and, at its highest point, a coordinated liking where the fact of coordination is the central object of delight. But Kant's discussions also betray a certain worry around the question. He recognizes that there is no guarantee that what furthers identification among members of a society will harmonize with the good. Kant treats moral education as the only *guarantee* of a genuinely progressive education, although he is willing to assign taste an educative *psychological* function whereby it supplants a harsher discipline in helping establish habitual orientation:

Taste enables us, as it were, to make the transition from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest without making too violent a leap; for taste presents the imagination as admitting, even in its freedom, of determination that is purposive for the understanding, and it teaches us to like even objects of sense freely, even apart from sensible charm.<sup>143</sup>

The worry that never becomes an explicit object of analysis for Kant but crops up in sundry places (and is at the heart of art's unreliability) is that imagination will "in its freedom" show us something that we will not like (or, worse, something we do in fact like, but should not). But what does that mean, we will not like what is revealed? In the above, taste is praised for presenting the imagination as "admitting, even in its freedom, of determination that is purposive for the understanding" – that is not rebarbative to the understanding, even if it also is not amenable to synthesis. This is something Kant is claiming about taste in general, but as we've already seen, only natural beauty is securely

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<sup>143</sup> *CJ* 354.

connected to habitual moral interest, and since a love for natural beauty is the result of a habit already in place, it is hard to understand why Kant has reversed the direction of psychological training in this passage. It does make sense, however, that natural beauty gives us the *image* of such training, which is to say the image of a potentially non-violent relationship between the understanding and the imagination, especially in the conspicuous absence of all forms of real social authority.

It is only in the case of fine art that taste finds itself constrained to assert itself more forcefully against what would undo it, even as what would undo it is what sustains it.

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. It introduces clarity and order into a wealth of thought, and hence makes the ideas durable, fit for approval that this both lasting and universal, and [hence] fit for being followed by others and fit for an ever advancing culture.<sup>144</sup>

Kant finds himself unable to settle on a single description of what it is that taste is actually doing to genius: disciplining or training it, making it civilized or polished. If taste is praised above as what, so long as we are not looking at the process historically, makes it possible for the individual to make the transition from sensible charm to moral interest, Kant's realization about the determinability of the imagination leaves open the possibility of a less pleasing transition, from sensible charm, say, to the interest of a sycophant in becoming polished, which is to say embracing the "advances" of aesthetic education without submitting them to our own understanding. The worry about aesthetic education is that once we realize that the imagination is open to determination in its freedom, which is to say that it may not actually *be* the author of what it identifies as its

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<sup>144</sup> *CJ* 319.

own, the imagination might also admit of determination that is contra-purposive to the understanding, that it might reveal itself to be in some fundamental way ineducable, or, worse, overeducable, open to unchecked manipulation. The tension in fine art, the tension that *makes* for fine art, offers us something along the lines of a simultaneous experience of both the autonomy of the imagination and the disciplining or training functions of the understanding. Indeed, whatever transgressive moment the work of art contains, it *contains* that moment, or tries to.

### **Deformity and Its Containment**

What we will discuss shortly under the concept of “deformity” in works of art is associated with what Kant calls “spirit,” which is likewise the mark of genius. He writes:

Of certain products that are expected to reveal themselves at least in part to be fine art, we say that they have no *spirit*, even though we find nothing to censure in them as far as taste is concerned. A poem may be quite nice and elegant and yet have no spirit. A story may be precise and orderly and yet have no spirit. An oration may be thorough and graceful and yet have no spirit. [...] Spirit in an aesthetic sense is the animating principle in the mind.<sup>145</sup>

Here, Kant sets “spirit” off against what is tasteful, nice, elegant, precise, orderly, thorough, and graceful; as against these, spirit is an *animating* principle, one that can be read as an excess of sensuous presentation. The work of the genius is exemplary only insofar as a “methodical instruction” can be developed out of it “by means of whatever rules could be extracted from those products of spirit and their peculiarity...”<sup>146</sup>

[The] courage [to retain deformities] has merit only in a genius. A certain *boldness* of expression, and in general some deviation from the common rule, is entirely fitting for a genius; it is however not at all worthy of imitation, but in itself always remains a defect that [any]one must try to

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<sup>145</sup> *CJ* 313.

<sup>146</sup> *CJ* 318.

eliminate, though genius has, as it were, a privilege to allow the defect to remain [anyway], because the inimitable [element] in the momentum of his spirit would be impaired by timorous caution.<sup>147</sup>

We have already connected this moment of revelation with what limits art's ability to symbolize morality. There is no public "appearance" of any empirical self in relation to natural beauty, but only on grounds of the evidence of precisely a limited and particular empirical self can we even enjoy works of art. We enjoy what makes them "bold" in addition to what makes them "tasteful," and indeed our enjoyment of the latter is predicated on the force of the former.

This helps make some sense of Kant's otherwise confounding claim: "A natural beauty is a *beautiful thing*; artistic beauty is a *beautiful presentation* of a thing."<sup>148</sup> Given the fact that Kant's critique of taste is devoted to showing that we cannot justify the claim that beauty resides in the objects themselves, that, as we saw earlier, "what matters is what I do with the presentation within myself," this is an odd distinction to make. It is less odd when we treat it as a phenomenological, rather than ontological, distinction: when we judge natural objects beautiful, we do not experience a distinction between the judging self and the judged object. Precisely such a distinction *does* appear, however, in connection with a judgment of artistic beauty. The beautiful presentation cannot be mistaken for reality (or it immediately ceases to be an object of enjoyment, or at least an object of art), and that means that we are aware that this is a presentation, which is to say the work of another judging subject. It is the unmistakable artificiality of the work of art that prevents it from serving as an adequate symbol for morality, since that function depends on the seeming reconciliation of the faculties of cognition, whereas the work of

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<sup>147</sup> *CJ* 318.

<sup>148</sup> *CJ* 310.

art must emphasize their division, presenting us not only with form and content but also some mark excessive to these.

But if the work of art always includes a reference to its author, we have to ask why the author is not just another rogue messing up our enjoyment with his presence. Because, in fact, far from destroying our pleasure in a work of art, authorship is the condition of the possibility of that pleasure, even if it is not itself the source of the pleasure but rather of a deformity. In the most straightforward sense, the deformity that informs us of an object's status as artifact is the representation's failure to fool us into mistaking it for the real thing, or, on the other hand, to be precisely determined by the technical rules governing its production. But whatever it is that marks a work of art as the work of an artist is also something that the artist cannot claim does not belong to him, something he cannot ascribe either to the "source object" or to cultural forms, which means that the confession of authorship is also in some real way confessional.

The author's mark enables art to do something nature cannot. Kant writes, "Fine art shows its superiority precisely in this, that it describes things beautifully that in nature we would dislike or find ugly. The Furies, diseases, devastations of war, and so on are all harmful; and yet they can be described, or even presented in a painting, very beautifully."<sup>149</sup> Poems and paintings can depict the worst of scenes in beautiful ways, and this is because they are clearly depictions, rather than actual scenes. (Sculpture, for example, is on Kant's account just too realistic to accomplish that task and so must resort to explicit analogy, which then serves as a different kind of confession of authorship, a clear call for interpretation to finish its work.) Not too far back, we saw that the lover of nature has a kind of unconditional love for his object that takes no account of whether it

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<sup>149</sup> *CJ* 313.

might do him harm, a love that is pleased at the object's existence, which is to say at its independence from him. Here, it looks like the mark of ugliness in nature is precisely potential harm to humans, that what we find ugly in nature are those things that are beyond our power and can at most inspire a feeling of sublimity. What is ugly in nature is what is beyond us and hostile to our purposes. It is thus also what, when it is facing us, makes it impossible to achieve a disinterested stance toward it.<sup>150</sup> Of course, in the list given by Kant, only diseases can be said to *be* natural objects or processes, since the Furies are mythical figures and the devastations of war undeniably social. But these are one and all objects that threaten us, demote us to natural, finite, mortal beings, threatening to undo the form that holds us together.

It is not merely that the danger is real in nature and unreal in works of art: after all, there is a real danger associated with art, and that is that it should present us with something disgusting. We do not find the sublime disgusting, even if our enjoyment of the experience involves a negative moment in which our imagination finds itself unable to cope with the task at hand. There is a limit to how far a depiction can go in presenting ugliness:

There is only one kind of ugliness that cannot be presented in conformity with nature without obliterating all aesthetic liking and hence artistic beauty: that ugliness which arouses *disgust*. For in that strange sensation, which rests on nothing but imagination, the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting; and hence the artistic presentation of the object is no

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<sup>150</sup> Many want to make ugliness a purely formal issue, usually because they take beauty to be a purely formal issue, so that what is ugly is just what does not on its own (or at the level of intuition) contain sufficient organization to be purposive for the imagination; ugly, then, is what lacks its own form or is resistant to the understanding's efforts to constitute it by formal means. (cf. Theodore Gracyk, "Sublimity, Ugliness, and Formlessness in Kant's Aesthetic Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Vol. 45, No. 1 Autumn, 1986) 49-56. In terms of the unconditional lover of beautiful nature, that does indeed seem to be the case. But the fact that it is different with works of art should not surprise us, since my claim is that the tension between concept and purpose (rather than their seeming coincidence, or possible coincidence) just is the condition of the possibility of enjoyment.

longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself, so that it cannot possibly be considered beautiful.<sup>151</sup>

The language of destruction in this passage echoes the language Kant uses to describe our reaction upon learning that what we had taken to be a natural beauty was in fact artificial, with the presentation “obliterating” all aesthetic liking and beauty. If the obliteration were complete, however, we would not need to forcefully resist the object, which, for that to be the case, must remain compelling for us in the face of our disgust. As in the bit of woodland trickery, here, too, we find a confusion about the ontological status of the object: is it an object we are looking at or the presentation of an object? Kant can’t exactly mean that we do not understand whether we are looking at art or nature, however, since we are not *quite* disgusted by the discovery of a fake flower in the meadow, even if the discovery does destroy our capacity to enjoy it. No, it is not that we confuse the object with nature, or at least not with nature “out there,” that is upsetting, but something else. Somehow, the understanding, the faculty which might have made the distinction between subjective and objective order (as it does when we distinguish a causal series of perceptions from one that is the result of the order of our attention), has been evicted from the scene, but in a manner that leaves sensibility behind – the eyes, it seems, are still gawking while the understanding strains to pull them away. That this is a work of art, a fiction, is not the only determination the understanding refuses to make here: the sensation “rests on nothing but imagination,” which makes it seem as if the object receives no proper conceptual shape at all, although to call it an object means we have at least conferred some kind of unity on it, even if only in the mode of dissociation: this is not *my* object. Again, sensibility appears as the name for what we refuse to recognize as

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<sup>151</sup> *CJ* 313.

our own, what we insist we receive passively. We might ask, then, what the artist is doing, presenting us with what we might imagine as a shockingly explicit scene, whether, one supposes, of decay, sexuality, or other markers of our finitude and neediness.<sup>152</sup>

Although it might not be obvious, this discussion is a roundabout continuation of the topic of the necessary “deformity” clinging to every forceful work of art. This deformity prevents the whole of a given work from being taken as an *example* of taste, but it is also the means whereby it makes its way onto the scene in that civilized world. And while we have talked about the way that deformity *appears* in the objective exhibition as excess sensuousness, our use of the term suggests that it gestures not at something senseless, something left outside of the order entirely, for then we would call it an “unformity,” which would in fact be more accurate. It is also not the same as the exhibition of a content that disgusts us, since it adds power to the presentation without thereby overwhelming it (and us). But just as disgust is compelling – or, rather, compulsory – the deformity must be compelling if it adds force to the work, facilitates the artist’s communication. Perhaps if the deformity is a kind of underdetermination of materials by either inherited social forms or empirical concepts, what disgusts us involves a corresponding *overdetermination*, too precise a replication, and precisely where we most need aesthetic distance.

### **Art as Dependent on and Productive of Associative Order**

It is here that it becomes important to remember that artistic beauty does not seem to have the potential to sustain our faculties in an endless play. With works of art, we are

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<sup>152</sup> One might look, for example, at Eakins’ *The Gross Clinic*, or various memento mori aimed precisely at arousing the disgust that obliterates aesthetic distance from our finitude.



dealing with specific orders of intuition, connections between them, and an extension of the limits of the imagination, but not without bound. This alternative order cannot be allowed to spread willy-nilly. And yet it is unclear in what the boundaries are supposed to consist, since the contents are neither subsumed under the principles of the understanding nor merely subjectively and associatively ordered by the imagination. Instead, we are dealing with something like an associative order that mimics the work of the understanding, proceeds with its materials analogically. The analogy is between the principle governing artistic production and the logical principle that governs object-constitution by means of an empirical concept. The latter process involves the imagination working in concert with the understanding, so that the form gathers together associations and links these by way of concepts. There are the associations that go together to make up a manifold, and if we recognized all the bits, they would come together to comprise the world as an object. The thought of an unendingly progressive synthesis brings with it the image of *every* new bit as a potential attribute of that single, coherent world.

In what sense does the work of art operate analogously? In one of our earlier examples, we saw the poet link birdsong to thicket to sky. But we also find in Kant the thought that this manner of linking objects is not just analogous to progressive synthesis but actually an alternative mode of organizing our thoughts. He writes:

If forms do not constitute the exhibition of a given concept itself, but are only supplementary presentations of the imagination, expressing the concept's implications and its kinship with other concepts, then they are called (aesthetic) *attributes* of an object, of an object whose concept is a rational idea and hence cannot be exhibited adequately.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *CJ* 315.

Here, we see Kant describing a constellation of concepts, all associated by way of their kinship with a central concept. We treat these then as if they *were* attributes of that concept, but something prevents us from conferring a substantial (synthetic) unity on the group. These are attributes that both associate with but refuse to pay tribute to what orders them; they continue to insist on being acknowledged.

In addition to what Kant will shortly explain are the logical attributes of *any* exhibition – those picked out by the concept – there are supplementary “forms.” What Kant means by “forms” is not entirely clear, but when he calls these forms “aesthetic attributes” we can see that we are supposed to understand these on analogy with the logical attributes. We have been calling what exceeds the form given to a presentation by its concept “material,” but we have also seen, in our discussion of natural beauty, that these are never purely and simply experienced as material, which makes sense if we insist that *nothing* entirely unformed can show up for us at all. It must be the case, then, that even what, in theoretical terms, is “material,” appears in experience not as undetermined but rather as *overly* specific, as paint or stone. Although from the vantage of the understanding, these appear only insofar as they do not contribute to the coherence of the work of art, in order to be associated with the force of the work, they must not *be* but *symbolize* opacity. There is the object as expressed by or by means of its concept, and then there is the object *in toto*, as expressed *and* as exceeding the expression in ways not entirely alien to us. That excess is the pendant to the “rational idea” because it is the mark of the object as a thing in itself, in addition to its being for us, and by calling it a ‘mark’ we can begin to see how this nascent appearance (which may nonetheless *not* emerge into the full light of consciousness) moves us toward the Hegelian thought that

the in-itself is for-us, or is a mediated reflection *of* us. When we call that excess ‘sensation,’ we disown it entirely, take it as something thrust upon us by the outside world. When we *love* it as beautiful nature, the possibility of reconciliation binds us into a universal if indeterminate “us.” When we enjoy it as the condition of the possibility of beautiful art, we find our enjoyment as well as our universality enabled just as it is limited by, precisely, another person.

If these aesthetic attributes were something arbitrarily superadded by the artist, we wouldn’t be talking about the object in-itself at all. Whatever they are, they must be shared by a social group of some size, or, perhaps better, must constitute a social group of some size; this is perhaps another way of saying that there is no in-itself for *me*. Instead of being superadded, then, the attributes are somehow rendered communicable by the artist, so that the moment of creativity is neither the art of reproducing something purely individual nor producing something entirely new out of thin air. On this reading, the artist is author of the aesthetic idea, or, rather, since the artist works in a genre, the artist is the source of some communication-enhancing shift or change in the pattern of an aesthetic idea that precedes her.

Because the author opens some edge of the form to “an immense realm of kindred presentations”<sup>154</sup> and closes things off again in a way that renders something new communicable, the aesthetic idea works on analogy with a concept.<sup>155</sup> Just as a concept works to order attributes into an object or event, an aesthetic idea works to link perceptions or objects into some other kind of whole. The disanalogy with a concept is

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<sup>154</sup> *CJ* 315.

<sup>155</sup> Makkreel, R., *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment*, 121: “Although Kant says that aesthetic ideas enlarge our given concepts, they are suggestive in a way that shows the limits of these concepts.”

that the aesthetic idea does not do this work by means of synthesis.<sup>156</sup> The terms “kinship” and “kindred” suggest a wholly different mode of connection, precisely the one that Kant elsewhere calls analogical.<sup>157</sup> We should note that it is here that we find repeated the distinction between beautiful art and beautiful nature: where the second opens out onto the realm of kindred presentations, the first does so but also always involves a simultaneous limitation of that realm. In the case of nature, there is no need for the conventions that circumscribe the meaningful possibilities and so no experience of the convention as disciplinary. Although Kant ascribes to the moral rectitude of the lover of beautiful nature the fact that he *neither does nor wants to* communicate with others about his experience, we might take that virtue to be rather a *result* of the fact that the absence of convention forecloses the possibility of real communication. The role of convention in enabling, if also limiting, communication rooted in analogical form means, however, that this other non-synthetic, artistic mode of representation is a specifically social act.

If we now think of that deformity that accompanies the representational function of the work of art (and marks it as such) as related to the idea of the aesthetic attributes that accompany and give force (“quicken” the mind with relation) to the logical attributes,<sup>158</sup> then the “aesthetic idea” is just the form that draws these two together in an order we find not only palatable but *interesting*. We have related this quickening deformity to Kant’s portrayal of “the disgusting” as overpowering the understanding, but the mark of the artist is more *senseless* than *disgusting*. It is a moment in a work of art

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<sup>156</sup> This is why Kant is undecided about whether or not to include music in the fine arts: it does not “bind” but merely gestures to that immense wealth.

<sup>157</sup> *CJ* 314-315.

<sup>158</sup> *CJ* 185.

where social meaning fails to get made. It is not the boundaries of representation that have been crossed by what disgusts – not, at least, in the sense of *logical* boundaries. It is rather the boundaries of taste, boundaries that inexplicitly dictate just how far the work is allowed to range. This requirement, that a rule be provided limiting our enjoyment of that “unspeakable wealth of thought,” is, as we’ve already shown, only enacted when the object in question is to serve as a vehicle for *communication*. But although one must go out into the woods to enjoy in peace what cannot be enjoyed among others, there is no guarantee that the natural setting will provide such an experience, and the fact that the woods does not offer such *automatic* release from social restraints suggests that it is not only from the eyes of *others* that we must hide parts of that unspeakable wealth. This is perhaps the reason Kant demands that the lover of nature be so trained in morality as to guarantee in advance that nothing that might disgust him, even when he is alone, will emerge; for Kant to think that such protection from oneself is possible, it must also be the case that the imagination itself, its functioning and its contents, are ultimately shaped by moral training (rather than simply being disciplined or standing in a negative relation to the understanding and, moreover, to reason). The mark of the author, in appearing non-specific or overly-specified, gestures toward the unspeakability of this wealth.

### **Symbols and Symbolic Communication**

Before he proceeds to discuss the aesthetic attributes in terms of the work of the artist, Kant discusses the question in terms of two symbols, one of which is already familiar to us: “Thus Jupiter’s eagle with the lightning in its claws is an attribute of the

mighty king of heaven, and the peacock is an attribute of heaven's stately queen."<sup>159</sup> To rehearse our earlier question: what does it mean to call something that is already an object on its own an attribute of something else? Normally, when we do this, what we had formerly treated as an object loses its independence and becomes by synthetic means a part of a different object, an "attribute," so that the object we call the thorn is understood to comprise part of the entire bush. But here we have birds as attributes of heavenly kings and queens, without ceasing to be birds. One of the birds is even given a lightning bolt, which is clearly superadded to the presentation, so that we might say the bird with its lightning bolt makes up an aesthetic idea, and that each of them is an attribute of that idea. These are symbols, however, and not directly works of art. As symbols, they are clearly artifactual, meaning that we experience them as human-made, but there is no mark of any specific author. Although we have just said that artists are the authors of aesthetic ideas – and, indeed, perhaps all symbols have some genealogical root back to artistic representations – the ready-made associations of objects are part of the symbolic materials on which any given artist works, conventions that define her social sphere of communication as surely as the technical conventions do her sphere of material manipulation.

We have claimed that the aesthetic attributes are connected with logical attributes in some obscure way, and that they are not the products of the artist but of the imagination as it exhibits a given concept.<sup>160</sup> We see support for that reading when Kant writes, "Fine art does this not only in painting or sculpture (where we usually speak of

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<sup>159</sup> *CJ* 315.

<sup>160</sup> My attention was drawn back to Kant's discussion of the attributes by Andrew Chignell, "The problem of particularity in Kant's aesthetics," Proceedings of the World Congress of Philosophy (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 2000).

attributes); but poetry and oratory also *take* the spirit that animates their works solely *from* the aesthetic attributes of the objects, attributes that *accompany* the logical ones and that given the imagination a momentum which makes it think more in response to these objects...”<sup>161</sup> It is not that the artist *produces* aesthetic attributes, but that she is able to give them a pleasing form, which is to say that she is the author not of the attributes but of the aesthetic idea that groups them. The question is whether or not there is something inherently social about aesthetic attributes, so that instead of assigning them to the imagination as a mysteriously productive faculty, or to genius as tapping into or being enlivened by nature, we might think of the spirit of which Kant talks here as closer to Hegel’s thought of it: that spirit is a name for something collective, although here it would not be what is discursively collective but what gets shut out in the development of discourse, which then also sticks with us as a peculiar and emphatically social set of figures. An aesthetic idea gives a kind of sensuous form, not in the sense of representing something made up of the aesthetic attributes, but by bringing them together using a sensuous rather than a logical principle – rhythm, tone, etc. Aesthetic ideas are patterns that allow us into a realm closed off by, or for the sake of, conceptual thought.

These aesthetic attributes are not only distinct objects that display a peculiar affinity (as with our eagle and the lightning bolt) but also “partial presentations,” what Kant also calls “ineffables.”<sup>162</sup> This is “undeveloped material [provided by the imagination] *for the understanding* which the latter disregarded in its concept.”<sup>163</sup> Here we have the presentation of what resists conceptualization *to the understanding*, which Kant then portrays as “employ[ing]... not so much objectively, for cognition, as

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<sup>161</sup> *CJ* 315, emphasis mine.

<sup>162</sup> *CJ* 316.

<sup>163</sup> *CJ* 317.

subjectively, namely, to quicken the cognitive powers, though indirectly this does serve cognition too.”<sup>164</sup> The partial presentations in question are, as “ineffables,” singular, and so we might with some justification call them the sensible remainder of the image that exhibits a given concept. While some of Kant’s description portrays the aesthetic attributes as themselves objects, objects arranged and associated in communication-bundles (we might borrow Adorno’s term “constellations” here), he is also talking about *partial* presentations that even in their partiality resist synthetic combination, and he speaks of these partial presentations as material for the understanding. When attributes picked out by *other* concepts are ignored, it is not surprising that they continue to play a cognitive function. But what are we to make of partial, singular presentations, which should be perfect fodder for synthesis, but which nonetheless require a mode of cognitive address that lends them force, acknowledges them without submerging their independence?

Here we can see that the interest we are taking in the work of art is an interest in forms of mediation and communication that seek out connections other than those forged in the understanding – peculiar affinities, kinships, and the like. What is partial and singular about works of art has to do with the fact that they are the mediations of, and so involve an engagement with, an artist in particular, an author, a rogue, albeit one whose company we enjoy.<sup>165</sup> Thus the mark of the author can be read as the presentation of materiality in its closed off and overly-specified form, and we can only make sense of our

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<sup>164</sup> *CJ* 317.

<sup>165</sup> Without that thought, it becomes possible to think of art, as indeed some sociologists of art are wont to do, as merely constituting audiences, a notion that becomes so abstract that it sorts kinds of people according to the genres of art to which they are responsive. Cf. Paul DiMaggio, “Cultural Democracy in a Period of Cultural Expansion: The Social Composition of Arts Audiences in the United States,” Performers and Performances, (South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey 1983).



enjoyment of it insofar as it gestures to an opacity *other* than that of paint, stone, etc. This is a shared opacity and limitation, and its presentation serves as an invitation to interpretive work – to judgment, that is.

Established social symbols, by contrast, *can* be thought of as constituting groups, and as mediating groups that otherwise stand in tension with one another – as constituting audiences where otherwise there would be none. It seems, then, that those attributes that are already objects are likelier the stuff of symbols, whereas those that resist articulation are the stuff of art and of symptoms. But even more than that, the thing that distinguishes works of art from symbols more generally is that the former are enjoyed as beautiful, whereas the latter produce an emotional response that may be as strong (or stronger: when was the last time someone died in the name of a work of art?), but is certainly not as complex. Works of art require work of us, and if they genuinely transform the conventions of communication, they also genuinely transform us. Symbols, on the other hand, require more of a direct attachment, an emotional bond, and when they are at their most effective, this bond is effortless, which is to say that something about the symbol works to satisfy (not leave actively wanting) something already in us. It is not that the emotions aren't involved in the enjoyment of works of art, aren't the source of 'enjoyment' in general, but that symbols do not require us to work up the response reflectively, to bring into the light of day the source of our enjoyments. It is in this sense that the loss of a substantial world of shared symbols is indeed an emancipation, calling on us to deploy our own judgment, but the difficulty of establishing a society of judges is figured in the work of art.

## **An Interest in Material**

Since we read the mark of the artist as the failure of complete determination by either social forms or the natural, given form, it must appear to us as the underlying materiality of the representation – paint, stone, etc. Again, this appearance lends force to the exhibition, but only insofar as it is in tension with the forms in question. If the materiality overwhelms the forms, the exhibition is senseless. If the social forms overwhelm the material, if its deployment is the work of a virtuoso, it is academic. If the natural form is too perfectly copied, we get, at best, a novelty, and at worst an object capable of disgusting us. We have to ask, then, what it is that we associate with the appearance of materiality, which is the appearance of a partial failure of determination, in the work of art. The fact that we *read* that appearance as the mark of the artist gives us our first clue that the interest aroused in us by the aesthetic encounter with a work of fine art is not actually *in* the object, but at the least *in* the artist, and, as we'll see, also in ourselves and one another, and compelling us to read this excess, by way of analogy with those associated with the natural object, as representing a kind of defense against the forces that would occupy us. With both natural and artistic beauty, the excess in which our aesthetic encounter enables us to take an interest evokes but simultaneously pacifies a certain sense of danger.

We saw that the intellectual interest on the part of the lover of nature oriented him to look at the natural object in terms of its own ends, so that the “excesses” our conception don't make intelligible find another justification for their specificity. We come to appreciate those attributes of natural objects that do not serve either to enhance their aesthetic form or to render the object more intelligible to us; this is the sense in

which the lover of nature is a *lover* of nature, one who can take its products as ends in themselves. Carrying this analogy over to the material excess we've called the mark of the artist, we might think that our interest is in the art object for its own sake. Our earlier criticism of the sycophant, that lover of art, should already serve to warn us against this interpretive move, since there we suggested that works of art are not meant to be loved in quite this way. Further, the material excesses in works of art do not achieve the same level of specificity as do the barbs and thorns of so many natural objects; or, taken another way, they achieve too *great* a level of specificity – just paint, just stone – to sustain our interest. The disunity in works of art lends them a certain “force,” a concept that connects back to the theme of rebarbateness, but it is hard to see why it should orient us simply and directly to the materiality of the works, to their being made of paint or stone, to what, in short, remains unordered in them. The argument is, of course, that our interest in disorder in the objects is a symbolic orientation to what remains unordered in their authors. The fact that we respond to this symbolic gesture by experiencing it with a kind of pleasure, albeit not the pure pleasure of taste, suggests a moment of identification or the enjoyment of some likewise untamed region in our own selves, a moment where we are compelled not by what coordinates us but by something else. That moment of enjoyment, which might be understood on analogy with or even as a moment of sensible recognition, seems to posit a counterclaim to the demands of good taste, a counterclaim without which indeed we would find the work academic. If taste is not enough in works of art, then this also means that we demand more from artifice than we do from nature.

A work of fine art is defined as such precisely insofar as it is transgressive, which is to say potentially transformative of the rules of the practice in question. The disruption in a work of fine art is the condition of the possibility of our responding to it with pleasure, although it is also not identified as the *source* of the primary pleasure. Instead, *taste* is identified as the source of that pleasure, which is to say the identifiable source of pleasure is the educated enjoyment of the sensuous as a vehicle for form. Insofar, however, as Kant makes clear our inability to truly enjoy overly schooled and formally correct works, that pleasure is paradoxically predicated on the disruption of the forms we've been trained to appreciate. A work of fine art is pleasurable because it communicates something to us for which its concept does not prepare us, something for which the understanding has provided no monogram. In spite of the fact that this is not identified as the source of the pure pleasure proper to a pure judgment of taste, it is *a* source of pleasure, but one that we do not quite want to recognize as such or that our taste will not let us regard as a basis for a universal judgment. It is the mark of the author, a mark that defines the thing as a work of art and so makes possible an empirical (and so impure) interest in it, but which does not overcome the restraints of taste so violently as to extinguish understanding altogether.

In the first *Critique*, the only way to think of perceptual particularity was to cast it as varying from individual to individual, as sensations that are by definition not shared.<sup>166</sup> Here, instead, there are these “supplementary presentations” – associations that are admittedly not logical, for which we cannot find an explanation in the object, and which yet resonate for us. Not, perhaps, for all of us for all time, but with those of us at a

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<sup>166</sup> Those “belong merely to the subjective constitution of our manner of sensibility, for instance, of sight, hearing, touch, as in the case of the sensations of colours, sounds, and heat, which ... [are] mere sensations and not intuitions.” (*CPR* A28/B45)

particular time in a particular place with the education necessary to respond. But what is it to which we are responding? This is a question that may not strictly speaking have an answer, if having an answer means having a theoretical account. But the essential fact is that we are responding to a representation *as* a representation, which is why Kant can claim that our response is disinterested. Interest is, remember, always interest in the reality of a thing, in its being real and so useful to us in some way. Given the fact that we are interested in something precisely insofar as it is the product of an author, a thing that gains force by its material deformity, it would seem like a work of art should *better* serve as a symbol of morality than something lacking such a defect. But the determinacy of the representation, the fact that it is produced along some if not all rules of genre, serves to remind us of the need for limitation and discipline, of what remains unconquered by our moral vocation – the in-itself not of the object but of us subjects.

When we say that something is “real” rather than “ideal,” we’re ascribing to it a certain independence from our presentation or representation of it, an independence that asserts itself as what exceeds our presentational capacity or conceptual orientation. To call something “real” is an acknowledgement of what exceeds our concept. We have a certain interest in the reality of our objects when we approach them conceptually, but obviously our interest is greatest when we approach them as objects corresponding to a practical concern. If we are lovers of nature, then the pure judgment can give way to a contemplative interest in the object; if we are responding to a work of art, then it can give way to either a certain vanity or a purer form of social interest. But the “objects” of the two kinds of judgments are not at all the same: natural beauty presents itself as if belonging to the object, while artistic beauty asserts itself as a presentation of a subject.

What does an interest in a work of art mean, then, if it is not a direct interest in the reality of its object, where by object we now mean the poem, the painting, etc.? Again, interest is always an orientation to an object's reality, and reality is what we have defined as what exceeds our presentational capacity. But interest in art is interest in the reality of a presentation, *as* a presentation, and yet whatever marks it the presentation of an artist is what cannot be ascribed to mere representation. Our interest is not directly in the marks of materiality, of course, but by way of these to what gives the work spirit; not the object but the subject interests us, and more specifically something about the subject that does not come to appearance without mediation, that is neither immediately given to us nor accessible by everyday discursive means. Something about skilled artistic mediation allows us to enjoy in one another what we could otherwise only enjoy by ourselves, in the woods. Perhaps, then, the successful work of art is a symbol of *politics* rather than morality. Our interest is empirical rather than contemplative, and we find ourselves almost able to enjoy in one another precisely what we otherwise find repellent, namely, deformity.

Although we might concur with the lover of beautiful nature that a given object is beautiful, we do not find the sight of someone having that experience, making that judgment, beautiful. We enjoy it only when we are absent from the scene and allowed to merely infer its beauty; in fact, the ability to *judge* beautiful nature is not enough to support the inference, since it is only the *lover* of beautiful nature, one who can sustain his enjoyment, that meets with our approval. The *lover* of art, the sycophant, is much less interesting, and this is perhaps because politics is about unfinished business; someone who mistakenly loves its symbol, then, has missed the point. A work of art offers

enjoyment, but also limitation; it requires work and should not be taken directly as an object of satisfaction. If in the first two *Critiques*, Kant recognizes just two central ordering principles – the categories of the first and the moral law of the second – in light of which what is *not* given by way of those principles is read as their material, their raw stuff, this reading of the third *Critique* does not so much suggest a *third* principle of thought as it insists that there is a social logic to what, from the vantage point of those other two, is mere material.

### **Works of Art as Both Inviting Recognition and Producing Distance**

Again, insofar as the work of art is work that seeks to “represent,” it has two sources governing its production: first, the figure of the object, scene, etc., to be represented, and, second, the technical rules governing the production of a pleasing example of a work of the genre in question (poem, painting, painting in this school, for this purpose, etc.). The mark of the artist has to be perceived as failing to satisfy each of these criteria, appearing as a sensible remainder (paint, for example) that neither serves to represent an object other than itself nor join the generically-regulated sensible qualities of the work, those that make it agreeable to its audience.

“Sensible elements rendered agreeable” might even be said to describe the results of a partial pacification of our experience of the disjunction between reality and our representation of it. Under normal circumstances, objective representations are not taken to be sources of pleasure except in connection with conceptuality; “being objective” requires precisely that we disavow any subjective mode of attachment. The social regulation of representational form and the mark of the artist allow us to take up a second

order stance to artistic representations, *and* they render it possible to make a “mere representation” into an object that can sustain aesthetic appreciation, even as, and precisely because, we *know* it to be mere representation. Here we at last make good on our earlier thought that “the agreeable” plays not only a symbolic but also a social role. With respect to the work of art, instead of becoming oriented to the material excess of the object with an eye toward possible *use*, cultural forms seek to re-cast the sensible remainders of perception as a *direct* source of aesthetic pleasure, providing order and regularity (submission) precisely at the site of resistance, stylizing the excesses. Although we need not coordinate on our deployment of the term “agreeable” to describe objects of our particular delectation, it might be that this coordination *does* occur with reference to the realm of the sensible, i.e., to the desires that find no particular objects, and that this coordination is one of the ‘civilizing’ functions of art. It makes us fans of the sonnet, or of the Impressionists, etc. Technical rules and genres allow us to find commonalities not in the objects of perception, per se, but among the remainders of conceptualization, i.e., sensibility.

Whatever in works of art *appears* as material is also what allows us to encounter each as the work of a specific artist, arising neither from the conceptually-determined nature of the object to be represented nor the social laws regulating the excesses of conceptual determination. The unmanaged part of the work of art symbolizes *without expressing* the unmanaged part of the artist. Even though this mark is the condition of the possibility of a work of fine art, Kant does not include it within the purview of taste itself. This, remember, is what lends force to the work, gives it communicative power, while the dictates of taste seek to pacify that force, or, as Kant puts it, to clip the wings of



genius. There is, then, some hope to be had from the fact that we cannot generate a judgment of taste in connection with an overly “correct” work of art, since this means that we cannot fully embrace the products of a (social) judgment not our own — even as we may deign to hang the knock-off over our sofas.

Works of fine art thus offer, in their production and then reception, a mode of communication that does not require, in fact only works in the absence of, an overly solid coordination and identity among participants. The fact that their deformities generate an affective bond (the added “force” necessary to the artist’s particular communication) *and* esteem (the latter being shown in the designation of their artists as ‘geniuses’) means that this mode of communication forges rather than relies on community. And yet, for all of the affection, esteem, and community-building, the excesses met with in the works are not treated as themselves sources of legitimate pleasure but as disfigurements, deformations, and defects. Indeed, we only respect the “courage to retain deformities” when it is coupled with taste, which is to say when these are presented in palpable tension with a respect for the inherited norms. Artworks, in that respect, inherit the task that shared social symbols no longer fulfill.

Kantian aesthetic theory thus accords “the artist” a privileged social position, and the use of the term “genius” only emphasizes the rarity of dispensations to stand publicly as judge. This might in fact be true insofar as artists are perhaps the only people who do this work professionally, although we’ll see in the next chapters two readers of Hegel who suggest that artists have either passed this work on to philosophers or, at least, that the latter have a particular share in it. In our chapter on gay marriage and then the conclusion, we will suggest that contingent political circumstances, crises around specific

social symbols and their conventionality, sometimes open up possibilities for even regular citizens to work publicly toward a shared symbolic order. If philosophers have a role in the process, it is as responsive to (rather than as responsible for) that work.

## CHAPTER IV

### HEGEL'S MODERNITY AS A CRISIS IN REFLECTIVE JUDGMENT

#### **Introduction**

Kant's work on judgment is predicated on an interest in and, we might say, a hope for empirical experience, both of nature and of other people; judgment is meant to heal the schism between the universal forms our concepts take and the particularity with which we are confronted in the world and ourselves. Hegel is worried, by contrast, by the idea that instead of healing that schism, the conditions of modernity have heightened the contradictions between universality and particularity to the point where we have lost meaningful contact with the empirical stuff of our natural and social worlds. Indeed, in various places he contextualizes Kant's work on reflection as work that brings to its fullest expression, rather than reconciling, the contradictions between particulars and universals.<sup>167</sup>

Hegel's contention is that Kant's deep philosophical *interest* in reflection is aroused by the fact that we acquire the "right" to mediate, to struggle with and against, the authoritative social forms just as they lose their substantiality and authority. This does not mean, however, that the forms thereby disappear, and so neither do the symptoms of our continued struggle with them. Kant's reflections on reflection come at the moment when we have been 'freed' to engage these forms, but these forms have also been 'freed' from their tethers, and the problem is now: what to do with all this

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<sup>167</sup> Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art Volume I*, Trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 59. (Hereafter *ALFA I*.)

disorienting ‘freedom’? This formulation of the problem does not mean, then, that all of that work on reflection is for naught; indeed, the demand for reflection is all the greater the more impossible it becomes. Reflection, in this sense, now faces a new and different task: instead of serving as the source for our pleasurable attachment to symbols, it now has to work at understanding how convention becomes “mere” convention, and further how we are to live in a world where this is largely the case.

This worrisome state of affairs motivates much, if not all, of Hegel’s thinking, such that his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for example, starts out with a consciousness that takes itself to be natural but looks at objects and itself only in terms of the most abstract of all possible universals. This is a deeply mediated approach that has lost contact with the history of its own mediation. The *Phenomenology* is an attempt to heal that schism at the level of thought and by means of philosophy. In the first section below, we will look at Hegel’s depiction of the crisis. In the next section, we turn to two representative readers of the *Phenomenology*, Donald Verene and Robert Pippin, each of whom takes that work to have succeeded in its reconciliatory task but manage to generate directly opposed conceptions of what that success looks like. On one of these readings, Hegel addresses the crisis of symbolic rationality by turning to philosophy as a means for what we might call the staging of desire; the other takes philosophy’s task to be rather that of shoving desire off of the stage. In the first case, we end up with a theory that treats all opacity as compelling. In the second, we end up rather with a theory that renders all particular claims mere instances of special pleading.

We will not take these contradictory readings as proof of Hegel’s failure. Nor are they precisely failed readings of Hegel. They are both plausible readings that generate

plausible visions of philosophical success, which is to say that both readings provide strategies for philosophy under conditions of modernity. Neither, however, manages to generate a plausible political scenario in which reflective judgment might be said to become the source of an affective bond or symbolic attachment capable of allowing us to acknowledge the opacity of social relations as a demand for respect. This is not, then, a criticism of respective *philosophical* positions, except insofar as their theories fail to generate the need to move beyond philosophy. What is needed, instead, is a form of thought that is capable of at least holding the rational and the sensuous in conflict – only thus can we catch a glimpse of what otherwise remains behind our (where “we” are now “we moderns”) backs.

We are turning to Hegel with two aims in mind: first, the fact that he approaches philosophy from a second order remove allows him to pursue his interest in the historical situation and needs that give rise to its questions; second, his analysis of art as uprooted (which demotion causes him to turn his attention elsewhere) will give us the beginnings of a way to think about symbolic mediation, reflective judgment, and public expression in a time of crisis. Toward that end, let us be clear about what we hope to gain, in terms of the question of symbolic rationality, from our entanglement with Hegel. First, Hegel takes himself to be intervening philosophically in a given moment in history. This will be important to us in many ways, but foremost among these is the fact that to talk about epistemology *historically* is already to assert the social moment as central. Indeed, we will be arguing that the ‘need for the divine’ is precisely the need to identify the veiled sociality of both knowledge and desire, although we will also run into the limits of this kind of pursuit when we turn to Marx. Ultimately, it is for the sake of mining Hegel’s

deep understanding of the *need*, rather than any attempt on his part to satisfy it, that we turn to him. Both Hegel and Marx, however, will help us elaborate the ways in which the problematic (if not the problem) is specifically modern. The problem emerges *as* a problematic just because, whatever this need is, it has lost its material anchor.

### **The Thirst for the Divine**

It must be admitted that our examination of the *Phenomenology* is merely one among many plausible tactics given that our aim is to illustrate the worries that animate Hegel's philosophical approach. Hegel's deepest thought is that something important has gone lost for us, and that indeed we have lost sight of the loss itself, so that the first step toward "recovery" is admitting we have a problem. Hegel offers many such first steps. Indeed, each of Hegel's mature works might be understood as attempting to recognize and then reconcile what history seems to have sundered:<sup>168</sup> if the aim in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to heal the rift at the epistemological level, the *Philosophy of Right* attempts to do this same work in terms of rights, duties, morality, ethics, and politics,<sup>169</sup> the lectures on aesthetics<sup>170</sup> to heal it by grasping scientifically the

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<sup>168</sup> There is, on this point, an interesting line of Hegel interpretation that holds that even in the mature works, where Hegel more clearly takes modernity to be characterized by the loss of immediacy, "as a knowledge of unity, love remains the source of the modern will in its drive to realize its unity in the world, *albeit a source which becomes unconscious.*" Alice Ormiston, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate: Towards a Reconsideration of the Role of Love in Hegel," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* (Vol. 35, No. 3 (Sep., 2002), pp. 499-525) 503.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Allen Wood in his introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: "Hegel meant the *Philosophy of Right* to afford its readers a joyous reconciliation with the social world around them." He adds, "But for us the actual effects of studying Hegel's book may be very different from what the author intended." *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) xxix.

<sup>170</sup> Hegel begins Part I of the *Aesthetics* thus: "Since we are now moving out of the Introduction and entering upon the scientific treatment of the subject, our first task is to indicate briefly the general place of artistic beauty in the realm of reality as a whole and of aesthetics in relation to other philosophical disciplines. Our object is to settle the point from which a true science of the beautiful must start. [...] [B]eauty is only a specific way of expressing and representing the true, and therefore stands open

impossibility that art might be the mode in which it is healed, and so on. Indeed, in the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, we find the following exhaustive, and potentially exhausting, account of the many forms in which this contradiction appears:

This antithesis does not merely display itself for our consciousness, in the limited region of moral action; but also emerges as a fundamental distinction and antagonism between that which is real essentially and in its own right, and that which is external reality and existence. Formulated in the abstract, it is the contrast of the universal and the particular, when the former is explicitly fixed over against the latter, just as the latter is over against the former; more concretely, it appears in nature as the opposition of abstract law against the abundance of individual phenomena, each having its own character; in the mind, as the sensuous and spiritual in man, as the battle of the spirit against the flesh, of duty for duty's sake, the cold command, with the individual interest, the warm feelings, the sensuous inclinations and impulses, the individual disposition as such; as the hard conflict of inward freedom and of natural necessity; further, as the contradiction of the dead conception – empty in itself – compared with full concrete vitality, or of the theory and subjective thought contrasted with objective existence and experience.<sup>171</sup>

With this, we see that the schism in question takes on many forms, and that the crisis is not merely one for *feeling*, since in this description it is the “cold command” and “dead conception” that bear the fullest weight of the loss of any meaningful contact with “warm feelings,” “the abundance of individual phenomena,” and in general the “vitality” of the living individual. Insofar as we are not institutional or conceptual animists, however, the worry here cannot be about the death of institutions and concepts, but rather about the persistence of these *after* that death, the fact that dead or not, we can't simply give up our social forms or voluntarily give birth to new and better ones. This means that, once the problem becomes clear, we are faced with an endless task.

In Kant, the thought of a lover of nature produced, seemingly of its own accord, the thought of the readers as speculative observers, albeit not precisely in the technical

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throughout in every respect to conceptual thinking...” *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art Volume I*, Trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 91. (Hereafter *ILA I*)

<sup>171</sup> *ILA I* 59.

sense of the Hegelian speculation. Instead, “we” found ourselves caught up in an *aesthetic* appraisal of what cannot be seen, which is to say affectively attached (if also for universal reasons) to the very idea or fantasy of a person. In addition, we saw other “characters” emerge: that of the sycophant, the artist, the interior decorator, the rogue, and the naïf. Hegel too generates a menagerie, the most famous character, of course, being Spirit, with its understudies (Spirits): Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and so on; the spirits of particular Volks; and then there are the lord and bondsman, Jesus, and so on. In addition to foreshadowing where our argument will go next, it might help us to understand this otherwise puzzling fact about Hegel’s *Phenomenology* to contrast its motley cast of characters with the comparative *absence* of human figures in Marx’s *Capital*. There, Marx deals rather in the abstractions that have relegated all of the real characters to the footnotes, although, as we will see, even when the protagonist is the commodity, it takes on an anthropomorphic form. Marx explicitly acknowledges his leading characters as symbols: “As we proceed to develop our investigation, we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations.”<sup>172</sup> These are, it seems, characters not even a mother could love, and we might think of Hegel’s imaginary roster of players as providing us with some substitute social satisfactions.

Both Hegel and Marx take the contradictions of modernity to result, on the one hand, in a variety of discourses that attempt to deal with its fragments, and, on the other, in an objective system of valuation that has little need of discourse (little need, that is, to make appeals to us poor reflective judges) to sort out its affairs. On the one side, we have

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<sup>172</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) 179. (Hereafter *Capital*.)



art, religion, and philosophy, and on the other, the state and capital. In “Private Property and Communism,” Marx identifies what he takes to be the alienation of ‘species-being’ (his early term for what we’ve been calling the hidden social moment) into just two different forms: religion and capital. He writes, “Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of man's inner life; but economic estrangement is that of *actual life*...”<sup>173</sup> We’ll discuss Hegel and Marx precisely in terms of their respective attempts to realize that hidden social moment in each of those forms of alienation. Hegel addresses the situation with his investigation into the phenomenology of *spirit*, which is to say the ideational appearance of social relations in religion and philosophy, and with his comments on the (impotent) role of art in this modern world. Marx, of course, supplies us with an analysis of capital and the real social relations it subtends. Since our topic is *imaginative* mediation in the conditions of modernity, we will give shorter shrift to the real conditions, suggesting here only that real conditions are such as to generate new imaginative needs and then examining in the next chapter the commodity form as *the* public form of value.

For Hegel, the successful mediation of social forms means an evolution from social relations mediated “locally” by actual objects to a world where community is grounded either in conceptual identity or, at least, conceptual identity supplemented by picture-thought, shared figures or schemata that require no material mediation. The issue of “picture-thinking” comes, indeed, in his thought, to occupy the place of symbolic rationality more generally insofar as modernity has moved the problem out of the sphere of empirical experience. Of course, the great debates around Hegel’s work center on the question whether or not the subsumption of religion by philosophy means the final

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<sup>173</sup> Karl Marx, “From the Paris Notebooks 1844”, Early Political Writings. (Hereafter *EPW*.)

overcoming of picture-thought. It is precisely here that we hope to intervene, by showing that this is the wrong question. We will do this in two ways: first, by showing that the attachment to picture-thinking is symptomatic of a much deeper need, and, second, by showing how *neither* the thought of becoming affectively attached to the pictorial remnants of conceptual thought *nor* successfully sealing the latter off from the realm of theory provide the grounds for a substantive sociality.

It makes sense, however, that there *is* this debate surrounding Hegel's relationship to picture-thinking, since he is without question a seriously abstract thinker who nonetheless (in fact, for exactly that reason) finds himself caught up in all manner of picture-thought. Even if his explicit aim is to overcome picture-thought, it is from our vantage no criticism to insist that he remains deeply attached to it. Only by way of such a deep attachment could it make the kind of claim on him that it does, the claim to being *the* mode of thought that requires overcoming. Here, he exhibits exactly the tendency toward symbolization which Kant ascribes to the regulative power of reason as a faculty. The questions we must pose to his project(s) are: first, does he (or could we in following him) succeed in breaking free from picture thought? second, is this a philosophical or a political goal? and third, what is it about Hegel's time that both sets for him this problematic and makes its resolution so difficult, if not impossible? This last question will lead us to turn to Marx. There, we will see that there is actually some small hope to be had in the thought that we do *not* succeed in overcoming picture-thinking, since to overcome this would be to overcome ourselves (and others), to "adjust" to what we hopefully can still recognize as intolerable conditions.

Since, as this reading maintains, Hegel is both keenly aware of the crisis and yet not entirely sure what it means, what we are missing, and how we might approach it, we will have to tease apart some of the strands ourselves. Here is the situation and the task as Hegel describes them at the start of the *Phenomenology*:

The eye of Spirit had to be forcibly turned back and held fast to the things of this world; and it has taken a long time before the lucidity which only heavenly things used to have could penetrate the dullness and confusion in which the sense of worldly things was enveloped, and so make attention to the here and now as such, attention to what has been called ‘experience’, an interesting and valid enterprise. Now we seem to need just the opposite: sense is so fast rooted in earthly things that it requires just as much force to raise it. The Spirit shows itself as so impoverished that, like a wanderer in the desert craving for a mere mouthful of water, it seems to crave only the bare feeling of the divine in general. By the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss.<sup>174</sup>

Hegel portrays “our” situation as the opposite of that described by Plato’s parable of the cave, and as we’ll see, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a parable to suit this new state of affairs. Both parables are stories about “looking,” epistemological adventures about the development of attention and interest on the part of a subject or subjects toward objects, scenes, and ideas. Both involve the question of forcible orientation. In Plato’s story, of course, the subject comes to realize the nullity of the scene in front of him once he has been dazzled by the divine, and it is unwillingly that he returns to the everyday in order to educate others. “Now,” however, and after a long time, something has changed: the “lucidity which only heavenly things used to have” has “penetrate[d] the ... sense of worldly things.” Sense is forcibly rooted to the everyday, but the source of the “dazzle” remains just as much a mystery. Objects have taken on a certain clarity and distinctness, become saturated by ideality, mediated. But given the connection with the quest for

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<sup>174</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Edit. J. N. Findlay, Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 5. (Hereafter *PhS*.)

divinity, we can take this mediation to involve something beyond epistemological interest, a connection both to authority and desire. That connection, however, is no longer figured as a *beyond*, since the beyond is precisely what has gone lost. Instead, it is to be located in the particularity of the object, the sense of an in-itself that exceeds but also subtends conceptualization.

We see hints of a connection with desire in Hegel's use of *thirst* as the analogy for what orients us in our search, but the application of this analogy is complicated by the fact that this thirst is for what exceeds the material, the world of sensuous things, a thirst for what, by definition, cannot quench.<sup>175</sup> This is of course not new to us, since we have been occupied in recent chapters with the paradox of a disinterested interest in beauty. We might even identify the "mere feeling of the divine" for which Spirit seeks with beauty – with, that is, the search for a contemplative attachment to the remainders of sensibility. Since our intention is not to seamlessly map Hegel's parable onto Kant's account of aesthetic judgment, it suffices to say that what is sought here is, at least at the stage described above, an aesthetic feeling and ultimately also an aesthetic judgment. In other words, what Spirit seeks when it thirsts for the divine is for an ideality or mediation of the kind that allows for or involves not only cognitive but also affective elements. We should not forget, however, that every thought of the divine involves also the thought of compelling *authority*, so that we might even say that this is a thirst not only for what cannot quench but for what demands that the thirst remain unquenched – a funny kind of a thirst then, one, we might almost say, that we can only know as a conflict or struggle.

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<sup>175</sup> There is, indeed, a much deeper story to be told about *how* the things of this world, for Hegel, get 'sacralized,' one that involves the birth and death of Jesus.

In terms of the trajectory of the Introduction (and perhaps unexpectedly, given the above exposition that places the thirst for the *divine* at the center) what Hegel is describing is the transition from religion to philosophy. This is, however, the bare emergence of philosophy, which is to say its appearance as a need, not as a satisfaction. One of Hegel's central occupations, even if he rarely says so in so many words, is to try to account for the desire to know; the difficulty in doing so speaks to the opacity of epistemological motivation. He writes:

When natural consciousness entrusts itself straightaway to Science, it makes an attempt, induced by it knows not what, to walk on its head too, just this once; the compulsion to assume this unwonted posture and to go about in it is a violence it is expected to do to itself, all unprepared and seemingly without necessity.<sup>176</sup>

Here, Hegel is describing the role desire plays in Consciousness's prematurely scientific orientation toward its object in 'Sense Certainty,' a role that is hidden from Consciousness ("induced by it knows not what") but which that section endeavors to reveal to us. The *Phenomenology* proper begins with a consciousness that appears to be disabled by its own undesiring relation to its object. Hegel claims in the above passage that "the eye of Spirit had to be forcibly turned back and held fast to the things of this world." An eye forcibly turned, of course, is one that does not turn of its own accord, and the eye of the Consciousness in 'Sense-Certainty' is precisely that eye that refuses to make any discriminating comments, to articulate its experience in any specificity, to make concrete *sense* of what it is seeing. And yet despite its not looking of its own accord, the eye "now" finds itself unable to look away,<sup>177</sup> in a scene so reminiscent of our description of the power of disgust to hold the senses captive that we might think this its

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<sup>176</sup> *PhS* 15.

<sup>177</sup> This would be the moment for a crack about Stockholm Syndrome.

complement, one in which it is the understanding that refuses to allow sense to look away. Just as the reaction to forcible orientation by sense is disgust, the reaction to forcible orientation by the understanding is the slack-jawed universality of the “this” and the “here” and the “now.”

So, it took force to direct Spirit’s attention earthward, and the result of that work is just where we find ourselves at the beginning of ‘Sense-Certainty’ – the empirical standpoint, which is not then the natural, uninflected orientation of a consciousness toward objects in front of it.<sup>178</sup> As we’ve indicated, for the consciousness now so inclined, this new orientation posing as “natural consciousness” must itself have become a need, since it again requires force to alter its attention. Spirit, however, is not just this consciousness, but the name for this consciousness and its complement taken together. Alongside, and, as it turns out, out of the production of a need for the empirical orientation, we see the production of something Hegel has characterized as a need for the divine. Only another need can provide the force that is to shake Consciousness from its dull fascination with earthly things. It is clear that whatever this need for the divine is, the substitute satisfaction Spirit is finding in Hegel’s time does not, on his account, suffice. He characterizes that substitute satisfaction as a mere ‘feeling,’ which means that it is inarticulate and, one might conclude, therefore unactionable.

What all of this means, then, is that we begin the *Phenomenology* with a divided Spirit, a Spirit that is home to two conflicting but also complementary needs. No matter what it does, Spirit’s activity seems induced by it-knows-not-what. At the heart of the

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<sup>178</sup> I take it as a given in my approach that there is no such thing as “natural consciousness,” that consciousness is a product of education. A natural orientation, then, would be by way of unreflected instinct. For Hegel, “natural consciousness” would refer to unreflective consciousness, consciousness that has not achieved self-consciousness.

*Phenomenology* is secret motivation. We may hope that what comes to appearance in its developmental narrative is exactly that secret, for the aim is self-consciousness, i.e., that Spirit come to recognize what confronts it as indeed its own. Often, the resulting identity (or identity-in-difference) is taken to be between subject and object, so that the problematic and its solution are merely epistemological. But if we're right, that Hegel is concerned not just with knowledge but with the desire to know, with, that is, the relationship between desire and the in-itself, then the aim of eliminating the opacity in objects is tantamount to eliminating the opacity in us, whether by bringing the entire contents of what remains hidden into the open or sealing them off all the more successfully.

### **Two Philosophical Responses to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit***

In order to pursue these lines of thought, we will give more than cursory but less than deep attention to some key "moments" in Hegel's thought, to include: 'Sense-Certainty,' the parables of recognition, the plight of the beautiful soul, and 'Absolute Knowing.' As mentioned, we will rely on our two representative readers of Hegel, Verene and Pippin, in order to illuminate two models on which the potential "success" of the reconciliatory attempt of the *Phenomenology* can be thought. These readers are important for us precisely because they place the question of motivation, affective attachment, and reflective mediation at the center of Hegel's thought, both realizing that Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to transform our relationship to our own grounds. They offer opposing interpretations that bring into sharp relief the two lines of thought that are in tension with one another throughout Hegel's work.

In this section, we are acting as philosophical voyeurs, watching others read Hegel rather than (primarily) reading him ourselves. This approach is justified not merely by issues of expediency but also insofar as Hegel means the *Phenomenology* to be a transformative work of philosophical thought, one that completes rather than merely describes the emergence of self-consciousness. By way of orienting ourselves to the task, we can say that where Verene sustains the force and movement of Hegel's thought, his approach lets go of the possibility of any articulation that might allow that force and movement to issue in anything specific; where Pippin sustains the rationalizing trajectory of Hegel's thought, his approach leaves him unable to understand the tensions that animate the movement and could provide materials for a reflective mediation of the past. The loss of either side – we can call them 'desire' and 'abstraction' as a kind of shorthand – results not only in the disappearance of meaningful moral reasoning (something already visible in Kant), but in the disappearance of any meaningful model of *politics*. In other words, what both lose is the way in which Hegel is committed to making clear how our world is organized around the determinate judgments of which we are not the authors, the concrete ideas that mediate our world and leave a kind of schism between that world and our everyday lives. That is to say, both readings miss Hegel's return to the things of this world in his aesthetic theory. This section is not intended, then, as a commentary on the secondary literature about Hegel (and is only incidentally that), but as way of suggesting that what we seek cannot be found in the isolated realm of thought. As we will see in the next chapter, even for Hegel it is only the work of art that can sustain the *problem* as an object for thought.



As mentioned, our two guides end up holding directly converse positions: while Verene ends up advocating what we might recognize as a liberal philosophical agenda paired with a conservative idea of politics, Pippin ends up doing a very conservative, universalizing kind of philosophy in the name of a liberal political agenda. Again, the point is not about the political positions per se, but about the inability to sustain the tension between real political positions and the philosophy that is meant to justify them. Philosophy ends up taking itself as a sort of underground alternative to politics or mistakes itself directly *for* politics – the very strange politics of ideal reconstruction. Since Pippin’s “vision” of a philosophy and politics free from aesthetic entanglements is further from our own interest in the persistence of the pictorial in modernity, we will devote less energy to his treatment, letting it stand as a kind of counterpoint and transition to our reading of Hegel’s *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*.

By the end of the section, we will have a clearer picture of why we must leave the realm of idealism, even an idealism supplemented by parables, figures of thought, and poetry, of why our thought must also grapple with the concrete (and why this *doesn’t* mean a face to face encounter with the other but must be also objectively mediated). The *Phenomenology* will help us, in other words, to see the limitations of what we might call “actually existing symbolic rationality.” With Kant, we arrived at two intertwined questions: 1) under what conditions do we find objects compelling? and 2) under what conditions do we find other people compelling? Hegel asks questions close to these, but with the difference that he is interested in knowing under what conditions we find the *ideas* of objects and people compelling. That is why his parable is about *looking* rather than about *acting*. In order to understand the role of symbolic rationality in ordering (and

disordering) political relations, we must re-introduce real conditions of existence and questions of real desire and agency.

To see that move as necessary already means stepping outside of the project of ideal reconstruction, a process we'll begin with our turn to Marx and continue with our analysis of the contemporary political struggles around the institution of marriage. While we might hope that Hegel's own position would generate the precise opening we need, that hope models Hegel's own mistake, a mistake that keeps us moving in a circle within idealism rather than opening our thought out onto politics. So, we will leave Hegel with a bit of a jump or lurch, although he will kindly provide us with a well-formed question.

Earlier, we suggested that Verene's reading of Hegel takes the aim of speculative philosophy to be the "staging of desire," while Pippin's reading has Hegel shoving desire of the stage. In order to make some preliminary sense of those thoughts, we might make use of Žižek's description of the function of "fantasy:"

Fantasy is usually conceived as a scenario that realizes the subject's desire. This elementary definition is quite adequate, on condition that we take it literally: what the fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desire is fulfilled, fully satisfied, but on the contrary, a scene that realizes, stages, the desire as such [...] That is to say, the realization of desire does not consist in its being "fulfilled," "fully satisfied," it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire as such, with its circular movement.<sup>179</sup>

Here, the idea is that it is not satisfaction that fantasy seeks, but rather a pleasure in distanced self-knowledge. In very different ways, this describes the two approaches we're outlining here.<sup>180</sup> Our first aim will be to show how on Verene's reading the

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<sup>179</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) 7.

<sup>180</sup> The thought that idealism is a hallucinatory attempt at self-satisfaction is not new. Wolfenstein, for example, writes, "Hegel's idealism, his desire to overcome absolutely the disjunction of subject and object, makes it impossible for him to distinguish between our phantasies of the Other and the existential Other. He purchases the identity of subject and object at the price of the reality of the object." "Mr. Moneybags Meets the Rat Man: Marx and Freud on the Meaning of Money," *Political Psychology* (Vol. 14, #2, 1993)

*Phenomenology*, with the opacity of its images, functions as the kind of desire-sustaining fantasy, a “staging” in the sense that allows for a kind of cathartic release without real activity. Our next aim will be to show how Pippin’s reading construes it as a fantasy that reflects instead the demands of reason, transforming contingency into internal and rational necessity and treating what fails of such transformation as absolutely distant. In some ways, these readings each provide the vision of a community constituted out of one or the other of the two modes of attachment we discovered at the end of our chapters on Kant: affection and respect.

Verene’s celebratory reading of the *Phenomenology* suggests that Hegel’s notion of the concrete concept, the realization of which is the work of that text, is not merely an example of symbolic rationality, but is indeed the kind of explicit symbolic rationality that, finally, here at the end of history, provides us with real and lasting satisfaction. That is to say, speculative (Hegelian) philosophy is for Verene a form of symbolic rationality we can live with, where the excess (though still in his opinion very much excessive) *no longer bothers us*. That is, of course, an ambiguous phrase: *it no longer bothers us*. From his own self-presentation, it is clear that Verene takes the poetic and figurative elements that remain at the end of the *Phenomenology* to be (to use our terms) compelling rather than compulsory. He sees them as sources of inspiration and instances of artistic genius, although we’ll see them function in his reading as sites of what we might term symptomatic agency, by which we mean agency in which the motive forces remain hidden. Verene takes the upshot of the entire *Phenomenology* to be a state (indeed, a kind of psychological state, rather than a political state) wherein we can

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282. Given the conditions of modernity, however, Hegel doesn't need to purchase the nullity of the object; the schism that separates experience from the world as a totality guarantees that.

understand, without being bothered by the fact, that our quest to specify the in-itself is futile, that what appears opaque just is opaque, but that we allow it nonetheless to drive us in our thinking. It is hard to countenance such a state of affairs as genuinely reflective. The situation in which Verene finds himself (and thinks we should all find ourselves) happy might, from another vantage, be described as manic-making. If our reading is right, this state of affairs – where we are “induced by we know not what” – is also not the *aim* of the *Phenomenology* but rather a symptom of the historical situation to which that text is addressed.

Verene’s interpretation of the *Phenomenology* focuses on the survival of the image into absolute knowing, on the fact that the image still seems to have a place in the fully realized (modern) life of Spirit. In the aforementioned debate about picture-thinking, then, Verene’s *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* comes down on the side of its happy persistence. It proceeds by way of an investigation of what Verene terms Hegel’s “master metaphors and ironies,”<sup>181</sup> so that Verene allows a kind of aesthetic principle to direct him to those sections that “have haunted [his] memory.”<sup>182</sup> He describes his procedure as follows: “Ideas about their meanings have come back to me again and again and in this sense the principle of selection I have used is personal.”<sup>183</sup> Since he presents his conclusions in a book, however, we may take it that he thinks to transform this personal principle into a shared one, and indeed, as we’ll see, the condition of being *shared* by a community of thinkers is for Verene what will render the opaque in-itself rational. At the risk of taking

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<sup>181</sup> Donald Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: SUNY Press, 1985) x.

<sup>182</sup> Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection* xi.

<sup>183</sup> Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection* xi.

associations too far, however, it seems that his very language betrays him when he terms the metaphors that haunt him “master metaphors,” and indeed in the end he accords images, metaphors, and ironies the status of a kind of direct cognition, a cognition beyond interrogation and so beyond, it would seem, reflection. If that is right, then this “success” is not the one we are looking for.

Indeed, there are signs enough that Verene shares some of our worries on this score, although these worries fail to inform his general approach. For example, we find a description at the end of his argument that stands in clear but also unacknowledged contradiction to the mastery over us Verene elsewhere attributes to metaphors and the like.<sup>184</sup> Verene ends his own book with a description of the philosopher as a kind of omniscient master of everything cognitive, a claim that sits uncomfortably right alongside the idea that what we come to at the end of the *Phenomenology* is the tragic acceptance of the impenetrable nature of the in-itself. Verene writes:

[A]bsolute knowing is wisdom. [...] The wise man answers all questions not by inventing or projecting new ideas, but by recollecting, by not forgetting, the forms of experience. His *scientia* is his *conscientia*. His ‘science’ is the production in his ‘conscience’ of a discourse that contains all phenomena that can be brought to bear on any question. The Wise Man weds Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses, who copulates with Zeus. The Philosopher has always aspired to be God.<sup>185</sup>

Throughout the book, the image is cast in various roles: as friend, as master, as servant, as a stranger we vaguely recognize, and as one with whom we find ourselves in friendly opposition, all without regard to the possibility that these roles might not be consistent. What is perhaps most important to our current task, however, is the fact that assigning images and metaphors roles at all, characterizing them as if they were people,

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<sup>184</sup> Since we have entered the realm of therapeutic philosophy with Verene’s reading, I feel somewhat less uncomfortable claiming that unacknowledged contradiction at the heart of a scholarly work is a symptom of wish fulfillment.

<sup>185</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 109.

underscores Verene's implicit awareness of the sociality of aesthetic thought. It is worth noting that the appearance of these social roles suggests that, while he may not have achieved *critical* awareness of it, Verene is on another level *hyperaware* of the complexity and sociality of symbolic rationality. He has grasped the way an image can exercise apparent control over us or serve as a vehicle for disavowal. He is interested in the idea that we respond to images (which, after all, would seem incapable of affording us material satisfaction) with pleasure. He even has a sense that either this pleasure binds us affectively to those who respond similarly or the social bond is itself the source of the pleasure in the object. Finally, in spite of his enthusiasms about the communitarian possibilities of what he understands as speculative thought, Verene seems at some other level to be unsettled by the situation. This ambivalence makes Verene an important reader of Hegel, as well as an interesting interpreter of what it means to be a philosopher in modernity.

Verene begins his discussion of the *Phenomenology* by analyzing the images that appear in its final paragraphs. This is appropriate since he is interested not only in arguing that images work as an aporetic propulsive force in the developmental trajectory of the text but also for the idea that they are *required* to sustain conceptual knowledge at its end. Verene orients his discussion around the following passage from that final section of the *Phenomenology*:

This Becoming presents a slow-moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with all the riches of Spirit, moves thus slowly because the Self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> *PhS* 492.

Though Verene returns again and again to the idea that the procession ends with a gallery of *images*, he does not make the idea of the *gallery* central to his analysis. It is clear, however, that his approach depends on the thought that images (along with metaphors and irony, all three of which are treated as essentially interchangeable) transcend the conditions of their production. That means that they both shed their history *and* remain meaningful. This would seem to make them, for Verene, happy symbols of the possibility that *we* might do the same. Given the variety of roles Verene assigns to images et al., it is not entirely clear what it means for them to remain meaningful, however. Sometimes, it looks like this means that the images themselves provide their own new ordering (curatorial) principles. At others, it looks like they are sustained by the concepts they originally made possible, that concepts somehow replace history as the source of meaning. At still others, it seems that it is their very opacity, their refusal to either yield meaning *or* disappear because not explicitly meaningful, that fascinates Verene. This would mean that the in-itself sustains itself as genuinely other even when we realize it is an in-itself-for-us. Even when Verene seems ready, however, to acknowledge the in-itself as genuinely foreign, he has little compunction about treating this “opaque something” that makes a claim on him as if it were acting on his behalf, in the service of his quest for knowledge, or for beauty, or both.

The idea of a gallery of images suits Verene’s focus on Hegel’s concept of *Erinnerung* (memory, literally ‘inwardization’), which Verene translates as ‘re-collection.’ Verene’s term underscores his understanding of the otherness of the in-itself, the resistance it puts up to being inwardized, to becoming a synthetic part of memory or history without thereby disappearing. Instead, what this kind of memory does is to

recollect the bits that have been produced and disordered, to preserve them in a space apart from the sequence of everyday experience, which is to say that it functions as a kind of gallery for the fragments of history. The shape of this thought is social as well as individual, since the claim Verene takes Hegel to be making is that it is only by removing ourselves from experience, which means both from the day to day as well as from the march of history – by doing speculative philosophy – that we might find an order that satisfies us, one based on what we henceforth take to be both a personal and a shared principle of selection. Indeed, this is Verene’s most worrisome thought: that sociality is constituted by way of such shared principles of selection.

The possibility of such a shared if also withdrawn – the term ‘monastic’ comes to mind<sup>187</sup> – order depends on exactly that forcible removal from a focus on individual experience with which we started. We’ll get to the question of how that removal is, a la Verene, to be effected, but for now we can see a picture of the results emerge. The idea is that reason, post-experience, is no longer slave to everyday reality and all of its contingent (from our perspective) ordering principles. (We can see that, from another perspective, this might be mourned as the very *loss* of experience.) Once concepts and their concomitant images have been produced up out of history, a process fraught with material resistance on all sides, we are able to address ourselves to thought-objects. This seems to be the central insight lurking in Verene’s work, which is that this freedom from reality would be purely negative, without attraction, appeal, or compulsion, if it weren’t for reality’s “remainders” in the form of images. It would be, in other words, an empty freedom if it weren’t for some obstacle to freedom. It is a common reading of the *Phenomenology*, and one we’ll encounter with Pippin, that what that text is supposed to

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<sup>187</sup> Indeed, Verene’s reading is discussed in a book entitled Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition, Magee, G.A.



do is to take what presents itself as given, as ready-to-hand, as picture-thinking, what Hegel calls our “inorganic nature”<sup>188</sup> and render it conceptual. For Verene, the task is working it up in some other, more mysterious manner.

As we saw in the lines above, we are left at the end of the *Phenomenology* with a gallery of images which it is now up to us (or perhaps only to Spirit) to digest. This is a second digestion, of course, since the images themselves are produced over the course of history in the primary struggles which it is “our” good fortune to escape. Verene’s thought has to be, then, that things are easier to digest the second time around, and there is little chance of indigestion if what we’re swallowing is merely ideas. To look forward to the argument we’ll pursue with Marx, we might say that instead of viewing the breach between symbolic rationality and production as crippling, Verene views it as clearly emancipating. He writes:

For the actually developing consciousness these metaphors of beginning points [what appear to *us* as metaphors] are reals. For the consciousness that has in some sense reached absolute knowing, these metaphors are keys to the state of consciousness on any given stage of its course. [...] The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a philosophical speech in which all the powers of language, its imagistic and conceptual powers, are brought forth so that the reader may recollect. This recollection is the process of internal vision that all speculation requires. It is the constant companion, the friend, of speculation.<sup>189</sup>

“That the reader may recollect” – the religious echo here is hard to miss. This mass of images and concepts, this bounty of history, is the condition of the possibility for us moderns of practicing the one, true speculative philosophy. Other spirits have suffered that we might not have to. It is only possible, for Hegel as again for Verene, to tell this history as one of *epistemological* struggle and sacrifice so long as we remain at an

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<sup>188</sup> *PhS* 16.

<sup>189</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 25.

impossibly high level of abstraction, where it is ‘consciousness’ that loses and finds itself again and again. Telling it as an epistemological adventure involves uniting its antagonists into a single protagonist, which precisely means collapsing its political dimension. We might attribute Verene’s confusion about which metaphor to use where – master, servant, friend, stranger – to that collapse, since all of these figures end up bound into one. For now, we can think of this figure as ‘concrete spirit,’ the production of which is supposed to have been the work of history. This work is the condition of the possibility of a phenomenology, which is the dis- and re-articulation of that history in epistemological terms.

This turn to epistemology does not, however, preclude all appearance of wants and needs, since it is precisely their reappearance at this ‘higher’ or more abstract level that is astonishing. This begins to explain how it is that the *Phenomenology* is simultaneously the story and yet not the history of a process. The development of just such an independent story is what Jennifer Ann Bates terms ‘proper reconstruction.’<sup>190</sup> According to Bates, the trajectory of the story involves us in the project of “thinking imagination through to its end,” a prospect that is fascinating given Kant’s idea that aesthetic judgment allows us to “range over” portions of the imagination, which ranging there however requires a restrictive principle that allows it to be purposive. Bates’ account is closer to Pippin’s, but for now it is useful as a contrast to Verene’s position, which is that while the *mediation* of imaginative content might be over, the normative or compulsory force of that content remains very much in place.

As we’ve noted, Verene refers to the process of recollection as a “process of internal vision” that is also “the constant companion, the friend, to speculation.” The

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<sup>190</sup> cf. Jennifer Ann Bates, Hegel’s Theory of Imagination (New York: SUNY Press, 2004) 13-14.

concept of “friendship” fairly dominates Verene’s thinking about both Hegel and the philosophical endeavor in general, and the focus connects him to our earlier thinking about the mediation of tastes in the absence of explicit authority. As a trope for interpreting the *Phenomenology*, it comes to Verene from the Schiller poem on which Hegel bases his final lines. At the end of the work, Hegel describes the various forms our parade of spirits is capable of taking. Those spirits

regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History, but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance: the two together, comprehended History, form alike the inwardizing and the Calvary of absolute Spirit, the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne, without which he would be lifeless and alone. Only ‘from the chalice of this realm of spirits/foams forth for Him his own infinitude.’<sup>191</sup>

Verene is right to take careful note of the fact that the *Phenomenology* ends with lines of poetry and just as importantly with *these* lines of poetry. The notion of absolute knowing as a kind of friendship jars with readings of Hegel that take it to be the stage at which there is an undifferentiated unity between subject and object. There would be no room in such an identity, no distance for something like friendship – and, indeed, who wants to be friends with an object? For Verene, the concept of “friendship” transforms the thought of absolute knowing into a social thought, one where what is at stake is not merely the relationship between knower and known but between knowers, and between knowers that meet one another on level ground, forge bonds of attachment that are voluntary, of love untinged by fear. At the same time, and with good if not explicit reason, Verene has a hard time keeping these two questions – whether we are dealing with a problem relating subject and object or subjects to one another – apart, so that the relationship between

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<sup>191</sup> *PhS* 493, final lines adapted by Hegel from Schiller’s *Die Freundschaft*.

thoughts, or between constellations of thoughts and images, comes to model a relationship between knowers. This is a thought familiar from the philosophy of art, wherein formal relations are sometimes taken to model political relations, but transferred to the realm of philosophy more generally, so that the relation of thoughts comes to model the relation among thinkers.<sup>192</sup>

Let us take a closer look at the friendship with which the *Phenomenology* closes. It is no sunny relationship. Spirit is kept company by what has been sacrificed for it. This sacrificed content has, on the one hand, been comprehended, made over into the science of knowing, and, on the other hand, it remains accessible in its contingent, historical form. “Comprehended History,” which is what Hegel calls these two aspects taken together, “form alike the inwardizing and the Calvary of absolute Spirit,” what has been internalized and the marker of the death that made that ideation possible. The life of spirit depends on that death, and all that remains to keep spirit company is a memorial. Although it is clear that friendship appears as an important trope at the end of the *Phenomenology*, its mere appearance is not enough to justify the vigor with which Verene latches onto the imagery. It serves as a kind ur-organizing principle for Verene’s thought about the text, as well as for his thinking about the possibility of philosophical community more generally. His enthusiasm toward the concept ultimately suggests that it masks a worry that the relationship is not as friendly as we’d like. Here, by the way, is exhibit A for the limits of picture-thinking: since it organizes its contents associatively, it is difficult to put the brakes on the associations.

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<sup>192</sup> In the sociology of art, the connection is sometimes made even more directly, as when Paul DiMaggio analyzes the composition of various kinds of art audiences. Cf. DiMaggio.

Verene offers the following explanation of the final paragraph of the *Phenomenology*:

What immediately precedes this final paragraph is spirit as nature. Spirit as the forms of nature is a form of forgetting, of wandering with strange companions, not itself. It saves itself from these strange companions, the objects of nature, by remembering it has another life—a life of self images. It recalls it has another life free of the mindlessness of natural science, that it is capable of *Bildung*.<sup>193</sup>

Here, we can see that it is not primarily in thoughts about objects that Spirit finds its friends and companions, but in its ‘life of self images,’ a community of friends, albeit not *real* friends, since these are not selves but self images. As it turns out, the only sphere in which we can hope for such friendly relations between thought and image is that of culture, and perhaps more narrowly that of philosophy, or even more narrowly of a specific kind of philosophy. This means that we must not merely turn from the ‘mindlessness of natural science’ (with its concomitant excesses of sensibility) but also from the day-to-day world Verene thinks must be left to the technocrats.<sup>194</sup> Only in this way can we be sure that the selves we encounter are like to ourselves, and the only way this serves as a guarantee that we will meet as friends is if we define friendship in terms of affirmative identity.

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<sup>193</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 5.

<sup>194</sup> In an interview with *Eurozine*, Verene answers a question about political hope as follows: My frank answer to that question is that my pessimism is whole and complete. I don’t see that philosophy can effect changes in the course of technological society. There might be a consolation of philosophy, because there is some consolation in the power of philosophy to allow us to understand what is, and what the human condition is, in relation to the forces of the contemporary world that play upon it. Philosophy can still hold out its ancient values for those who can grasp and appreciate them. Thus on the individual level the study of philosophy can help one make a life in the midst of conditions that are not ideal. Through the appeal that philosophy can have on some individuals, I think that philosophy can be kept alive but this can only be done as an activity among friends. Tõnu Viik, “Myth and Philosophy,” *Eurozine*, (www.eurozine.com 12.20.2002, 1-6) 6.

Compare this with the following claim from Pippin, describing his thesis in *Idealism as Modernism*: These essays, then present a somewhat indirect defense of a simple but sweeping thesis: that the modern European intellectual tradition has not ‘culminated in nihilism,’ a technological will to power, or a thoughtless, hegemonic subjectivism. On the contrary, the modern tradition is sustained by a defensible moral aspiration: to live freely. *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 24. (Hereafter *IM*.)

If Verene focuses on the *friendship* built around the resistance of the object, Hegel himself seems more interested in idea that what greets us *as* object is always the sublimated appearance of authority. This means that acknowledging the independent and ontological claim an object makes on us involves resisting the subjective claims it might otherwise be making. This becomes clear in Hegel's discussion of a possible (and mistaken) response on the part of consciousness to what it encounters as other and object. It greets the new object "with the assurance that it comes from the shrine of inner divine intuition:"

A reception of this kind is usually the first reaction on the part of knowing to something unfamiliar; it resists it in order to save its own freedom and its own insight, its own authority from the alien authority (for this is the guise in which what is newly encountered first appears) and to get rid of the appearance that something has been learned and of the sort of shame this is supposed to involve. Similarly, when the unfamiliar is greeted with applause, the reaction is of the same kind, and consists in what in another sphere would take the form of ultra-revolutionary speech and action.<sup>195</sup>

Hegel is describing something like the opposite of dissociation. It is a psychological response that posits what appears as most foreign as most one's own. This is, Hegel claims, a way of preserving the appearance of self-authority (autonomy) in the presence of alien authority. This reaction is thus also a means of denying the shame involved in development and education, the shame that accompanies moving from the initial position in which we (and our desires) act as the ordering principle to one where we develop or adopt objective (shared) ordering principles. Hegel's second point, that we might celebrate the appearance of the alien with applause, is an alternative route to the avoidance of shame; we'll have occasion to return to that idea in a moment. For now, let us just note that Hegel indicates that it is *not*, for him, objects that are the source of

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<sup>195</sup> *PhS* 35.

alienation; they are rather the sites where alien authority appears. That means that the antagonism that looks, with Verene's account, to arise by way of the otherness of the as-yet undigested material world is really a social antagonism; this is much closer to our own social conception of symbolic rationality, and we see hints of a similar thought throughout Verene's writing.

As we've noted, the hidden worry about antagonism makes itself felt both at the level of concept-image relation (relation among thoughts) and at the social level. This has to do in large part with the fact that the speculative idealist account collapses the distinctions that might otherwise hold open the gap between the two. Verene ultimately makes the connection between a friendship of thought and a friendship of thinkers by way of a leap between figures: the question of community arises without introduction, and it is left behind almost as abruptly as he returns to the imbalanced relations of mastery and servitude. Even when he is not explicitly discussing a society of thinkers, however, his continued use of the friendship trope keeps the 'communal' aspect of the philosophical project before our eyes.

By way of indicating the depth of Verene's reliance on the trope of friendship, and for the sake of highlighting some of the importing tensions that animate his thinking about it, we'll briefly survey some of its appearances. On the side of the concept-image relation, Verene claims that "speculation will fall into lifeless solitude the minute it loses its friendship with recollection."<sup>196</sup> He writes also that the "presentational image is always the basis of the life of the speculative proposition. They are the friendship of thought."<sup>197</sup> That is a handy if also awkward phrase: the friendship of thought. It is

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<sup>196</sup> Verene, *Hegel's Recollection* 9.

<sup>197</sup> Verene, *Hegel's Recollection* 12.

handy insofar as the ‘of’ is left indefinite: is this a friendship of thought with something else, a friendship of people grounded in thought, or a friendship among thoughts? It is impossible to really distinguish the members of this friendship; instead, this is the assertion of an inarticulate affinity that sustains all of its members. Again, Verene describes the relationship between concept and image, this time with the introduction of tension or antagonism into the relation: “The *Begriff* is no monotone of itself, its own metaphysical categories in sequence. It is forever in friendly opposition to the image—its own origin, present in itself.”<sup>198</sup> In terms of the project Verene takes to be proper to philosophers, it is participation in the life of Spirit: “We, the readers, like the divine, are forced back into the forms of our creation to produce the perfect friendship of the whole.”<sup>199</sup> It is by engaging in a certain form of recollection or reflection that we forge a unity, and while Verene doesn’t quite recognize this as a political thought (or only recognizes it as an anti-political thought) it is clear that he is laying out a normative principle for a social pursuit. By following that principle we can, on Verene’s account, escape the lonely fate of the beautiful soul. He writes, “Experience cannot be perfectly recollected, yet this recollection saves philosophy from the lifeless solitude of the beautiful soul, taken as a description of philosophical life.”<sup>200</sup> The unfinishedness of the recollection is what sustains the communal project, and there seems to be no prospect for real headway, so that the project is sustained indefinitely. Good news, then, for philosophers, but bad news for the rest of the world.

For Verene, the fact that the project of recollection is a communal affair appears to justify the fact that it involves removing oneself from the sphere of practical activity.

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<sup>198</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 13.

<sup>199</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 7.

<sup>200</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 112.



In his discussion of the beautiful soul, Verene follows Baillie in pointing out that Hegel's claim that the beautiful soul "wastes itself in yearning, and pines away in consumption,"<sup>201</sup> is aimed at Novalis, who was in fact consumptive. This prompts Verene to ask: "Why is Hegel so nasty?"<sup>202</sup> Verene's own answer would appear to be a more complicated "because the beautiful soul deserves it." He writes:

The beautiful soul is morally and intellectually dangerous because it has a degenerate version of the relation of the self-consciousness to the absolute. Its illusion about the absolute is more grave as an obstacle for the self to find the pathway of true speculative thought than that of the earlier Unhappy Consciousness. At this earlier stage consciousness can become unhappy. The beautiful soul, on the other hand, is happy, self-satisfied, and appears to be the most profoundly poetic, religious, and philosophical of all positions. It appears to be deeply human, to be the authentic self. Instead, it is anti-communal and its drive for purity (or authenticity) is the condition for fanaticism and the destruction of love. Never having understood community, such a beautiful self does not understand how the community of selves offsets death, affirms the reality of the community, and survives what the individual cannot. Let us wish it its abstract, authentic death.<sup>203</sup>

Note that the danger posed by the beautiful soul is first described as *moral* and *intellectual*, and yet the description that follows appears to be that of a purely intellectual danger. The beautiful soul poses a grave obstacle "for the self to find the pathway of true speculative thought." It is possible that Verene takes the resulting anti-communitarian attitude to be a moral danger, but even here Verene seems concerned with the epistemological, rather than moral or political, relation to the community, a purely affirmative relation between members and between each member and the whole. Verene takes the beautiful soul's gravest offense to be its *epistemological* abstraction, rather than, say, the failure to act that Hegel ascribes to its understanding of the necessary failure of all actions. While his notion of community leaves much to be desired, Verene's use of

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<sup>201</sup> Cited in Verene 100 as "Baillie 676, Miller 668."

<sup>202</sup> Verene, Hegel's Recollection 100.

<sup>203</sup> Verene, Hegel's Recollection 101.

‘fanaticism’ to describe the danger inherent in the overly purist attitude of the beautiful soul allows us to see what it is that Verene gets right. Fanaticism (at least on Kant’s account, which seems as good as any for this discussion) is the enthusiasm that accompanies the absence of images, and Verene also calls this “the destruction of love.” By the latter phrase, he means the absence of anything to “hang” our desires on. Now we can finally see the way in which Verene’s conception of community is founded in terms of compelling images shared by but also transcending (not derived from) its members.

All the same, his condemnation of the beautiful soul seems very harsh: the beautiful soul is consigned to its lonely (and violent) death *because* it is lonely in life, and abstraction – the loss of the sense of a real in-itself, which is to say a shared in-itself – is the cause of that loneliness. One might ask of Verene, as he asks of Hegel: why is he so nasty? Why the lack of sympathy? I would suggest that it is because the description of the beautiful soul hits too close to home. When the notion of praxis gets reduced to an idea of philosophical practice, it is hard to say what remains of it that deserves the name. It turns out that Verene even recognizes how his position, which he takes to be Hegel’s, might be mistaken for that of the beautiful soul. He thinks Hegel recognizes this as well. In referring to Hegel’s re-treatment of the beautiful soul in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*, he writes:

Why does Hegel emphasize the beautiful soul here? His recollection of the other stages is much more generally stated. I think this is because the beautiful soul is very close to the philosophical standpoint of absolute knowing. When the self steps from its final role as substance in the form of revealed religion into the self as subject, it risks confusion and forgetfulness. It can revert here to ... the life of the beautiful soul.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 110.

And what is to keep us from slipping into forgetfulness? It is the model of philosophical praxis:

[T]he philosophical mentality almost entered politics but saw the unreality of the state and pulled back in apparent servitude to the state. The philosophical attitude is born in the mind of the servant. [...] The mind of the master sees only at odd moments how strange a partner it has in the philosophical servant who knows the secret of his own work. [...] The philosopher lives under the power of the state, but his work is directed toward realities that run counter to it. [...] That Hegel offers here a portrait of philosophical praxis has been missed by traditional commentaries.<sup>205</sup>

Here, we see Verene inclined to treat philosophy as a kind of (anti-)political work, generating something like a fantasy of the philosopher as underground political worker, or a politics of the philosopher as an underground fantasy worker. The philosopher is at work tending to ‘realities’ that run counter to the power of the state. But the tending is clearly monastic, a caring-for but not the kind of mediating of either public or private concerns that would yield results outside of the community this project sustains. It is the constriction of this affirmative community to the realm of thought that makes Verene’s romantic model less dangerous than a political model built in the same way, but for that very reason it is also less real.<sup>206</sup> It is worth recalling here the final line in Hegel’s passage about our response to what presents itself as new or alien: “Similarly, when the unfamiliar is greeted with applause, the reaction is of the same kind, and consists in what in another sphere would take the form of ultra-revolutionary speech and action.”

Although Verene’s reading of Hegel helps *us* to highlight the mysteries surrounding the

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<sup>205</sup> Verene, Hegel’s Recollection 69.

<sup>206</sup> In the *Eurozine* interview, Verene says: “I think all philosophy can expect is the freedom to speak its mind, and when philosophy is being done there are students who can hear it and will be attracted to it. I think there is no special system or method for its transmission other than to hold the belief that when philosophy is being done those who come in contact with it will respond to it. In that way philosophy will continue. In this sense I think that philosophy has its own momentum, because, for those who can respond to it, it serves a purpose of being a way to form the basic human need for self-knowledge.” Viik 5.

survival of images into absolute knowing, we are left with the pressing question: how does a friend of images end up in such a constricted world?

What we have in Verene's reading is not, then, a successful or cogent account of symbolic rationality as a model of sociality. Indeed, it is not so much the successful resolution as an acute expression of the symptom we took the *Phenomenology* to be addressing, namely the dissociation of desire and knowledge. What Verene craves are *compelling images*, which is what sense-certainty cannot provide, what gets lost in the production of the natural-scientific standpoint. His joy in finding these images throughout the *Phenomenology* is evident – but, to misquote Hegel, by the little that satisfies him, we can measure the extent of our loss. Verene treats these images as divine, in two senses: first, the images are clearly 'spiritual' insofar as they are not material representations but their psychological traces; second, and more importantly, they are 'magical' insofar as they support conceptual thought in a way that we cannot understand and yet of which we are aware, and they support community in the same way, binding us (philosophers at least) together we know not how. The problem with Verene's approach and its celebratory tone is that it does not interrogate the source of those forms of compulsion, and I would suggest that this is because modernity leaves us needing to be compelled by *something*, anything.

It is precisely this need for compelling images at which Pippin directs his own reading of Hegel. If Verene is taken with the images and poetry Hegel corrals in the service of his argument, Pippin is committed to analyzing the text in terms of Hegel's explicit philosophical commitments, the former taken with the spirit and the latter with the letter (or logical structure) of the text. Indeed, Hegel writes: "To help bring

philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title ‘love of knowing’ and be *actual* knowing—this is what I’ve set myself to do.”<sup>207</sup> If Verene’s treatment of the text ends with a wedding, the wedding of the Wise Man to Mnemosyne, it is left to us to ask if this is the end of an erotic relation or the means for sustaining it. (We’ll get to ask that question in some seriousness in the second to last chapter of the dissertation.) Pippin, on the other hand, is enthusiastic about the possibility of a politics *without* poetic or erotic over- or undertones.<sup>208</sup> In his *Idealism and Modernism*, Pippin clearly sets his own account of Hegel’s task over against what we might take to be a fair approximation of Verene’s: “[S]ome commentators classify [Hegel] as a ‘romantic,’ along the lines of Schiller, and so try to equate a practically rational life with some sort of sensuous harmony with ‘the whole,’ or with *the rational*, ‘what there truly is.’”<sup>209</sup> Indeed, in his introduction to *Hegel on Ethics and Politics*, Pippin asserts that one must understand “what, for Hegel, was the distinctiveness of *modern* societies. For modern societies are, in effect, founded not on tradition or religion or mythology (and certainly not for Hegel on a common ethnicity) but on *philosophy*, on philosophical claims to legitimacy. Thus, philosophy plays an active, very different role in such a community, attempting to articulate to itself its own claim to normative authority in essentially philosophical terms.”<sup>210</sup>

What is sought, then, on Pippin’s account, is not the perfect friendship of the whole, and his rejection is complete enough that it does not much matter if we read that

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<sup>207</sup> *PhS* 3.

<sup>208</sup> This orientation and enthusiasm leads him to dismiss as pertaining to issues of ‘style’ (*Hegel’s Idealism* 117) exactly those obstacles and images that ignite Verene’s interest; instead, Pippin is clearly relieved when, for example, he can isolate a serious philosophical problem in all this mess: “All of this is, admittedly, still not easy to understand, but at least it looks like we are on the verge, finally, of a recognizable philosophical claim.” Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 148. (Hereafter *HI*.)

<sup>209</sup> *IM* 418.

<sup>210</sup> Pippin, *Hegel on Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 7.

as an internal psychic harmony, an external aesthetic harmony, or a harmony between desires and the forms available for their expression. Instead, we might say that what is sought instead is a whole without need for friendship, a community in which our membership is thoroughly (or as thoroughly as possible) mediated by reason. This thought is familiar enough to all readers of Hegel, who might remember, in addition to Hegel's claim that our task in the *Phenomenology* is to transform philosophy (love of wisdom) to science (wisdom itself), his corresponding claim in the *Philosophy of Right* that the goal of the modern state is a unity of citizens through reason rather than love.<sup>211</sup> The progressive elimination of the need for any sensuous supplement to thought is in effect what Pippin means by the term 'modernism.' Hegel's "own enthusiastic modernism" means that his "interest in the role of motivational possibility in ethical theory *does not amount to a claim that we must find room for hedonic or egoistic concerns in order to explain such motivation.*"<sup>212</sup> Clearly, Pippin does not take the problem to which Hegel addresses himself to be a schism in experience that prevents our "hedonistic or egoistic" drives from appearing. Pippin again describes his own approach by way of contrast with the romantic reading:

[Hegel] is not portraying the problem as *primarily* one of psychic harmony, integration, or inner alienation, as if what is originally wrong with the moral point of view is that it requires me to detach myself from all I have come to care about, all that makes me 'me.' The question he is raising, *together* with Kant, is whether what you have come to care about really does reflect 'you' as a *subject*, or it is about the conditions of the *attachment* in the first place, such that these attachments truly reflect your subjectivity. [...] Hegel thinks that ... the norms you must be committed to, such that any attachment could come to reflect you and your subjectivity ... involve social and institutional conditions wherein you can 'meet with' your own reason.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> cf. *Philosophy of Right*, 199

<sup>212</sup> *IM* 441, emphasis mine.

<sup>213</sup> *IM* 441.

Here, we can see in what way Pippin is clearly helpful to the account we have started to develop: the task of trying to understand the conditions of affective attachments involves understanding *social and institutional conditions*. The idea that we look to these to understand the contradictions in which we find ourselves will contrast with the clues we find in the aesthetics lectures about a schism between experience and the world orchestrated as the state and civil society. In addition to keeping our own concerns focused more directly on the question of object-attachment, we will part ways most decisively with Pippin's notion that we can "meet with" our own reason, that reason can be experienced in this way as our own, without simultaneously experiencing a contradiction.

Pippin's thought about this "meeting" relies heavily on his reading of the scenes of recognition in the *Phenomenology*. It is telling that on his account, in order to guarantee that what we meet with here is our own reason, the entire story of recognition must be rendered as a parable, and indeed a parable of which we can take ourselves to be the authors, and indeed this only on a certain understanding of what it is to be an author – a fantasy involving the notion of total authorial control. This is where Bates' notion of an "ideal reconstruction" comes into play. Pippin describes the *Phenomenology* as doing a kind of descriptive work:

The problem is how all this 'opposition' and 'overcoming' is supposed to be *described*, indeed, to be described as some sort of idealized 'history' of Spirit's self-education. [Hegel] tries to account for such things as how and why a subject would find its views of *another subject* 'opposed' by such a subject; how social subjects, groups, or classes find their desires, and especially their view of the own desire, opposed and negated by other social subjects, groups, or classes; how political subjects with certain Notions about political life would (and did) find themselves in sometimes 'tragic' opposition; in what way laboring or even worshipping subjects

find their experience of their own activity ‘in opposition with itself’; and so forth.<sup>214</sup>

Hegel’s mode of description is, then, ‘idealized history,’ a story wherein Spirit rewrites the tale of its own education. The rest of this passage describes the various kinds of opposition this mode of storytelling is meant to overcome, all of which are social oppositions – between individuals, individuals and groups, groups and groups, and sometimes within a single individual, primarily, of course, ‘ideal’ oppositions in the sense that this is about the various *views* of ourselves, our desires, our practices. If this were true, that a certain kind of idealized history (namely, speculative thought) allows us to overcome these very real and genuinely political oppositions, then it would again be the case that Hegel’s idealism is the very mode of symbolic rationality we seek. But already the fact that Pippin seems compelled to distance himself from all descriptive terms that would stake a claim for the *reality* of these “oppositions,” these “tragedies,” this “history,” suggests that he himself has not settled the question whether this work of thought can “really” be expected to accomplish this work.

If Verene takes absolute knowing to be the result of a different kind of education, education into a kind of symbolic rationality we can live with and even, at least philosophically, be sustained by, he also takes it to be a kind of resignation that allows us to admit that the “in itself” or source is and will remain opaque. From our vantage, this is not a properly symbolic form of ‘rationality,’ not adequately mediated, even though it *might* be (like Hegel’s own work) a basically adequate description of the condition judgment finds itself in. Pippin’s account is both more and less optimistic than that. It also includes an understanding of the empirically (though not logically) necessitated

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<sup>214</sup> *HI* 110, emphasis mine.



‘remainder’ that prevents our thinking from becoming entirely speculative, that limits our ability to do away with reflective or empirically-engaged thinking, but modernity itself is, as we’ve indicated, the project of progressively eliminating or reducing the claims that this remainder might make on us. This is how he describes the strangely humble and grandiose claim of absolute knowing: “[T]he resolution in question is an absolute comprehension of the incompleteness of thought’s determination of itself.”<sup>215</sup> What this awkward formulation means is that while politics will still be a fact of life, we will in a more general sense have ‘comprehended’ what it is about and what it is after. Pippin’s use of the term “absolute comprehension” suggests that this is a process of sealing off from theory what is, from its vantage, contingent. This general comprehension can serve to give shape and, it would seem, a fairly definite direction to whatever political negotiation is left to be done, serving as what we might call a ‘strict’ regulative ideal – one the achievement of which we grant is impossible, due to our finitude, but toward which we can make definite and perhaps tangential progress. (This vision of politics is then analogous to the promise of progressive comprehension of the natural world that beautiful nature offers us, but which the work of art somehow disrupts.)

The project, then, has become clear, and this is what it means to be modern. Pippin seems more confident in the thought that this work of speculative thought aims at real political results *in the future* than that it meets up with any real social or political contents from the past. Indeed, given the strange narrative status of the *Phenomenology*, it seems as though this project of reworking history aims to make over the past in such a way that to do this philosophico-political work is a *real* continuation of a *fictional*

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<sup>215</sup> *IM* 257.

trajectory. Why, however, should we think that speculation will be any more responsible to the future than it has been to the past?

Pippin makes it clear that the recognition of their *sociality* is the condition of the possibility for gaining the kind of reflective distance from our desires that might allow us to make our attachments, if only retrospectively, our own. Since we will take that insight but argue that this kind of retrospective, speculative encounter with an imagined other is not sufficient, we should head off one suspicion in advance. We have left our definition of ‘politics’ purposefully vague, claiming only that it must involve some manner of real, empirical encounter with other people, and that the necessity of this encounter must, then, have to do with something ‘real’ about them and about ourselves. Hegel has a sense of this when he says in his 1805-1807 *Philosophy of Spirit* lectures that “Man is this Night, this empty Nothing, which holds everything in its simplicity—a kingdom of endless representations, images, none of which appears immediately to him—... *One catches a glimpse of this Night when one looks others in the eyes.*”<sup>216</sup> The move to a speculative relationship with others involves the replacement of any ‘real’ encounter with a retrospective, self-narrated encounter, a project (we argue) aimed at doing away with some kind of disruption. But the fact that we will be critical of the move to speculative reason does not mean that what is needed is a face-to-face encounter with others but rather that the dream of doing away with the disruption that others *are* is a dangerous fantasy. The reasons why it is not a face-to-face encounter that is needed begin to appear already with the Hegel citation above: what we get a glimpse of when we look others in the eyes (and this is of course a parable, not an empirical claim, quite) is *opacity* or *darkness*, but not its potential shapes, the possibilities of communication or interpretation

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<sup>216</sup> Cited Bates 66, emphasis mine.

it might yield up. But, and this is important, in the passage above it is *our own* “Night,” our own “kingdom of endless representations” that is invisible *until we see that kingdom reflected in another*. Here, it is clear that the recognition of our own opacity is a social phenomenon *and* that these are not given any further shape in direct encounters with our peers.

Both Verene and Pippin understand the transition to modernity in terms of what that transition means *for philosophy*. For Verene, the possibilities that this move opens up are ones that can only be realized philosophically, since the transition also means that other modes of engagement, of agency and activity, have been foreclosed. For Pippin, however, philosophical engagement is the form of activity proper to modernity, and he seems to take it as the progressive replacement of politics with philosophy. He presents what he takes to be the milder form of the claim to absolute knowing again thus:

In one sense, this just means that Hegel considers philosophy, realized in Absolute Knowledge, the decisive single institution within the interrelated collective attempt at mutual recognition by a historical community. Its resolution of the terms within which any form of self or other knowledge can occur is the *sine qua non* of self-satisfaction.<sup>217</sup>

Here, it seems clear that Pippin is assigning philosophy a very deep and important, as well as a (strangely) therapeutic task, but he is also distancing himself from that depth and importance with his “this just means...” On Pippin’s reading, the method by which this philosophical therapy works is precisely that of ideal reconstruction. We might connect this notion of ideal reconstruction with the ‘shame’ we saw<sup>218</sup> Hegel posit as often associated with learning and development. On this model, which is in no way explicitly present in Pippin’s account, ideal reconstruction would be a process of

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<sup>217</sup> *HI* 170.

<sup>218</sup> *PhS* 34.

transforming our relationship to our desires in such a way as to transition from psychological or political modes of explanation to philosophical modes, which is to say from modes that explain things in terms of concrete contexts to those which explain them in terms of some kind of internal logic. Instead, then, of discipline and incentive, or struggle and domination, as the causal forces that give rise to moderns and their modernity, we look for a story that can account for “us” in terms we recognize. Given the forms of thought – and for Pippin, this means the various *philosophical* positions, skepticism, empiricism, realism, transcendental ideals – that exist, what “must” (where ‘must’ asks after rational necessity) their history be?

As a moral thinker, Pippin is clearly interested in the question of desire, and he takes the process of ideal reconstruction to be aimed at revealing the necessity of the ideality of desire, an ideality which is required if we are ever to identify, know our own desires, take them as interests rather than compulsions. But since he is involved in reading this section as a work of rational reconstruction, he doesn’t at all address the *specificity* of the desires in question. Indeed, all three troublesome notions come to stand in for untenably immediate relations to ourselves and our environs – untenable *because* ‘dissatisfying,’<sup>219</sup> dissatisfying because not recognizably born of reason. His reading of this section is about the genesis of the need for a stable, objective world, and the realization that such a world requires other people and some manner of coordination:

The eventual problem here is that such constitutive forms of self-understanding can be properly understood only if our reconstruction can explain such a ‘self-relation’ in relation to a genuine *other*, if we can show how an initial *self*-determination is progressively ‘objective.’ Or, clearly,

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<sup>219</sup> *HI* 149.

relation to objects, objectivity, cannot simply be ‘whatever a subject, or even a group of unanimously agreeing subjects, desire it to be.’<sup>220</sup>

On this account, it is in order to meet this epistemological need *for* an objective world that “the other” is called forth, makes its appearance in the story, although given that genesis it is a real question to what degree we can take the modifier “genuine” seriously.<sup>221</sup> The problem set up by the parable in this section can be understood as follows: as individuals, we relate to the objective world by way of desire and its more or less immediate gratification. We thereby assert our superiority over the objects before us, and we ourselves gain objectivity by eating them. But we cannot sustain this object-relation, cannot use it, by our lonesomes, to generate an objective world that we might take to be the objective reflection of ourselves, and such a world is possible only among subjects. Now, it may be true that such a world is only possible among subjects, but it is also true that it is only in that same company that we develop the *need* for such a world; thus, it is a mistake to *call on that need* to explain the appearance of our new friends. Immediate instinctual gratification may in fact be an obstacle to reflective self-knowledge, but from within a world where that just is our orientation, we can hardly have been said to hope for something better.

Since part of the criticism we’re aiming at Pippin is the fact that he doesn’t pay “real” attention to the specificity of the model of desire that arises in the chapter on Self-Consciousness, we should show what it is we think he misses thereby. *Eating* is, of course, the desire that stands in for Consciousness’s orientation to its world as we enter

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<sup>220</sup> *HI* 149.

<sup>221</sup> Although Pippin nowhere says as much, and indeed tries to fend off readings of Hegel that suggest it, it does seem sometimes like he is engaged in a kind of existentialist project whereby we voluntarily take on (identify as serving a real purpose of our own) what we otherwise might encounter as an obstacle or source of frustration; here, that something is other people, the things of this world we cannot “eat.”

the chapter. (Remember that in our opening citation Spirit wanders the desert *thirsting* for the divine.) This shouldn't surprise us, since we have already talked about Verene's transformation of *Er-innerung*, memory as inwardization, into a kind of (re)collecting, and indeed that is not far from Pippin's reading whereby what is sought is a transformation from an object-relation that involves devouring the object, which then ceases to be, to one of object-relating. (Only if we do not eat the art can we curate it.) Clearly, as a parable, there are really two things going on, so that Pippin is right to read this section as about object-relations, but since object-relations are the result, rather than the starting point, of this section, we can hardly credit these as the central plot mechanism. This is where it becomes important that it is *eating*, rather than sexuality, that provides the model of desire. Sexuality is, of course, the desire that sustains its object, does not devour it, and it is the desire that is, even the most prudish would admit, more aptly aimed at other people, at least once we have become consciousnesses.<sup>222</sup> So how does the situation, which (very roughly put) is about the limitations on self-knowledge for the unfettered eater, call forth an object (an opposing subject) whose sole purpose is to act as a limitation on what we might happily eat? This is analogous to the question with which we started this chapter: how do we come to thirst for a knowledge of what demands we restrain our thirst?

Already in Sense-Certainty, Hegel dismisses the aim of object-knowledge *for its own sake*. He writes:

In this respect we can tell those who assert the truth and certainty of the reality of sense-objects that they should go back to the most elementary school of wisdom, viz. the ancient Eleusinian Mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus, and that they have still to learn the secret meaning of the eating

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<sup>222</sup> It is tempting to launch into a discussion of Klein and Freud here, but I will restrain myself. That said, and to give Hegel his due, it is indeed as eaters that we first interact with another human...

of the bread and the drinking of the wine. For he who is initiated into these Mysteries not only comes to doubt the being of sensuous things, but to despair of it; in part he brings about the nothingness of such things himself in his dealings with them, and in part he see them reduce themselves to nothingness. Even the animals are not shut out from this wisdom but, on the contrary, show themselves to be most profoundly initiated into it; for they do not just stand idly in from of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up.<sup>223</sup>

The animals “fall to without ceremony,” not standing idly by as if things possessed intrinsic being. Intrinsic being, of course, refers here to the “in-itself,” the idea that objects make a claim on us – when, for example, we ascribe beauty, or, in this case, merely reality, to them – a claim that we find it difficult to acknowledge as our own. If the in itself is only important insofar as it subtends ceremony, then it turns out we need to acknowledge it not as a claim made by objects on us, i.e., not as a simple marker of the contingency of our own desires, but as a claim – related to need, but not only to “my” need – made on us by and by way of our social others.

Pippin’s *Hegel’s Idealism* bears the addendum *The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*. We might take this to refer to something close to what Žižek has in mind, for, although Pippin refers to ‘satisfactions,’ they are those of ‘self-consciousness,’ which is to say that consciousness that gets to witness itself, to recognize the connection between the appearance of the object and its own desires. But it is not only the otherness of the object that has to be overcome; indeed, if the source of the otherness of the object is somehow really an effect of our estrangement from social forms of authority, as our reading of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* suggested, then it is the loss of “other people” that is the problem, the fact that we are kept company only by what has been

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<sup>223</sup> *PhS* 65.

sacrificed for us. This is a topic that we will leave off here, in order to turn at the start of the next chapter to the situation of the artist in this modernity where over-enchancement is the same thing as dis-enchancement, but we will return to it as we move on to Marx and the commodity form.

All of this has brought us to the clearest articulation of our critique of idealism, even as we acknowledge a debt to it for giving us the form of our thought: *Where have all the real people gone?* An overly-cute (if also in some way tragically true) answer might be: into the factories, or into our goods and services. Indeed, this worry about the appearance of the other is really a worry about relations with others who *never* appear to us, a new condition of relatedness whereby authority, religion, kinship and locally-oriented need fail to us to our people and our place, or alternatively where they root us all too well, without allowing for the possibility of reflective mediation. This is a model of “community” that begins with Jesus and the Unhappy Consciousness but really gets its objective footing with the advent of civil society and the modern state, and these are the conditions under which the work of art no longer *works* as the happy mediation between social demands and our sensuous existence. As Hegel seems to put it in the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, we are both too rooted, too “entangled in minute preoccupations, ... petty needs and interests”<sup>224</sup> and too far above experience, “beyond the stage at which art is the highest mode assumed by man’s consciousness of the absolute,”<sup>225</sup> that is, our need is too great and our interests too petty and everyday to be satisfied by the work of art. And yet, as we’ll see in the chapter, it is here that the work of art stands to reveal more to us (if heal less for us) than it could have when it was firmly rooted in the

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<sup>224</sup> *ILA* 12.

<sup>225</sup> *ILA* 12.



traditions that shaped our everyday lives, since we at least search in it for something that might enable us to bridge the schism between the forms of our lives and their seemingly dead contents. Although we have called this a crisis of reflection and symbolic thought, Hegel describes it too as a kind of *overabundance* of reflection:

The beautiful days of Greek art, and the golden time of the later middle ages are gone by. The reflective culture of our life today, makes it a necessity for us, in respect of our will no less than of our judgment, to adhere to general points of view, and to regulate matters according to them, so that general forms, laws, duties, rights, maxims are what have validity as the grounds of determination and are the chief regulative force.<sup>226</sup>

Hegel refers to “reflective culture.” If reflection is the middle term, the subjective copula between the particularities that confront us and the demands of conceptualization, then it is here described as a middle term that arrives to us ready-made, a part of objective culture rather than our way of claiming our right to mediate that same culture.

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<sup>226</sup> *ILA* 12.

## CHAPTER V

### HEGEL AND MARX: FROM ROMANCE TO NECROMANCE

#### **Introduction**

*[I]n the position we have been forced to assign to art in the course of its development, the whole situation has altogether altered.*<sup>227</sup>

We have so far depicted modernity as a condition of alienation from both the given “contents” of the world and ourselves *and* the laws and norms by means of which we are supposed to make sense of and express these same contents in communication with one another – as, in other words, a crisis of or for reflective judgment. Hegel’s claim about art being for us a thing of the past is a claim we’re reading as a recognition on his part that the art persists but it does so as a reminder of a past and now impossible project of reconciliation, i.e., in the form of an unsettling dissatisfaction. That is to say, we’re focusing in on what for Hegel is art’s *failure*, the failure that makes it a question and a problem and, on his view, invites philosophical treatment, because this persistent failure tells us something important about our relationship to the available social forms of life and expression. For Hegel, of course, the important question is about what happens when religion and finally philosophy pick up where art has left off, but for us, it is about art’s never having actually left off. This means at the very least that from the standpoint of “art” (or, more accurately, that of those artists who continue to work in spite of their demotion), religion and philosophy do not successfully transcend art or answer whatever questions it poses to us.

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<sup>227</sup> ALFA II 604.

In this chapter, we will first look at Hegel's description of the end of art, paying special attention to those moments where it seems clearest that art persists, past its own end, as a kind of non-absorptive symbolizing function. Then, in order to see why such a form is requisite, we will turn to Marx's account of the commodity as the exemplary all-absorptive symbolic form. There, we will cleave apart the question of whether symbols still exist (the answer: yes, and how) from our own proper question, namely, whether a shared world of symbolic rationality is available to us. This chapter will thus leave us with the task of casting about for a living instance of symbolic rationality.

### **The Ironic and the Deadly Earnest**

Toward the end of the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel lays out his periodic narrative of the subjective forms of art, beginning with the symbolic, moving into the classical, and, as far as specific forms of expression that can be compared to one another are concerned, ending with romantic. The history of art culminates, and, one supposes, continues on indefinitely, in the so-called irony.<sup>228</sup> Since this is as close to a "culminating" form as we get, this means that it gets assigned the work Hegel assigns to *all* culminating forms. Put perhaps too simply, the role assigned to culminating forms is always that of sublimating the forms that precede it. That is to say, the final form is always supposed to transcend, but in a way that preserves the variety of articulations, any particular form (which might here just mean any form that can be juxtaposed to any other, any form that makes a claim to doing something *else*). It is the attempt to appropriately sublimate the symbolic, classical, and romantic forms of art that is exactly

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<sup>228</sup> *ILA* 70.

the site of art's failure. In the body of the *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel describes the end of the romantic period as follows:

Herewith we have arrived at the end of romantic art, at the standpoint of most recent times, the peculiarity of which we may find in the fact that the artist's skill surmounts his material and its production because he is no longer dominated by the given conditions of a range of content and form already inherently determined in advance, but retains entirely within his own power and choice both the subject-matter and the way of presenting it. [...] The artist thus stands above the specific consecrated forms and configurations and moves freely on his own account...<sup>229</sup>

This is clearly a scene of emancipation, although it is also, as we'll shortly see, a scene of *crippling* emancipation; without the direction provided by a substantial and shared form of life, the choice of forms and contents becomes arbitrary and the results perpetually dissatisfying. This is the death of art, insofar as it is supposed to be the sensuous reconciliation of form and expression, of law and desire. Indeed, one could read Hegel's claim that "art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past"<sup>230</sup> just exactly in terms of the ironic positioning of the "modern" artist, a position that continues to take on but also continually fails to achieve the task of reconciliation.

This failure to achieve sensuous reconciliation leaves us, on Hegel's view, two basic forms of expression and/or response: irony and earnestness. In the final chapters of the dissertation, we will want to complicate the scene that Hegel leaves us with, and to which we'll turn in a moment, by adding additional "positions" that are various versions of each or composites of the two – camp, kitsch, melodrama, compulsion, and so on. For now, however, we will just think of irony and earnestness as the two modes of relating to sensuous, symbolic forms of expression, whether we are talking about the art producer or its audience.

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<sup>229</sup> *ALFA II* 604-605.

<sup>230</sup> *ILA* 46.

This is where it becomes important that while Kant treats all issues of “content” as mere occasions for judgments of taste, the content is always, but particularly in the case of fine art, more deeply connected to the pleasure we feel than we admit. By the end of that section, we at least suggested that the sensuous, forceful “disfiguration” which appears as a purely sensuous aspect of the work, and which allows the artist to communicate, acts as a kind of claim on behalf of the purpose of happiness, the idea that the available social forms *ought* to be forms for the expression of our desires. As we’ll shortly see, the tension between the discipline of taste and the force of genius or expression gets lost in the final and perpetual stage of ironic art, which also means that the moment of contingency or individuality becomes nothing but accident and the form thereby loses its life. Without that tension, the work of art is not able to press a claim in the form of an *ought*, but instead presents both moments side by side. Either we find ourselves capable of distancing ourselves from the content, annihilating it, as Hegel puts it, as not ours, or we simply take it as our own, so that we see it not as a claim pressed over and against “us,” but directly *as* “us” or ours.

It would be handy if we could think of our two readers of Hegel as pure representatives of these two positions, but the situation is likely more complicated than that. Indeed, although my claim has been (and still is) that both of these thinkers essentially flatten Hegel’s own complicated relationship to picture-thought, with Pippin focusing in on the rational trajectory and Verene on the opacity of aesthetic thought, they do not thereby successfully take up any single, purified stance to that thought. Verene comes close to taking up an earnest relationship to the poetic and symbolic moments in the book, which would be the case if he identified these *as* his own, but the fact that he

continues to dissociate from them, to see them as in some essential way not his (by way of treating them as *pure* opacity), means that there is something of the ironic in his stance. Pippin likewise treats the (ever-smaller, one supposes) remainders of the unrationalized as in an important way “not us,” but his hopes for their transformation is its own kind of earnestness, a belief in the eventual identify of forms of expression and what gets expressed.

Hegel’s own triumphalist moments involve a vacillation between those positions as well. If it did not, then we might read the situation as follows: once we arrive at a definite failure of reconciliation in the sphere of sensuous expression (which is also that of empirical experience), we must focus all of our hopes on those forms of meaning that are entirely *inward*, so that if “figuring” remains at all as a mode of social communication, it does so entirely in the mode of picture-thought, rather than, well, actual pictures; in that case, then, sociality depends on what is “in our heads”. In that case, too, we should it seems give up hope for a reflective relationship to our empirical experience. If art is around merely to remind us of the futility of sensuous reconciliation, or, for the less savvy among us, to serve as the invitation to melodramatic identification with its expressions, then we’re done, or done for. Either we take up an ironic stance to our sensuous existence (we become hipsters), which is an attempt to display ourselves as happily reconciled to the futility, or we mistake ironic representations for real expressions (we become art appreciators or lovers of daytime drama), which is an attempt to *actually* reconcile ourselves to the given forms of expression. Although we’ll attempt to complicate this scenario in our final chapter, this very worry about the potential

meaninglessness of the available forms for public expression will be at the heart of our analysis of the kind of “threat” gay marriage poses to heterosexual marriage.

We should be clear about the fact that this present discussion of irony places *far* more weight on the category than Hegel’s own. Indeed, although the category of “earnestness” shows up in his discussion of the end of romantic art in the main lectures, irony makes its full appearance *only* in the introduction, and even there it is unclear whether we are to take it as a real successor to the other forms or as the dying gasps of the romantic form. In the introduction, when Hegel is involved in any *systematic* account of the succession of forms, at precisely the moment when we should expect him to raise the topic of irony again, he turns away from art altogether and begins discussing *religion* as successor, explaining that “now the spiritual has withdrawn itself out of the external and its immediate oneness therewith.”<sup>231</sup> Without naming irony, Hegel summarizes the results in the sphere of sensuous representation thus: “The aspect of external existence is committed to contingency, and left at the mercy of freaks of imagination, whose caprice is no more likely to mirror what is given *as* it is given, than to throw the shapes of the outer world into chance medley, or distort them into grotesqueness.”<sup>232</sup> This is clearly, and Hegel says as much, a kind of revival of the symbolic form, which begins with the attempt to make natural objects direct bearers of meaning (an enchanted natural world) and, out of the frustration with their incapacity to do so, distorts, exaggerates, and tortures those same forms, multiplying limbs and other attributes. Art has returned to the so-called viciousness of its symbolic stage, left to work with just what is given in the world, but with two differences: first, it now *recognizes* (we now recognize) the nullity of the

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<sup>231</sup> *ILA* 87.

<sup>232</sup> *ILA* 87-88.

objects in question, and, second, it now has not merely natural objects but an entire history of social forms with which to play – or on which to take out its aggression.

Just after describing this disheartening end of our story, where Hegel has just claimed that “the aspect of external existence is committed to contingency,” he closes this introductory description of the trajectory taken by the forms of artistic expression as follows:

This we may take as in the abstract the character of the symbolic, classical, and romantic forms of art, which represent the three relations of the Idea to its embodiment in the sphere of art. They consist in the aspiration after, and the attainment and transcendence of, the Ideal as the true Idea of beauty.<sup>233</sup>

This sounds like the ending to an entirely different narrative. Irony doesn't appear as a category, which makes some sense, since rather than being the final and sublimating form, it is the symptomatic appearance of the non-sublimation or non-reconciliation of its predecessors. But then the symptom seems clearly a sign that the transcendence Hegel describes in this passage has not really occurred at all.

This crisis of judgment that we've begun to describe results in something very like an experience of the sublime, which makes sense since irony is the final form of art, which means it is the form that is supposed to sublimate the forms that precede it. Just as a judgment of the sublime leaves the imagination and the understanding crippled but pleases us insofar as it gives us a kind of apprehension of the “I” or reason, so the ironic standpoint leaves us with what Hegel refers to as Fichte's “utterly abstract and formal” I, in which “every positive matter is annihilated.”<sup>234</sup> Of course, this is not the way sublimation is *supposed* to work for Hegel, since it is instead supposed to preserve all of

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<sup>233</sup> *ILA* 88.

<sup>234</sup> *ILA* 70.



the various determinations in *both* the subject and the object in a concrete idea. Indeed, this utterly abstract and formal I forms the starting point for the *Phenomenology*, with its “natural consciousness,” and for the *Philosophy of Right*, where it is the work of the modern state to finally return to the I its contents in a form it can recognize. Here, however, in the sphere of art, it represents the most “advanced” position, where that notion of advance both is appropriate, insofar as it grasps at something true about the state of things, and is itself the object of scorn and irony, since it mistakenly *celebrates* its own condition.

Those who continue, on the other hand, to think that they can judge end up, on Hegel’s account, merely confessing their own limitedness. Hegel uses the term *borné* early on to describe the role of the critic, and then again those who mistake the products of the ironic artist for earnest. All critics risk revealing themselves as rubes. This is because art, as Hegel recognizes, is irredeemably local: it is made up out of the stuff and genres that are available, by a person at a given time and place. Even at its most genius, it relies on a shared taste in order to communicate. Likewise, the audience of the ironic artist risks being duped: “By others, indeed, my [ironic] self-display in which I present myself to them may be taken seriously, inasmuch as they interpret me as though I were really concerned about the matter at hand; but therein they are simply deceived, poor *borné* creatures, without talent and capacity to attain my standpoint.”<sup>235</sup> Hegel has taken on the tone of the ironist in order, it seems, to mock it, and yet it is clear that he also recognizes that there is something *true* in the tone. Indeed, irony is as much about tone as it is about any content in particular, since every content in particular fails to satisfy its needs. Irony is a way of presenting all that is available as inadequate.

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<sup>235</sup> *ILA* 72.

We will return briefly to a time just before the irony takes hold, to Hegel's almost-loving descriptions of the blundering Schlegels, who we can take to be semi-successful judges in spite of this crisis of judgment exactly insofar as they "set themselves near the standpoint of the Idea".<sup>236</sup> The Schlegels represent for Hegel the need for a philosophical comprehension of art exactly insofar as their work suffers in his view from the lack of an evaluative standard; they failed of a "thorough philosophical comprehension of their standard, [so that] this standard retained a character of indefiniteness and vacillation, with the result that they sometimes did too much and sometimes too little."<sup>237</sup> It is precisely such a standard that Kant argues *cannot* be given to taste, and it is the absence of such a standard that guarantees taste's freedom to take as an object of pleasure something or other. This freedom is of course also constrained when it comes to works of art, since these are produced according to shared rules of taste, rules that form the basis for symbolic communication. The encounter with works of art involves, then, a tension between an inherited standard that seeks to orient the subject, and something in the subject that resists its orientation.

The Schlegels were on Hegel's account anything but provincial in their taste, and indeed they executed their judgments in a world of objects that was undergoing a rapid expansion, with objects coming to them from the past and from around the globe. This means that the Schlegels proffered judgments that could not have been as securely rooted in their own historical time and place, and in connection with objects that could not have been carefully prepared to ensure decorum or purposiveness of associations. In this context, the judgments issued must needs be *more* confessional, or *less*, than their

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<sup>236</sup> *ILA* 69.

<sup>237</sup> *ILA* 70.

provincial cousins (which we've already suggested themselves involve at least minor confessional moments) — this, then, is the meaning of Hegel's "they sometimes did too much and sometimes too little." Hegel completes his description of the Schlegels as follows:

No doubt they are to be credited with the merit of bringing afresh to light and extolling in a loving spirit all that was held obsolete and was inadequately esteemed by their age, e.g., the work of the older painters of Italy and the Netherlands, the 'Nibelungen Lied', etc.; and, again, they endeavoured with zeal to learn and teach subjects that were little known, such as the Indian poetry and mythology. Nevertheless, they attributed too high a value to the productions of such epochs, and sometimes themselves fell into the blunder of admiring what was but mediocre, e.g. Holberg's comedies, and attaching a universal importance to what had only relative value, or even boldly showing themselves enthusiasts for a perverse tendency and subordinate standpoint as if it were something supreme.<sup>238</sup>

Although Hegel himself nowhere uses this language, it seems clear that the risk the Schlegels run, and the results of which they suffer publicly, is exactly the risk of confession. This is especially clear in the final line of this passage, where they are described as "boldly showing themselves enthusiasts for a perverse tendency and subordinate standpoint." We should take this to be representative of the confessional moment involved in all judgments of taste occasioned by works of art, but writ large. If those judgments always depend in some important way on the moment of disfiguration, and that moment of disfiguration is represented as a claim for recognition made on behalf of what does not find an adequate form for expression, then we might wonder how much more appears as "content" when we lack an adequate understanding of the forms of appearance. Albeit in a surprisingly loving way, Hegel is scolding the Schlegels for making *mistakes* in their judgments, for, it seems, venturing judgments as though

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<sup>238</sup> *ILA* 70.

judgment were not in crisis. Instead of such judgments being taken as signs of a true cosmopolitanism, they are taken as slight embarrassments, and perhaps the Schlegels appear as two naïfs who, luckily for them, are not entirely unsuited for public appearance. The Schlegels are not yet ironic, as they are happily dealing with contents that are not their own, or at least with forms that cannot be their own, with objects, forms, contents from other times and other places, other religious traditions, and there is something appealing in this picture. It is clear that Hegel too feels its appeal, since while they are represented as blundering, they are not castigated with the fury Hegel reserves for the ironists. It must be said, however, that Hegel very clearly distances himself from those who “prate[ed] about” this new orientation “then,” as well as from the many who “are prating of it afresh just now.”<sup>239</sup>

In addition to its dependence on an abstract and empty conception of the I, a conception that depends on the non-appearance of the self, or, failing that (since it seems we cannot help appearing, even when we’d like to), the appearance of the self as not expressible in the form of anything in particular, Hegel implies that the ironic artist seeks to express himself at the general level of a certain kind of “life,” “and [this] life consists in bringing its individuality to its own consciousness as to that of others, in uttering itself and taking shape in phenomena.”<sup>240</sup> This response can be nicely contrasted with the response of the beautiful soul, who, when he realizes that every action is tainted by contingency and accident, refrains from acting altogether. Instead of refusing to appear at all in the world, the ironic artist wants to both appear *and* appear as not-appearing, as

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<sup>239</sup> *ILA* 72.

<sup>240</sup> *ILA* 71.

not revealing the opacity that prevents any particular form of appearance from being adequately expressive of what he takes to be a perfectly abstract self. He does this by

living as artist and forming [his] life *artistically*. But, according to the principle before us, I live as artist when all my action and utterance in general, whenever it has to do with any content, is for me on the level of mere *semblance*, and assumes a shape which is wholly within my power. So I am not really in *earnest*, either about this content, or generally, about its utterance and realization.<sup>241</sup>

This is what it looks like to try to live life at the level of generality, in dissociation from every particular form of life. The attempt to *live* at the level of generality will to some degree fail, just as surely as the attempt to express artistically finds itself bound to use this or that stuff and this or that form for its means. In addition then to living in ways that seek to escape from social norms, “liv[ing] with friends, mistresses, etc.”<sup>242</sup> the ironic artist must further take an ironic attitude toward even these nonconventional forms and contents, so that he “sets no value on this relation to his determinate reality and particular actions, or to what is universal in its own right.”<sup>243</sup> “And then,” Hegel writes, “this skill of living an ironical artist life apprehends itself as a *God-like geniality*, for which every possible thing is a mere dead creature...”<sup>244</sup>

Hegel responds to this dismissal of all content with a protest, one that takes the perhaps surprising form of a kind of defense of conventional order, and certainly one that leaves him open to charges of earnestness. Over and against the image of such debauched debauchery, Hegel invokes that of a solid and substantial life:

For genuine earnest comes into being only by means of a substantial interest, a matter that has something in it, truth, morality, and so forth; by means of a content which, as such (without my help) is enough to have value for me as something essential, so that I myself only become

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<sup>241</sup> ILA 71.

<sup>242</sup> ILA 72.

<sup>243</sup> ILA 72.

<sup>244</sup> ILA 72.

essential in my own eyes in as far as I have immersed myself in such a matter and have come to be in conformity with it in my whole knowledge and action.<sup>245</sup>

Here, Hegel hauls out the entire arsenal at his disposal, pitting *truth, morality, value*, the stuff of those contents that *without my help* sustain their depth and meaning. It is unclear where these things “are,” however, or why the assertion on their behalf isn’t precisely a symptom of the earnestness that mistakes (because it needs to mistake) what is presented ironically for something real. But of course Hegel is right: these are defenses against irony rather than directly its products. Earnestness might indeed take one of two forms: it might embarrass itself at a gallery opening by *loving* what is not meant to be loved, or it might alternately mistake these defensive expressions for real ones. That would be to take what is essentially a social form of life as though it were an intensely personal one. It is that kind of earnestness, as we will shortly see, that keeps the wedding industry in business.

But since we’ve raised the issue of romantic love, let’s turn for a moment to Hegel’s own comments, in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, on the subject under the heading “Love’s Contingency”:

[R]omantic love also has its limitation. What its content lacks, that is to say, is absolute *universality*. It is only the personal feeling of the individual subject, and it is obviously not filled with the eternal interests and objective content of human existence, with family, political ends, country, duties arising from one’s calling or class, with freedom and religious feeling, but only with its own self...<sup>246</sup>

Romantic love is thus exactly the kind of content that we can, indeed, must leave behind in transcending the sphere of art. It is essentially ineducable. Like art, it sticks around, but not in any form that can be *our* concern. Romantic love is love of another individual,

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<sup>245</sup> *ILA* 71.

<sup>246</sup> *ALFA II* 566-567.

the kind of love that can only be carried out empirically (although that does not mean only at the level of sexuality). It is pathological rather than rational love, and we might doubt the existence of anything that goes by that latter name.

*Eternal* interests, by contrast, transcend the sphere of contingency. In the list above, Hegel includes family, political ends, country, class duties, freedom, religious feeling. He writes further: “In the family, marriage, duty, and the state, it is not subjective feeling as such and the consequential unification with just *this* individual and no other, which should be the chief thing at issue. But in romantic love everything turns on the fact that *this* man loves precisely *this* woman, and she him.”<sup>247</sup> It is clear that our love-interests are *not* made in the universal voice, even when we articulate them thus; it is not that I expect all to find and love the same object as me. Indeed, the fact that marriage remains one of the only heavily symbolized civil institutions speaks to this worry: we must call on the forms of high drama in order to make publicly acknowledgeable our capricious choice, a choice that we know (even if we also work not to know) at the very moment of choosing will at the very least not remain the *same* object of satisfaction we originally met. But even if the *content*, the object itself, is not made in a universal voice, the existence of marriage is itself the attempt to present the form as universal. We are invited to symbolize our true attachments at that level.

This is not only a question of expression and attachment, since the expression of attachment is our way of making a claim on others for recognition. This move also means then that the only mode in which we can recognize the claims that *others* make on us, insofar as the forms of their social appearance are concerned, are likewise at that level. Hegel writes,

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<sup>247</sup> ALFA II 567.

Now just as every man is a child of his time in every activity, whether political, religious, or scientific, and just as he has the task of bringing out the essential content and the therefore necessary form of that time, so it is the vocation of art to find for the spirit of a people the artistic expression corresponding to it. Now so long as the artist is bound up with the specific character of such a world-view and religion..., so long is he genuinely in earnest with this material and its representation. [...] Only in that event is the artist completely inspired by his material and its presentation... If, on the other hand, we nowadays propose to make the subject of a statue or a painting a Greek god, or, Protestants as we are today, the Virgin Mary, we are not seriously in earnest with this material.<sup>248</sup>

Here we can see that, at least as far as the sphere of artistic representation is concerned, to be Protestant *is* to be ironic. A presentation of the Virgin Mary becomes a matter for kitsch sensibility, a mode of deriding the sentimental attachment that *others have* to any particular empirical content. But given the absence of explicit mediation, whether in the persons of priests, the institutions of a church, or the exhibition of religious art, in Protestantism, where and how do “we Protestants” find our community? Perhaps this is a question left to philosophy and the modern state, Hegel’s twin hopes for the final sublimation, but his commentary on the role of marriage, for example, in the modern state would seem to leave us with little hope that this success actually involves anything about which we might be in earnest without simultaneously becoming dupes.

### **The Commodity as Ironist, Us as Earnest Necromantics**

With Kant, we followed out a line of thought that portrayed the principle of reflective judgment as closely connected with a shared or shareable pleasurable activity whereby we work to make sense of our empirical natural and social worlds, which includes the attempt to make sense of ourselves and others within that world. Beauty turned out to be a symbol that figured for us a kind of promised success of that endeavor,

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<sup>248</sup> ALFA II 603.



the possibility that the sense we make of the world *is* or could be pleasurable. Reflective judgment further turned out to be linked to the constitution of a social space, and the work of art with the possibility of encountering the limits of sociality. With the turn to Hegel, we find that project severely restricted: the world of nature is no longer available to us (perhaps never really was), and we are left hoping to at least make pleasurable sense of the world that has been born again of mind, the socially mediated world.

Although Hegel is still concerned with the question of beauty, he suggests that we are no longer even sure that such a thing is possible, that such a judgment is ever in actual fact carried out. Indeed, the story that Hegel tells is about the failure to find even one real preserve or territory where the pleasurable social activity of reflection allows us to hope for the successful mediation of our real, empirical world with our spiritual or philosophical worlds. Instead, we find in the realm of art something like the unremitting representation *of* failure, of precisely the failure to find real expressions or suitable social forms, in spite of the fact that we are now presented with an endless variety of such expressions and forms. We are closed off not only from the world of the real but thereby also from the drives, desires, wants, and needs we can only access by way of material mediation.

Now, for Hegel, this is merely the failure of the individual to make sense (work up into what Kant would call ‘experience’) of what continues to confront her as real and particular. Luckily, the modern world is *already* mediated, so that if she can figure out how to live to the best of her ability at a certain level of generality, she will find pre-articulated for her all of the forms she could need – or, almost all. This is the objective success of spirit as the modern state, and in view of all of its grand success, its varieties

of social forms, estates, corporations, civil society, and so on, the tiny-scale failures of the artist (and, as it turns out, the less self-aware failures of each of us whenever we mistake the social form as *about* us in some important way, the failures that allow us to embarrass ourselves by dressing marriage up with romantic trappings, etc.) seem a small price to pay. Plus, there are still open two realms where we meet with greater (although still varying) degrees of success in our attempts to share forms of meaning with one another. It may no longer be possible in the empirical world, as the persistent failure of art reminds us, but we've still got religion and philosophy. Religion has successfully moved away from all reference to real mediation, priests, iconography, perhaps even real congregations, completing the process that began with the appearance, disappearance, and loss of the site of the disappearance of Jesus. Although religion is still closer to picture-thinking than is philosophy, it is difficult to say exactly what figurative modes of expression exactly are shared by its adherents. Philosophy, finally, allows for a mode of sociality (or so goes Hegel's story, which does not concern itself overly with the symptomatic remainders that bespeak a different reality) free or nearly-free from pictorial representation, which means both fully shareable (since it is after all the messiness of associative extensions that mars the coordination of pictorial thought) and thus also free from any need to reference *my* particularity, *my* pleasure, in order to ratify itself as valuable.

For now, we take this finale as an opening to move to a discussion of the commodity form, since we will suggest that it is the emergence of this new and entirely social form of value that *actually* frees me from the task of publicly negotiating my private desires. For Marx, the commodity form is *the* public expression of value, and it is

marked by its almost complete disregard for use value, which appears as the object's material particulars, even while use value remains the condition for the possibility of a thing's existence *as* a commodity. The public form of value draws almost not at all on the now-privatized realm of wants, needs, desires, and so on. With his labor theory of value, Marx aims to demystify the *source* of that public value, to make it clear that it does not rest wholly (indeed, barely rest at all) on demand, a demystification that can at least help us understand why what looks to us like an entire world of objects aimed at gratifying us does not indeed make us happy – why that world doesn't even hold out the *promise* of happiness.

In other words, we will be using Marx as a way to block an interpretation of the rise of capitalism as the emergence of what Pippin calls (tongue-in-cheek but – nonetheless) “bourgeois freedom.”<sup>249</sup> One source of the temptation to such an interpretation is the commodity form's structural homology with the object of taste. As we'll shortly see, when an object becomes a commodity, its value arises from a source other than its usefulness; this means that insofar as it is taken to be a commodity, its value and meaning are purely formal, existing in near-perfect abstraction from its material particularity. On that reading, what we've treated as a depletion of symbolic resources looks indeed like its infinite expansion, a world in which any old product of human artifice (not just those rare birds, works of art) can stand for any other. That means that while its value does not arise from our interest per se (or, in Marx's terms, its use value), it manages to stand in for, or to appear to stand in for, the whole unspeakable (but not, apparently, thereby impossible-to-represent) wealth of possible interests. If symbols are

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<sup>249</sup> cf. Pippin's talk *Bourgeois Philosophy? On the Problem of Leading a Free Life*. (<http://www.sfu.ca/humanities-institute/pdf/bourgeoisphilosophy.pdf>)

promises of future satisfaction, then commodities are without a doubt symbols. Their formality, however, leaves nothing for judgment to do, since the value in question does not depend on any mode of empirical encounter with the object in question. Thus, once we have made the case for this formality, we are left with the question: are there still realms (or even just pockets) of public life that require reflective judgment? Does anything like a shared world of symbolic rationality exist?

The emergence of the commodity is accompanied by the disappearance of those substantial figures of authority to which human production and the mediation of desire had always been tied. This is a further source of the temptation to treat the commodity form as a source of freedom, rather than its obstacle. As real authority goes underground, the world of commodities emerges as the nearly infinite articulation of desire into real objects. If before we were worried about our access to and the possibilities for mediation of the unspecified and repressed realm referenced by the general purpose of “happiness,” why, now, we need only worry about navigating the perhaps overly specified world of objects designed to meet every imaginable need.

In the following section, we will work to show that, despite all appearances, it is precisely where commodities seem to refer us to our own future satisfactions, their value in fact refers to their own histories, which turn out to be histories of human suffering. While commodities look, then, like symbols of the agreeable which have done away with our need for objects of taste, the commodity world both heightens that need and makes it very difficult to pursue. Instead then of articulating the unspecified wants and needs that made us turn to works of art, commodities stand for value made possible by the further repression of wants and needs, resulting in a net increase in the sum total of the material

in question. Indeed, if there is an increase in real freedom anywhere, it is to be found precisely in the breach that has opened up between production and purpose, a relationship already strained by and in the work of art but very nearly broken with the emergence of the commodity form.

We might even say that we are turning to Marx's account of the commodity fetish as a kind of interpretation of Hegel's end of art thesis. In the same way that Hegel describes the advent of the irony as a cynical return to the "primitive" object-orientation in early symbolism, taking what is at hand as ready-made (but also indecipherable) expressions of what we don't know about (or even as) ourselves, so, according to Marx, do we moderns take commodities to be our fetishes – although without the requisite cynicism. By the end of this section, we'll suggest that Marx opens *Capital* with the discussion of the commodity form in order to generate some such cynicism, but that his rhetorical strategies in the discussion suggest a further, deeper meaning behind our attachment to the commodity form.

Here, we will closely confine ourselves to rehearsing the obvious point that what is "now" the shared form of value is not open for reflective mediation, is no longer a pivot between authority and inarticulate desire. What "looks" to us naïfs like the promise of happiness is instead its opposite; we mistakenly read value in terms of gratification when its form is, in fact and pretty literally, *made out of people*. Indeed, instead of holding out a promise, instead of its value arising out of an imagined future satisfaction, the public appearance of value now takes the shape of congealed labor, which is to say that value arises from the object's history as a product of a certain self-mortification. Public value is, in other words, made of the stuff of human suffering. In a world where

*this* is the appearance of value, it is hard to see how the work of art, which attempts to reconcile public, historical, and social forms of expression with a demand for happiness, could be anything but a persistent reminder of failure.

This next section then requires a strange and rather sudden shift in perspective. For the opening chapters of *Capital*, it is the commodity that takes center stage, shoving aside our ironic artist and his earnest compatriots. Indeed, it is the commodity who now takes up the position of ironist, experiencing all manner of difficulty expressing himself, finding an appropriate expression of value, seeking recognition, even trouble, as we'll see, constructing a kind of political order for himself. Marx writes:

From this point of view, the coat is a 'bearer of value', although this property never shows through, even when the coat is at its most threadbare. In its value-relation with the linen, the coat counts only under this aspect, counts therefore as embodied value, as the body of value. Despite its buttoned-up appearance, the linen recognizes in it a kindred soul, the soul of value. Nevertheless, the coat cannot represent value towards the linen unless value, for the latter, simultaneously assumes the form of a coat. An individual, A, for instance, cannot be 'your majesty' to another individual, B, unless majesty in B's eyes assumes the physical shape of A, and, moreover, changes facial features, hair and many other things, with every new 'father of his people'.<sup>250</sup>

It is not surprising that Marx describes the commodity's situation by way of a social analogy, since it is his claim that people now stand in the relation of objects to one another and objects in a social relation. If that is the case, then there is not merely an *analogy* between "our" situation under modernity and that of the commodity; instead, the latter *is* our situation. But in an interesting reversal of our earlier problematic, where both desire and authority found themselves constrained to borrow the forms of logic and causal reasoning in order to appear, what are basically causal forces now borrow those borrowed forms. It makes perfect sense, then, that Marx turns the commodity into a

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Capital 143.

dramatic character, one that in turn gets compared to all manner of authorities, including generals and popes.

The realm of commodities has in an important way ‘literally’ replaced the religious realm, both blocking and parodying the Hegelian sacralization of the desacrilized world. Economic mediation has taken the place of religious reflection, and this in a way that appears all the more “real” (in the way in which the natural world that underlies a symbolic religion is more real than a missing God, in the sense then that the objects are material, even if their value is not). Thus the real world really has been saturated with religious meaning, although this is not due to the once-presence of Jesus, as it is on Hegel’s telling, but the fetishism of commodities. Like Hegel, Marx understands Protestantism as the most fitting form of religion under conditions of modernity, unencumbered as it is by the thought that the material world might successfully reflect back at us something we might want to see. Where religious thought, a la Kant, arises out of an inability to complete our synthetic construction of the world, as a projection of a basically impossible completion, the commodity takes the form of an overly concrete individual. The sense we make of the commodity form, and ultimately of the social mode of production in which it is the dominant form, is precisely *not* amenable to pleasurable reflection. If this is an enchanted world, it is not the one that we would dream up for ourselves.

Marx opens *Capital* with his analysis of the commodity form precisely because it *is* the public appearance of value, which is to say, it constitutes the phenomenal social world. This question of “appearance” is a difficult one, however, given that both use value and exchange value can be said to *appear* in any regular, empirical sense of the

word. Indeed, the actual appearance of any given commodity is determined precisely by its use value, and by the useful and specific labor that went into shaping it. Marx casts this other mode of appearance as in some important way mute, claiming that “the progress of the investigation will lead us back to exchange-value as the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance, of value.”<sup>251</sup> Here, we come to what we might for now characterize as the second important moment of analogy: by the end of Marx’s chapter on “The Commodity,” we find the commodity in the position of Hegel’s ironic artist. In its particular identity, it has no hope of presenting itself for public recognition; indeed, it can only “say” something about itself if it assumes the form of an entirely different commodity, so that we learn something of the value of linen only if it appears to us in its equivalency with coats, or iron, or coffee, or corn. On its own, it is trapped in the Fichtean infinite I=I, which is to say suffering from a severe identity crisis – indeed, the identity crisis that afflicts us all under modernity. And, of course, it is the latter affliction that really interests Marx, since, as we’ll see, this objective appearance of identity crisis depends on it. The commodity can use any and every other commodity to express its public value, and this expression turns out to have nothing at all to do with the commodity in its particularity – its shape, its material, its potential use. These are the things that interest us, of course, as consumers of commodities, so that the public expression of value likewise has almost nothing to do with us or our own particularities.

In a footnote, Marx comments on Locke’s habit of identifying use value with “worth” and exchange value as simply “value”:

In English writes of the seventeenth century we still often find the word ‘worth’ used for use-value and ‘value’ for exchange value. This is quite in

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<sup>251</sup> Capital 128.



accordance with the spirit of a language that likes to use a Teutonic word for the actual thing, and a Romance word for its reflection.<sup>252</sup>

“The actual thing” is of course use value, since the material thing owes its shape etc. to useful labor aimed at an intended use. But it is crucial that we notice how Marx equates the exchange value with the “reflection” of this particular, material thing, if we are to understand how the present conditions represent a crisis in reflective judgment. As we’ll see, the reflection can only just barely be tied back down to the object in question, and only by way of the strenuous efforts of the first three chapters of *Capital*. There is a real breach (where “real” is intended with some ontological bite) between the particular value, which “ought” to be a reflection of the value of particularity, and the exchange value, which will turn out to be the mortification of particularity. This is indeed then a much less “artistic” version of the breach that we’ve been arguing makes a certain kind of reflective experience impossible: the public value is not only *not* the same as the private – it is the *negation* of the private.

Again, “exchange-value cannot be anything other than the mode of expression, the ‘form of appearance’, of a content distinguishable from it.”<sup>253</sup> Here, then, we have a radical mismatch between form and content, where the universal manages to depend on the particularity of its instantiation without the latter appearing at all. When we think of the “content” of exchange value, however, it is misleading to think of it as use value per se. Indeed, use value continues to have a minimal appearance, and it is for this reason that it is mistaken *as* the source of value by economists who fail to see that it is rather accumulated labor – the *history* rather than the *destiny* of the object – that is the substance of exchange value. Marx writes,

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<sup>252</sup> Capital 126.

<sup>253</sup> Capital 127.

[T]he exchange values of commodities must be reduced to a common element, of which they represent a greater or a lesser quantity. This common element cannot be a geometrical, physical, chemical, or other natural property of commodities. Such properties come into consideration only to the extent that they make the commodities useful, i.e. turn them into use-values. But clearly, the exchange relation of commodities is characterized precisely by its abstraction from their use-values.<sup>254</sup>

Here, we can see that Marx intends to describe a literal crisis in empirical judgment. We are facing a world of objects that we *cannot read* in terms of physical properties – neither by way of those modes of reflection proper to the natural sciences *nor*, as we might expect, by way of an aesthetic principle rooted in some shared conception of potential use. The “abstraction” from use values is not a kind of generalization beginning with them, but a complete turn away from use value as the public form of value, although in its continued *dependence* on use value we might say that we acknowledge the form of purposiveness in anything we call a commodity.

Marx portrays this as an epistemological problem for us, making reference to Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, “The objectivity of commodities as values differs from Dame Quickly in the sense that ‘a man knows not where to have it’.”<sup>255</sup> The editor handily supplies the entire short exchange in a footnote: “Falstaff: Why she’s neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not where to have her. Dame Quickly: Thou art an unjust man in saying so; thou or any man knows where to have me, thou knave, thou!”<sup>256</sup> Marx’s point, as we’ve already noted, is to illustrate the empirical difficulty of finding the source of value in the commodity itself, but the fact that he does so by way of this particular analogy is telling. The objectivity of the commodity does not arise by means of its suitability to serve as a site of material pleasure. This is connected, if obliquely, with the

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<sup>254</sup> Capital 127.

<sup>255</sup> Capital 138.

<sup>256</sup> Henry IV, Part I, Act 3, Scene 3. Cited *Capital* 138.

way the commodity form manages to collapse the distinction between objects and people – or even reverse their roles. People, of course, are those objects that are not supposed to be taken as (merely) the sites of material gratification, those objects whose value arise from a hidden source that commands respect.

In both its purposiveness and its resistance to direct interest, then, the commodity shares some formal features with the work of art. Here, however, instead of the attempted (and finally, with Hegel, failed) reconciliation between given forms of expression and what lacks a suitable form, the deformity that lent the work of art its force and made it thus into a work of fine art, we have instead the expression of *labor* in its social form, as abstract and homogenous labor, alongside labor in its concrete expression: “The body of the commodity, which serves as the equivalent, always figures as the embodiment of abstract human labour, and is always the product of some specific useful and concrete labour. This concrete labour therefore becomes the expression of abstract human labour.”<sup>257</sup> Here, we are talking about a commodity insofar as it serves as the equivalent form of value for another commodity, so a bulk of linen standing in for coats, or vice versa. The equivalent must itself be the product of concrete labor, but whatever this concrete labor is, it is merely standing in for the labor that produced the commodity whose value we’re trying to ascertain. This makes it clear that we’re interested in the accumulated labor, and not at all in the particular form of its accumulation or appearance. Its particularity is the deformity that allows it to carry value, but it cannot be read at all in terms of that expression. Indeed, it must be in a *different* particular form (that of a coat, for example) that a given commodity (linen) expresses its value. Instead of encountering the marks of labor as an illicit source of value, one that adds force to a presentation even

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<sup>257</sup> Capital 150.

as it “detracts” from its perfection, the particularity of the thing as the product of useful labor is entirely separate from the question of its value.

What is Marx’s aim in unmasking the fetish character of the commodity, in revealing that what appears to be immanent value accrues to the object insofar as it is the product of human labor? It is certainly not, as Jean-Luc Nancy would have it, to follow in Moses’ tradition and “reverse the mercantile idols.”<sup>258</sup> (Marx does however claim to expect that when his analysis is done, “the mystery of money will immediately disappear.”<sup>259</sup>) In this same article, Nancy goes on to claim that “the fetish is a *being-there* of desire, of expectation,” but as we’ve seen, the fetishism of commodities arises precisely insofar as they *fail* to represent a “being-there of desire.”<sup>260</sup> We are dealing not with the presentation of desire but with the presentation of *congealed and coagulated labor* as such.

For the most part, Marx depicts the fetishizing of the commodity world as a kind of mistake, a situation in which we mistake the source of animation as something aimed at us and at a future, if also deferred, gratification. And yet perhaps we hold commodities sacred in part precisely because they represent our subjection, so that we link them to the forms of authority that have disappeared only to haunt our objects. This would make some sense of Marx’s rhetorical use of the analogies to generals, popes, and the like, so that he too partially recognizes that our subjection continues to adopt symbolic forms. These forms are, however, clearly also fragmented and displaced. When the table “transcends sensuousness,” then, we might understand that to mean something more than

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<sup>258</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy and Thomas C. Platt, “The Two Secrets of the Fetish,” *Diacritics* (31.2 (2001): 3-8.) 4-5.

<sup>259</sup> *Capital* 139.

<sup>260</sup> Nancy 6.

merely that it is mysteriously animated – indeed, we might understand it to represent, in a veiled way, the forced transcendence on the part of its maker of all immediate wants and needs. That would mean that fetishism is the submergence, but not therefore the complete disappearance, of the claims of both authority and the desires on which authority operates.

Perhaps, then, the danger now is not, as Marx worries in the *German Ideology*, that we will think that “the ‘fancy’, the ‘conception’ of the people in question about their real practice” is the “sole determining and effective force,”<sup>261</sup> but rather the opposite, that such fancies will be thought nothing more than epiphenomena, that short of a revolution we feel ourselves constrained to ignore the continued attempts people make to make some sense of their worlds. This sense-making may be (is) fractured and difficult to recognize, but it certainly has not ceased. If causal forces are now constrained, however, to borrow shapes originally borrowed from it, it is not surprising that what is the attempted eviction of authoritative meaning looks to us like an overabundance of the same.

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<sup>261</sup> *GI* 63.

## CHAPTER VI

### MARRIAGE HYSTERIA

*An amendment to the Constitution is never to be undertaken lightly. The amendment process has addressed many serious matters of national concern. And the preservation of marriage rises to this level of national importance. The union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution, honoring—honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith. —President George W. Bush<sup>262</sup>*

Hegel and Marx have provided us with analyses that present a crisis in and for reflective judgment and symbolic mediation. If it is the case that, as Heidegger notes of technology, we only become aware of and theoretically interested in the way things work once they've broken down, then whatever hopeful notes we struck in the Kant chapters – hopes placed in art's ability to symbolize a different kind of politics, in the idea that symbols act as a placeholder for public issues in need of critique and reflection – these hopes were misplaced. Indeed, it is difficult to know at this juncture whether what we should be seeking is hope or just to understand something about what we earlier called “actually existing symbolic mediation.” It might be that the crisis is real and yet there is some small-scale hope that what symbolic fragments remain to us might still offer up grounds for important (if, alas, not all-important) political struggles, that the demise of authority might allow for some (anxious and again small-scale) moments of emancipation.

It is here, with this turn to the actual political realm, that our worries about the worthiness of our attentions crop up again most sharply. When we narrow our focus onto

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<sup>262</sup> Robert M. Baird and Stuart E. Rosenbaum, eds. Same-sex Marriage: The Moral and Legal Debate (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004) 64.

gay marriage alone, we cannot help but see it, in the scope of things, as a small-scale crisis. At the same time, the power the issue has to divide people into polarized constituencies and become linked thereby to many more social and political issues, demands analysis. Garret Keizer writes not about gay marriage but the issue of the consecration of gay Anglican pastors and bishops, an issue that not only threatens to divide but has already divided the Episcopal association of churches. In response to a fellow Anglican who has expressed hopes that the consecration of openly gay pastors and bishops will be start of a large-scale disruption of binaries, Keizer writes:

I remain an unreconstructed binary thinker, my view of the world being pretty much divided between people who do have a pot to piss in and people who don't. My tendency—perhaps my temptation—is to see the church crisis, at least in America, as I see most other political disputes between bourgeois conservatives and bourgeois liberals: as cosmetically differentiated versions of the same earnest quest for moral rectitude in the face of one's collusion in an economic system of gross inequality.<sup>263</sup>

These are worries that might just as well attach to any reflective work in aesthetic theory, worries that what we need “now” is not aesthetic theory but real, transformative action. But we have tried in the previous chapters to at the very least make plausible the notion that aesthetic theory arises just where forms of authority disappear, which means that the absence of any clear stake in “reality,” in “real problems,” etc., just is the condition of the possibility for acknowledging a demand for recognition. The hope we pursue in this

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<sup>263</sup> Keizer, G. “Turning Away From Jesus: Gay rights and the war for the Episcopal Church” (Harper's, June 2008) 43. If we were interested in making the case really dire, in borrowing the form of melodrama, the claim could even be made that the demands that we recognize marriage as an authoritative institution might actually end up sacrificing real men and women in its name. The covenant marriage movement is in favor of letting people opt out of the hard-won rights and protections granted by the institution of no-fault divorce. Stephanie Coontz, in her *Marriage, a History*, points out that “in states that adopted unilateral divorce, this was followed, on average, by a 20% reduction in the number of married women committing suicide.” *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy Or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005) 293; and, as she points out elsewhere, an astounding 25% reduction in the murder of husbands by their wives. “The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap,” (UChannel: <http://uc.princeton.edu>).

chapter is that what strike us as “cosmetically differentiated versions” of the same problem might in fact be mined for deeper, wider meanings.

Further, and this point is likely in tension with the last, with Keizer, it is clear that even as this *presents* as a symbolic question of public recognition, it is at its deepest and most personal about our gay brethren having “the same legal protections around sickness and death...”<sup>264</sup> Even without simply calling on the small-scale crises that have such difficulty making any public claim for attention, however, we’ll see by the end of this chapter that in addition to skeptical irony or deadly earnestness and melodrama, there are modes of “attention-getting” that manage *not* to sound perfectly self-righteous without thereby losing their claim on us. For shorthand, we’ll call these modes “camp.”

So, it is with modest hopes that we now turn to the recent and on-going struggles over access to the symbolic institution of marriage and the recognition (and, as we’ll see, defenses) it offers. The “gay marriage” debate (as if the struggle were for the right to get gay-married rather than simply married) has been waged in a variety of very different arenas, from the White House to state legislatures to homespun issue-websites, from the pages of the journal *Ethics* to newspapers and magazines to leaflets, and the fractured nature of what can only very loosely be called “the debate” will determine the somewhat fractured form of this chapter. Perhaps less excusably, we will even broaden our lens to include sources on the status of marriage as an institution more generally, from marriage books to books on marriage. As philosophers perhaps know best, it is not easy to root around in the real, especially when that real involves digital rhetoric and virtual interlocutors. Thus, our work here cannot aim at exhaustiveness. Instead, we will aim to highlight portions of the debate that bear directly on the work of the dissertation so far,

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<sup>264</sup> Coontz, 47.



without, of course, brushing under the rug what doesn't fit. It turns out that the vocabulary and grammar we've developed – talk of symbols and signs, questions of mechanical, scientific/everyday, and motivated associations, worries about the absence of visible authority and the attempts to communicate disparate demands among equals – are well enough suited to help us make some sense of the materials.

We have chosen “marriage” from a multiplicity of available contemporary debates involving significant symbolic components (flag-burning, cross-burning, gays in the military, headscarf politics in Europe and Asia, the cartoon depictions of Mohammed, to name a few) for a variety of reasons, many of which we'll detail shortly. Foremost among these, however, is the fact that the struggle seems to this author to be so clearly and closely organized around questions of desire and mortality. Even if public approval of gay desire is not the central aim behind the marriage equality movement, it is the thought of public approval misplaced that seems to motivate much of the resistance, which rarely talks about healthcare concerns, sickness, or death. The worry is that a public that largely greets what we're cavalierly calling “gay desire” with disgust will be transformed into one that greets it as nothing more than one of the many compelling deformities that make us human and, indeed, sustain us in community. (For an example in which the tables seem to have been almost too successfully turned, we need only think of the “advances” made by TV shows like Bravo's “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” where poor, slovenly straight men get made polyglamorous by a whole team of charming gay men.)

But to focus too much on the transformation of the public perception of “gay relationships” alone would be a mistake, since for the institution of marriage to have that

kind of power, the power to transform perceptions, this must also be a part of its function more generally. That is to say, it is at least plausible that marriage itself functions already as *both* a social form allowing public expression of sexuality *and* as a defense against the same. Indeed, during the debate surrounding a ban on gay marriage in Georgia,<sup>265</sup> one of the judges involved made the joke that if what conservatives were *really* against were gay sex, they'd be lobbying *for* gay marriage. This, and the entire arsenal of married-people-don't-have-sex jokes both strengthen the defense against the public perception of sexuality that marriage is and reflect the way marriage (and the way it patterns private life) might actually function to discipline and even check its actual expression. Similarly, the thought of marriage as a holy calling, duty, sacred institution also serve to cover over its role in helping us mediate and put off thought about our other needs and worries.

A couple of years ago, I gave a talk on the topic of the gay marriage debate, a talk that was supposed to be called "Symbols and the Problem of Marriage" but was mistakenly advertised as "Symbols and the *Problems* of Marriage," to which someone responded, "That will be a long talk indeed." Although it was accidental, the latter title was the more honest. I aimed to give a talk not about marital problems but about the kind of problem marriage itself is, it turns out that marriage is the cipher for a whole constellation of problems, ordering relations between the sexes, between citizens and their nation, church, extended families, not to mention the work it does in determining tax issues, healthcare and insurance, and on and on. It is obvious that marriage serves, then, to order much more than merely the sexual lives of its participants or even relations between the sexes, and yet neither can it be entirely a coincidence that this has always

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265 Voters in Georgia overwhelmingly approved (76%) constitutional ban on gay marriage (Morning Edition, June 27, 2006, NPR), but this ban was challenged in the Supreme Court as unconstitutional (violating the single-issue rule that a constitutional amendment can only address a single issue).

served as the primary sortal, nor that it has become *the* question, the central object of fascination, in the contemporary debate.

As we have said, the decision to investigate the topic of marriage equality is not, or at least has not remained, arbitrary. It is true that its centrality in popular politics (since somewhat abated or reduced to the occasional flare-up) influenced the choice. The more we examine the debate, however, the clearer it becomes that marriage is for many people the central (and for many of these the only besides citizenship itself) symbolic institution that directly mediates their empirical lives. Further, it is ostensibly an institution in which we *volunteer* to participate, unlike, for most of us, citizenship. It organizes issues as mundane (but important) as property rights, as well as all kinds of issues surrounding desire and death. For many, it seems to be a source of identity and social bond not just within the partnership but to others, locally, nationally, and globally; as Nancy Cott describes in *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, marriage often serves as an analogy for and reflection of government.<sup>266</sup> For some of its participants, marriage retains an essential authority linked to religion or nature. Although in many places, it has become a largely civil institution accompanied by little in the way of symbolic trappings, in the US an entire realm of commodities (which we might call the Marriage Industrial Complex) remains devoted to sustaining an interest in symbolic flourishes, from dresses to dye-to-match silk shoes to floral arrangements to pristine bucolic settings and sit-down buffets. Our demands in this area are both too high and too low, as we are made cynical by the failure to find in this last bastion of voluntary association either the perfect expression of our desires or the full satisfaction of what Kant so happily names our urge for social joy.

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<sup>266</sup> Cott 17.

And yet this chapter is not merely about the way we are left to dry up as old, wearily married ironists and cynics, living out the failure of a dream. Neither, however, is it about the romantic aspirations of those who *wish* they could live out their days as old, wearily married ironists, only to be cruelly denied that wish. Instead, we will be searching around in a seriously fragmented debate (one that, again, spans from bumper-sticker-chatter to actual constitutional amendments) for insight into the “ways of meaning-making” in this time of symbolic crisis. This is not the most satisfying of pursuits, since it will not yield either a single coherent vision of symbolic-meaning-making-in-a-time-of-crisis (indeed, it will serve as evidence of the impossibility of this) nor even a final policy suggestion in terms of the actual political debate in question. Our concentration on questions of interpretation and meaning-making does not allow us to ignore entirely, however, the arguments that focus in more narrowly on the question of equal access to the rights and benefits conferred by the civil institution of marriage. Although the *resistance* to marriage benefits for same sex partners is rarely actually couched in the terms of rights and benefits (the Hawaii Supreme Court dissenting opinion provides a notable exception with its preoccupation with state-sponsorship of homosexual behaviors), it is not by accident that one of the few publicly resonant symbols also has the potential to organize so much of our private lives. Indeed, in the absence of authoritative religious or political forms automatically ordering questions of birth, desire, property, and death, and along with the concomitant increase in the levels and points of bureaucratic mediation of the same (access to health care for example), marriage bears the weight of a great deal of historical and civic authority even as it looks for all the world about a

voluntary association between equals. Perhaps, indeed, it can only assume the latter appearance once we no longer experience those authorities as compelling.

It will not be possible to make the case with any degree of certainty, and yet we will at least suggest that marriage itself is experienced, even by (and perhaps especially by) its staunchest defenders, as an institution in symbolic crisis. It is impossible to determine whether or not it is for this reason that it finds itself “under attack” just now; it could just as well be that the gay rights movement has achieved enough momentum to open this question on its own. But it seems that only a serious crisis in the way we “live” the institution can explain the political potency of the issue. It is beyond the scope of this current project to ascertain the precise source of the crisis, if there is one, but we might suggest by way of analogy with our discussion the way “taste” becomes a problem among supposed equals with the disappearance of clear orders of authority, transforming what had been a command into something more like a petulant demand for acknowledgment, that something similar is happening here. The struggle against gay marriage is, as we shall see, in its own way a struggle to revitalize entire frameworks of authority and submission, frameworks that seem to have little claim on us beyond some vague call on “tradition.” (At the same time, as in civil rights era struggles for marriage equality, marriage can likewise serve as a mark of equality, a right granted to those suited to form families.)

As a symptom of what we’re treating as marriage’s symbolic crisis, let us turn briefly to an article about the ceremony itself, called “Analysis of Wedding Rituals: An Attempt to Make Weddings More Meaningful.”<sup>267</sup> In the article’s precis, its author

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<sup>267</sup> Barbara Jo Chesser, “Analysis of Wedding Rituals: An Attempt to Make Weddings More Meaningful” *Family Relations* 1980.

writes, “Students in high school and university marriage classes have found this information to provide a provocative foundation for developing their own wedding vows and rituals.”<sup>268</sup> She writes later, “Couples usually want to include many of the ancient rituals in their wedding ceremonies because of the human desire for validation of passing from one status to another. [...] Studying ancient meanings of wedding rituals and vows in a marriage class seems to facilitate [the] processes...”<sup>269</sup> Here, the ancient rituals are treated less like actually-compelling symbols than as talismans brought into the ritual to ward off anxieties about meaninglessness. And, indeed, the gems she dredges from the depths of history offer little to sustain critical interpretation:

Monday for wealth,/Tuesday for health,/ Wednesday, the best day of  
all,/Thursday for crosses,/Friday for losses,/ Saturday no luck at all.<sup>270</sup>  
and

Married in red, wish yourself dead;/Married in black, wish yourself  
back;/Married in blue, you’ll always be true;/Married in green, ashamed to  
be seen;/Married in gray, go far away;/Married in brown, live out of  
town;/Married in white, chosen all right.<sup>271</sup>

These little ditties must, even in their heyday, have functioned mainly as mnemonics meant to help sustain public consciousness of which options (days or colors) are socially sanctioned and which are not; they are, it seems, all rhyme and no reason, and not very good rhyme at that. Now, however, although patterns persist (brides in white, something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue), little is actually proscribed, and these folk poems do not even convey an old-timey charm. They are positively hollow.

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<sup>268</sup> Chesser 204.

<sup>269</sup> Chesser 209.

<sup>270</sup> Cited as Dyer 1878, Chesser 189.

<sup>271</sup> Cited as Defrain, Note 2, Chesser 207.

Indeed, the article's author cannot get away from the fact that her efforts to give shape are haunted by the serious optionality of every aspect of the wedding, which optionality transforms formerly meaning-laden elements into mere decoration. The veil, once thought to protect the bride from malicious spirits, "simply [now] may be an embellishment to add to the elegance of the wedding pageantry." While candles once represented love, "they may merely add beauty or romance in contemporary weddings."<sup>272</sup> "Garlands," Chesser writes, "were a tribute to the bride's virtue (Lacey, 1969). Many modern couples scoff at this historic symbolism. They contend that the amount of flowers at a wedding is probably more of a tribute to the father's fortune than the bride's virtues."<sup>273</sup> While baby's breath was once associated with fertility, "most modern florists think brides select flowers because of personal preference, beauty, availability, or cost. No theme can be detected."<sup>274</sup> It is surprising that in the face of these acknowledgements, the author offers up the conclusion we cited earlier: that students in high school and university marriage classes find this investigation compelling and useful in "making weddings more meaningful." We do not, of course, take this one attempt to add meaning back into the ceremony as proof of a crisis, but it is at least interesting that a teacher of marriage classes has such petty offerings in the attempt; it is *more* interesting that there are (or at least were in the 1980s) such things as marriage classes at all. Finally, we can take the appearance of conspicuous consumption here and elsewhere as an indication that where meaning was, there commodities shall be.

This article's author has responded to anxieties in the absence of apparent meanings by groping for totems in the ceremony's history, but the more prevalent

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<sup>272</sup> Chesser 207.

<sup>273</sup> Chesser 208.

<sup>274</sup> Chesser 208.

response seems to be to treat this as a “mystery solved” rather than “mystery vanished.” Especially in states where a constitutional amendment or ballot measure to ban gay marriage has been proposed, one sees variants of the following bumper sticker: man-sign + woman-sign = marriage. This is an argument so simple it can be expressed with mathematical precision, a claim so simple as to be almost intuitive. It involves nothing messier than analytic definition. Marriage, it claims, is an empirical concept that gives us everything we need to understand it, to pick out its examples when we see them, to reject particulars that don’t fit, and to form our own marriages when the time comes. Nothing about what marriage is, what it does or should do for us, what it might be doing against us, enters into the concept itself. This is a concept, goes the claim, that bears no taint of contingency, which taint is left to the particulars it is supposed to order. It requires no supplement and is self-authorizing and, as its capacity for bumper-sticker expression shows, it requires only a moment of our time (and no particular arithmetical skill) to comprehend. This is a forcible refusal of the idea that marriage is symbolic, but it is a refusal that works against itself. What is represented *on* the bumper sticker is marriage as concept, operating to determine its objects (constitute its subjects) with automatic authority of a natural law. What is represented *by* the bumper sticker, of course, is its failure to be and do just that – what natural law requires bumper stickers? Marriage has always served organizing and regulating functions, but it has not always required motor vehicle affixed support.

The conservative group Focus on the Family likewise treats marriage as a concept and the elaboration of a rule. On their website, they locate marriage’s function as follows: “Families are the building blocks of civilization; marriage is the glue that holds



it together.”<sup>275</sup> Here, again, marriage is a rule of addition, this time yielding far larger groups than our bumper sticker pairs. But adding things up isn’t really like gluing them together. Glue, in fact, could serve as a passable metaphor for the symbolic function in general: symbols have to *be* something, like glue *is* something, so that what binds is also what divides and marks division. In spite of the ease with which man-sign and woman-sign add up to marriage, or marriages to civilization, the fact is that even in those relationships successfully picked out by the concept, the participants do not, for better or worse, *actually* become one flesh. This is an insight understood by the Tennessee Eagle Forum, a group of citizen activists “Leading the Pro-Family Movement Since 1972,” which has the following to say on its website devoted to Frequently Asked Questions About Marriage: “Marriage solves the paradox of humanity(!) – that we exist as male and female. What other human institution can both heal the divide between the sexes and provide a platform for cooperation – all at the same time? Marriage uniquely ‘completes’ the members of both sexes.”<sup>276</sup>

What should we make of the idea that “sex” is the “paradox of humanity?” It must be something like this: humanity, as a grouping concept, has to be made up of members indistinguishable in all important respects, i.e., all respects made important by whatever the content or definition of “humanity” is. Humanity is however paradoxical insofar as it requires a kind of identity among members of which we aren’t capable due to the congenital problems that order us into two distinct kinds. We can see that the concept of humanity projects a dream of total unity, a dream off limits to us as individuals but attainable as couples. In order to forge a marriage, that fundamental unit of society, the

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<sup>275</sup> <http://www.family.org/cforum/fosi/marriage>.

<sup>276</sup> <http://www.tneagleforum.org>. The Tennessee Eagle Forum is a chapter of the national organization associated with Phyllis Schlafly.

equation first has to articulate society's members into something less than free-standing units – as it turns out, the math is not so simple after all, since it involves fractions. The basic idea, however, is easy enough: each of us is incomplete, and you can tell this by the way we fit together.

In this way of looking at things, marriage requires us to view one another symbolically, figuring us in terms of excesses and lacks. It unites us not so much on the basis of our sameness but on the basis of our differences. Concepts can do this kind of work too, when, for example, they unify traits or attributes into a single object. But only symbols can simultaneously project unity and mark present disunity, which means that insofar as people are always the kinds of things, so to speak, that resist synthesis, that cannot achieve total social reconciliation, whatever mediations their relations remains to some degree symbolic. The traditionalist view of marriage tries to still whatever remains unsettled about it and its members, to put what remains opaque out of the way of interrogation. The more concrete we insist the material, the more our approach to it can only be descriptive, affirmative, and the less we can ask for legitimation of the current order – lest we be accused, as one website puts it, of “holding nature [itself] guilty of being intolerant.” Again, the Tennessee Eagle Forum:

Gender becomes nothing. The same-sex proposition cannot tolerate the idea that any real, necessary differences exist between the genders. If they did exist, then men would need women and women would need men. Our children will learn that gender is like mere personality type. This will create far more, rather than less, confusion and dissension within us as individuals, and within our relationships with others, because it will not allow us to be true to our respective genders.<sup>277</sup>

In a funny rhetorical move, the authors turn the accusation of intolerance and the suppression of difference on their opponents, when they themselves have decided to

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<sup>277</sup> ([http://www.tneagleforum.org/homosexual\\_faq.cfm](http://www.tneagleforum.org/homosexual_faq.cfm))

allow for two kinds, just two. They then treat the “same-sex proposition” as a mistaken attempt to achieve a goal they too share: to create less, rather than more, confusion and dissension within us as individuals and among us in our relations with others. Whatever difference our two empirical concepts (man-sign, woman-sign) fail to pick out should be ignored; we will feel calmer if we deny our particularities any claim to acknowledgement or recognition. They are the material that subtends the social form, instead of the social form providing them a means whereby they might be represented. Concepts are rules for object-constitution, recognition, and identification, but symbols are persistent reminders that we are not so easily constituted. Otherwise, whence the potential for “dissension within us as individuals” when faced with the prospect of same sex unions? Thus even the vision that tries to silence the resistance within us finds itself constrained to acknowledge and address differences in desires and sexual needs, since when total identity among members isn’t possible, the only option is to closely regulate difference.

One finds evidence that such regulation is indeed experienced as constraint even (or, as I suggested earlier, possibly especially) among the staunch traditionalists and within the fundamentalist community. For example, the emphasis on sacrifice, with its implied if also infinitely deferred reward, is itself simultaneously an acknowledgement and denial of the individual claim to find satisfaction and meaning in what would otherwise be mere empty convention. We can see something of that in the title of a Christian marriage book by Gary Thomas: “Sacred Marriage: What if Marriage Were More to Make You Holy Than to Make You Happy?” We are familiar with the idea that holiness is to be juxtaposed with happiness, but this certainly does turn the old adage “it is better to marry than to burn” on its head. Now, marriage is a form of burning rather

than a mechanism for escaping it. Lisa from New York gives this book a five out of five, writing:

Finally, a real solution to an age old dilemma: marriage God's way. Do not read this book unless you are ready to do marriage God's way – absolutely surrendered to Him and dead to self. What glorious liberty and freedom I have found. This book blows all other marriage books out of the water.<sup>278</sup>

To be fair to Thomas, the book's author, he calls for neither literal nor psychological suicide, but his approach does emphasize the notion of sacrifice almost to the exclusion of any counterclaims on behalf of satisfaction. Dictatorial commands are always a sign of weakened authority. If marriage is to be a concept, then we are to be its signs, particulars rendered dead – doing their job, to borrow the phrase, God's way. But although Lisa claims to have found liberty in submission, it is difficult for such a demanding authority to neutralize the contents of repression.

It is exactly that difficulty that animates much of the conservative anti-gay marriage (and anti-gay) rhetoric, sometimes very explicitly. The worry here is that a loosening of the scriptural strictures will result in an irreparable opening up of the territories of unbridled association, so that behind the gay couples loom the specters of all imaginable forms of sexual deviancy. This is not just true of the website rhetoric we have been examining, although we will return to some choice web selections in a bit, but indeed informs the debate at the “highest” levels – so much so that one of the philosophical arguments has become familiar enough to be known simply as the “PIB” argument. That stands, of course, for the “Polygamy, Incest, and Bestiality” argument, a strategy common enough to get an acronym and, apparently, persistent enough to require philosophical treatment in the journal *Ethics*.

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<sup>278</sup><http://www.amazon.com/readerreviews>.

The PIB tries to make the claim that public approval of gay activities and partnerships either logically or causally entails the loss of any principle of judgment that might exclude other taboo sexual behaviors. In an *Ethics* article (the first on the topic of gay marriage) called “Homosexuality and the PIB Argument,” John Corvino clearly recognizes the serious deficits in the strategy. He begins by lamenting that “some bad arguments never die”<sup>279</sup> and ends by designating the PIB argument a “scare tactic,” a “rhetorical strategem,” and finally evidence of what he calls an “irrational panic.”<sup>280</sup> And yet Corvino gamely takes on the PIB argument in various incarnations, takes it seriously enough, in fact, to critique three other responses to it and provide his own alternatives. Given his claim that his opponents “keep changing the subject,”<sup>281</sup> it should be no surprise that the trajectory of his own argument is a bit disorienting. For whatever reason, he feels compelled to provide serious and compelling arguments against each of his opponents claims, only to – for argument’s sake, one supposes – subsequently *grant* the premise in question and think them through, in ways their original proponents do not, to their logical (unintended and unwelcome) consequences.

Corvino’s overall strategy is, it seems, to take his opponents more seriously than they take themselves, a familiar approach, especially to teachers hoping to either inspire or shame their students into harder work. And he does manage to reveal holes and poke new ones in the PIB argument. It is perhaps no surprise that an argument inspired, on Corvino’s reading, by a kind of panic is also riddled with logical and rhetorical fallacies, and it does little harm, perhaps even some good, to point these out. But Corvino’s dogged pursuit of the arguments does little to ground any understanding of the panic

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<sup>279</sup> John Corvino. “Homosexuality and the PIB Argument,” *Ethics* (115.1 2005: 501-534) 501.

<sup>280</sup> Corvino 534.

<sup>281</sup> Corvino 534.

itself, especially insofar as he takes almost no account of the historical or political issues at hand.

The demands of the “traditionalists,” as Corvino calls them, are that whatever principle or argument gets used to sanction homosexual relations must also contain the grounds by which we can condemn polygamous, incestual, and bestial relations. Failing that, our choices are supposed to be clear: we choose between heteronormativity and sexual anarchy; or, as new natural lawyer John Finnis puts it in a passage that occupies Corvino:

The plain fact is that those who propound a homosexual ideology have no principled case to offer against (prudent and moderate) promiscuity, indeed *the getting of orgasmic sexual pleasure in whatever friendly touch or welcoming orifice (human or otherwise) one may opportunely find it.*<sup>282</sup>

Leaving aside the tempting question as to what might constitute ‘prudent and moderate’ bestiality in Finnis’s opinion, it is important to note the choice he is trying to force: namely, that between principles and orifices, a social good and a self-indulgent and fleeting (if friendly) pleasure. It is as if the question of pleasure could not possibly be of anything but negative social value – unless, of course, it undergoes a kind of transubstantiation into a good by virtue of being linked with procreative goals.

In an important way, Finnis’s critique of the “homosexual ideology” is anything but conservative, involving as it seems to a conception of human subjects as radically undetermined. His is a subject that, once having lost its principled (heterosexual) orientation, wanders around blindly in its search for welcoming orifices, a kind of sexual *tabula rasa*. Either we accept the traditions we’re born to or we rove around in a

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<sup>282</sup> Corvino 515, emphasis Corvino’s.

polyamorous haze. Either we are social (read: principled, i.e., heterosexual) creatures, or we are uninformed, pleasure-seeking pieces of flesh.

Corvino clearly recognizes that Finnis is presenting us with a false dilemma, but he does not realize that the latter's position is the result of an overzealous abstraction from social and historical circumstances. Indeed, Corvino's response to this and other versions of the argument suffer from a similar problem. He chooses to focus on "the moral argument against sexual *relationships* of persons of the same sex" in his attempt to "eschew the kind of reductivist thinking about sex that separates its physical from its emotional (or more broadly, personal) aspects."<sup>283</sup> This slightly broader focus does allow him to move past the principle-vs.-orifice dilemma, but just as sexual acts do not occur in a social vacuum (Corvino's point), neither do human relationships (my point).

Corvino writes: "Insofar as opposition to gay civil marriage stems from the conviction that homosexual relationships are morally wrong, my discussion is likely to have implications for the gay marriage debate."<sup>284</sup> If we take that "insofar" to mean, as it seems to, "because" (rather than "to the degree that"), then Corvino is suggesting that the opposition to homosexual activity is primary and the opposition to gay marriage one of its effects.<sup>285</sup> If, however, the opposition to homosexual activity depends, at least insofar as it constitutes a *political* issue, on the question of gay marriage, then Corvino's attention on private relationships, personal desires, etc., is just as misplaced as Finnis's over-attention to orifices. More importantly, however, in terms of our present inquiry, Corvino's insistence on remaining almost entirely within the bounds of causal and logical

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<sup>283</sup> Corvino 503.

<sup>284</sup> Corvino 503.

<sup>285</sup> One debate source cited by Corvino, E.J. Graff's *What is Marriage For?* argues persuasively that, from an historical point of view, it is just impossible that one transformation to its shape would or could open it up to any and all comers.

modes of argument means that he cannot gain the distance needed to recognize these forms as largely borrowed in the service of giving shape to anxieties.

Further, it *does* seem to be true, for some unsteady conservative commentators at least, that the gates guarding against untoward thoughts have been rattled. This situation results in the uncomfortable deployment of an *explicit strategy of psychological defense*, which is to say the conscious deployment of strategies usually worked out in a more subterranean manner to *prevent* consciousness of whatever is being defended against. In other words, when we call something a defense, we normally mean that it is a mechanism for keeping ourselves aware of something else. But perhaps this is the real paradox of humanity: that in order to do the work of covering our own eyes, we have to know what we're trying not to see. When the struggle becomes explicitly political and public, there is a bizarre doubling of that paradox. The defensive forms amount to accidental confession – think here of the Defense of Marriage Act.

In a very strange review of *Brokeback Mountain* on the website “Christian Spotlight on the Movies,” a review which gave the movie five of five for “artistic content,” the reviewer writes, “The images are haunting, and so I must caution spiritually dangerous for anyone who is not completely grounded in Scripture!” A sidebar on the same page, a testimonial from Tim, self-described ex-gay, concurs: “To view the movie will likely reduce one’s defense from future immorality.”<sup>286</sup> The image, it seems, exerts a power above and beyond the word, and perhaps even the Word. In the struggle against this public presentation, the reviewer finds himself constrained to present exactly that as attractive what the Christian right has otherwise worked so hard to present as unnatural, pathological, and perverse.

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<sup>286</sup> <http://www.christianspotlightonthemovies.com>.



It must be thoughts like these that subtend those anti-gay marriage arguments that are more than willing to admit that marriage is purely a matter of convention, where convention really means agreed upon and arbitrary – arguments that maintain explicitly that if we cannot eradicate difference we need to have some rules, any rules. Such an argument is forwarded, for example, by self-proclaimed libertarian Stanley Kurtz, who, in light of troubles grounding his claims against same-sex marriage seems to call for order, any order:

Gay marriage would set into motion a series of threats to the ethos of monogamy from which the institution of marriage may never recover. Yet up to now, our society has been unable to face the real costs and consequences of the proposed change. That is partly because of an understandable sympathy for the gay rights movement. But it also reflects the sheer inability of modern folk to grasp the operation, necessity—or even existence—of the system of moral consensus and prohibition upon which society itself depends.<sup>287</sup>

Again, we see that the argument is motivated by the fear that as soon as we loosen our stranglehold on our desires, *anything is possible*: the article substitutes for the PIB list of associations that of “Incest, Homosexuality, and Adultery.” Further, Kurtz does not insist that modernity is a *rejection* or *refusal* of the way society depends on consensus and prohibition, but instead cites “the sheer inability of modern folk” to grasp these things. This brings us, finally, back to the claim that modernity just is a crisis of both authority and the reflective judgment we might use to mediate and transform its claims. In lieu of the deployment of judgment, the current social convention finds itself defined almost exclusively in terms of its ability to exclude, grounding its meaning most staunchly in what it is not.

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<sup>287</sup> Kurtz, S. “The Libertarian Question: Incest, Homosexuality, and Adultery,” Same Sex Marriage 268. (Hereafter *SSM*)

It might seem far-fetched to think that heteronormative social forms ground their seriousness on and by way of the exclusion of representations of same-sex desire,<sup>288</sup> and yet something of the sort seems to be at work in the panicked tone of so many anti-gay marriage arguments. Sam Schulman, in an article called “Gay Marriage – And Marriage,” finds himself working overtime to put gay desire back in the closet – or, rather, portray it as a basement pursuit. He starts out in a tone of slightly revolted tolerance:

Insofar as I care for a homosexual friend as a friend, I am required to say to him that, if a lifelong monogamous relationship is what you want, I wish you that felicity, just as I hope you would wish me the same. But insofar as our lives as citizens are concerned, or even as human beings, your monogamy and the durability of your relationship are, to be blunt about it, matters of complete indifference. They are of as little concern to our collective life as if you were to smoke cigars, or build model railroads in your basement, or hang glide, and of less social concern than the safety of your property, or your right not to be overcharged by the phone company. Your pleasures have no public meaning, deserve no public representation.<sup>289</sup>

Friendship, apparently, has very different obligations than do citizenship or even membership in the human race. We are obliged to support our friends in their overzealous pursuit of hobbies or destructive cigar-smoking behaviors; this is the much lauded principle of tolerance. As citizens and humans, however, we must be blunt: I may care, but *we* do not. “Your pleasures have no public meaning, *deserve no public representation.*”

What, on Schulman’s account, is the *purpose* of marriage as a public representation of desire? “Marriage is how we are connected backward in time, through the generations, to our Creator (or, if you insist, to the primal soup), and forward to the future beyond the scope of our lifespan. It is, to say the least, more than two hearts

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<sup>288</sup> Although similar arguments have been made by the likes of Freud and Judith Butler.

<sup>289</sup> *SSM* 237.

beating as one.”<sup>290</sup> What is so striking about this representation is its openness in debarring even “gay friends” from symbolic inclusion in history and civilization, even from symbolic connection to the Debased Source – the primal soup. If we render this connection available to gays, we will “transform it into a contract between chums,” a contract that cannot claim the high seriousness of a link to the primal soup or a heavenly future, a contract that admits its own contingency while yet having the audacity to take itself seriously.<sup>291</sup> Schuler apparently does not think that this threat to what on his account is our most important site of meaning will be enough to convince us, however, so he ends his argument with the standard litany of dangers. Gay marriage “sunders the natural laws that prevent concubinage and incest. Unless we resist, we will find ourselves on the path to the abolition of the human. The gods move very fast when they bring ruin on misguided men.”<sup>292</sup> This is perhaps the most muddled mix of rhetorical strategies possible: it attempts to demystify gay desire by linking it to hobbies, model train, cigar smoking, a relationship between chums. It is unimportant, a friendly and unassuming failure of character. But if it is simultaneously to act as the threat that ensures the seriousness of the heterosexual connection that *does* deserve public representation, it must be reanimated, linked to “concubinage” and “incest,” *the abolition of the human*. And, in case that weren’t enough, we might as well throw in some fast-moving gods bringing ruin on misguided men – proof at last that monotheism is not to blame for this insistence on monolithic identity. Most importantly for our present purposes, Schulman seems to be struggling to both say and hide the fact that sociality itself, whether among citizens or just humans, depends on this exclusion.

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<sup>290</sup> *SSM* 238.

<sup>291</sup> *SSM* 238.

<sup>292</sup> *SSM* 238.

There are sources that say this much more clearly. Stanley Kurz, the libertarian we met earlier, explicitly assigns the suppression of gay desire a symbolic role in the heterosexual social economy, writing, “And our new sexual freedom has benefited no one more than homosexuals, who no longer serve, in nearly the degree they once did, as ultimate symbols of forbidden sexuality.”<sup>293</sup> Indeed, Hawaii Supreme Court Justice Walter M. Heen authored the minority opinion that lays out its reasons for dissent; in it, he cites the following: “Dr. Socarides opined ... [that] ‘to introduce homosexuality as a valid psychosexual institution is to destroy the function of heterosexuality as *the last place in our society* where affectivity can still be cultivated.’”<sup>294</sup> This claim is remarkable both for its ruthlessness and its acuity: the cultivation of affectivity, which we can take to be fairly synonymous with what we’ve been calling its symbolic mediation, has one last refuge. It has been backed into a corner such that the heterosexual marriage is depicted as the one place we can publicly recognize (which is also to say cultivate) the affective dimension of sociality. If we “introduce homosexuality as a valid psychosexual institution,” we lose our last mediated contact with our affective lives – knowledge and desire will be forever left to follow their own independent paths. Each of these sources seems aware of the fact that their arguments require a symbolic sacrifice be made of our gay brethren, and, like the others, Justice Heen too represents them as our friends, as friends among themselves – or, chums, rather – and as worthy of being left alone.

There are, of course, plenty of arguments that embrace exactly the freedoms that worry Kurtz, Schulman, et. al, some as a freedom that already has been or might be visited *on* the institution of marriage, and others as a freedom found by queer

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<sup>293</sup> SSM 265.

<sup>294</sup> SSM 309, emphasis mine.

communities (or other free-thinkers) that is imperiled by the bid for access to the marriage institution. We might open our discussion of these positions with yet another bit of bumper sticker wisdom: “Marriage turns *lovers* into *relatives*.” This bumper sticker has its own argument to make – namely, that marriage turns those with whom we voluntarily associate on the basis of a living and felt passionate attachment into contingent and yet binding facts, motivated associations into mechanical ones. Of course, the larger vision it communicates, if we can say it *has* a larger vision, is of free association without authority, which is to say without claims that exceed legitimation. (Only anarchists, it seems, believe in this as a specifically political vision.)

Before we turn briefly to Stephanie Coontz’s *Marriage: a History*, and even more briefly to Laura Kipnis’s *Against Love*, which we will take as representatives of an earnest and then an ironic orientation to marriage, let us dwell a bit more on the question of family and authority. If it is hard to say what we want our political authority to *look* like, even as we make the argument that we crave some figuration at that level, it is equally hard to say what we want our smaller scale, familial authority to look like. Children discover early on the strategy of exempting themselves from parental rule by claiming that they hadn’t *asked* to be born into this family. And yet, when attempting to de-authorize extra-familial authority, they deploy the line: “You’re not my mother!” Marriage itself is a strange attempt to represent as unified the bonds of love and consent, on the one hand, and the familial, civic, and/or religious bonds that authorize obligations in excess of what we freely give.

Coontz sees the disappearance of external “guarantors” of our commitment as both dangerous and liberating.<sup>295</sup> Coontz is interested in telling the history of marriage, or what she takes to be its ending, as a story of emancipation. It is by no means a straightforward story of emancipation, as we travel back in time and around the globe, looking at an array of social orders so vast it includes marriages between the living and the dead, a person and a dog, even a person and the limb of another, not to mention the more expected variations on sexual relations. Somehow, though, starting in the eighteenth century, we get a trajectory or tendency that persists, more or less, up through the present, a trajectory that involves the gradual liberation of marriage from its social and political roles and into what she takes to be a more satisfying private role.

Coontz compares the process by which marriage is disestablished – the process of *demariage*, as she calls it – to the disentanglement of the European and American states from religion, writing: “When this happened, religion itself did not disappear. But many different churches and new religious groups proliferated. Similarly, once the state stopped insisting that everyone needed a government-sanctioned marriage license to enjoy the privileges and duties of parenthood or other long-term commitments, other forms of intimate relationships and child-rearing arrangements came out from underground.”<sup>296</sup> Given, however, the panic that surrounds *demariage*, not to mention the fact that it takes place in a world of decreasing possibilities for shared public meaning and reflection, it seems we should temper our enthusiasm for our newfound freedoms. Surely, the official de-politicization of religion has not actually moved religion entirely

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<sup>295</sup> Indeed, in a talk on the same subject, Coontz cites a variation on the bumper sticker just mentioned: instead of “Marriage turns *lovers* into relatives,” the version she mentions reads, “Marriage turns *strangers* into relatives.” Although this is meant to show marriage’s transformative and constitutive social power, there is something sinister in the idea of strangers suddenly appearing as relatives.

<sup>296</sup> Coontz 280.

into the private sphere. If it had, we would not be arguing about same-sex marriage.

“For thousands of years,” Coontz writes in her conclusion,

marriage served so many economic, political, and social functions that the individual needs and wishes of its members ... took second place. [...] Only in the last two hundred years, as other economic and political institutions began to take over many of the roles once played by marriage, did Europeans begin to see marriage as a personal and private relationship that should fulfill their emotional and sexual desires.<sup>297</sup>

Although it looks on Coontz’s telling like marriage has become a *refuge* from the messy world of politics, a refuge from the intrusions of unwanted authorities, isn’t it possible that the way contemporary marriage focuses us on our private lives, our private satisfactions, our nuclear concerns, that this is in itself a political function? Or, as Laura Kipnis puts it in a review of Coontz’s book, “The prying eyes of fellow villagers may be a thing of the past, but given the self-policing capacities of the modern individual, the celebration of personal autonomy may be a little premature.”<sup>298</sup> In her approach, Kipnis focuses in on the political function played by the restriction of sexual desire, but given our work on the necessary role of symbolic mediation in making possible the affective bonds of sociality, the worry is bigger than that. It is not just that in the 1800’s began a process whereby Europeans (and Americans) began to see marriage as “a” relationship meant to fulfill their emotional and sexual desires; instead, it was on its way to becoming *the* relationship meant to do all of that work.

If Coontz is telling a story in which an external and constraining social form becomes a space for earnest expression and satisfaction, the transubstantiation of the church or civil marriage into the love marriage, Kipnis puts the screws to love itself. In the “Reader Advisory” to her *Against Love*, she writes:

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<sup>297</sup> Coontz 306.

<sup>298</sup> Laura Kipnis, “Love or Money?” Harpers (June 2005).

To begin with, who would dream of being against love? No one. Love is, as everyone knows, a mysterious and all-controlling force, with vast power over our thoughts and life decisions. Love is boss, and a demanding one too: it demands our loyalty. We, in turn, freely comply—or as freely as the average subject in thrall to an all-powerful master, as freely as indentured servants.<sup>299</sup>

Toward the end of the book, she writes further, “Households aren’t just training grounds for citizenship and allegiance to contracts, they’re small governments in themselves, and like the democratic nation, they must be founded on the illusion of a loving partnership.”<sup>300</sup> Kipnis makes it clear that she is purposefully launching a polemic against love, one that is almost unremittingly ironic in tone, but her vantage is also clearly influenced by both Marx and Foucault. Her argument is essentially that marriage just is a tool (or, more precisely, the nuclear and monogamous constraints that attend modern day love, just are tools) for economic and social control.

We will not rehearse her polemic, although it is a fun read; instead we will take a claim she makes about the expansion of marriage rights as providing entrée to an “in-between” position that we’ll explore in the conclusion to this dissertation, the possibility of a position that is neither sappily earnest nor scathingly ironic. Kipnis writes, “And with gay populations now demanding official entry to state-sanctioned nuptials too, no longer is the heterosexual plight alone: welcome all commitment-seeking queer, bi, and transgendered compatriots.”<sup>301</sup> We will also not answer all of the Marxist and Foucauldian worries that animate Kipnis’s approach, but we can take this question with us: is it reasonable to suggest against her view, as many have done, that instead of becoming just like their straight brethren, gay couples might transform the institution itself? The suggestion is, then, that the advent of gay marriage might actually work to

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<sup>299</sup> Laura Kipnis, *Against Love: A Polemic* (New York: Random House, 2003) 3.

<sup>300</sup> Kipnis 68.

<sup>301</sup> Kipnis 14.



help queer – where here we just mean by that open up, enliven in unexpected ways – an institution that seems to be losing its claim on us. Suddenly, the use of the term “gay marriage” seems more appropriate.

Given that the rigid insistence on unity in identity can be read as a symptom of a symbolic crisis around the institution of marriage, it is at least plausible that the attempt to expand its representative capacities stands a chance of revitalizing it. To the degree, however, that this is a sociological hypothesis brings us into contact with the bounds of philosophy.<sup>302</sup> Neither our more abstract investigation into the conditions of symbolically-mediated self-understanding and the affective dimensions of the social bond, nor, alas, our more concrete investigation into the gay marriage debate yield up anything like philosophical arguments capable of convincing opponents or policy-makers. Insofar as our analysis has given us some interpretive purchase on the gay marriage debate, we have, however, shown that the limits of philosophy are not as far from the concrete as Pippin’s Hegel would have us believe. As our earlier work suggested, the symbolic crisis is experienced as a prohibition on association, accompanied by the anxious production of a scene whereby the transformation of this public norm is accompanied by the fall of every imaginable taboo and the wrath of gods both ancient and modern. Its defenders expect everything and nothing from it: it provides *the* path to a satisfying life, and the best way to approach it is, to cite Lisa again, “absolutely surrendered to Him and dead to self.” In that sense, all of the pieces are there: marriage reflects both the repression of wants and needs *and* provides therewith the stuff for an affective bond, although, since they stand in such rigid contradiction with one another, the affective bond is to a God and a beyond rather even than the man or woman

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<sup>302</sup> As do all “wait and see” or “try it, you’ll like it” claims.

in question. The pieces are there, but they are there in modes that resist all attempts to mediate them. Although we have not generated a philosophical argument likely to convince Lisa to take another look, we have found ourselves capable of analyzing the terms of the debate in a way that, in the next chapter, provides the grounds for thinking through how a community might be forged at this site of exclusion, a community that might be able to make claims for itself that philosophy cannot make on its behalf.

## CONCLUSION

We ended the last chapter by letting Coontz and Kipnis stand for the competing conceptions of marriage at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: on the one hand, Coontz takes what she sees as the *decrease* in emphasis on public and shared conceptions of marriage as opening up a space for private meaning-making; on the other, Kipnis sees that very transformation as a sign of an even more potent symbol. Neither treatment, however, allows the struggles around the question of *gay* marriage to complicate their scenario: Coontz takes it that the institution will, as a matter of course, indeed as part of the process of *demariage* she describes, become more open and inclusive of difference; Kipnis sees the extension of the institution as an extension of its disciplinary grasp to otherwise resistant sectors of the population. In both stories, the process is recognized as substantially external and historical but in such a way that there seems to be no place for judgment to intervene, so that we seem inexorably headed toward respect without identity (meaning-making as a private affair) or identity without respect (meaning as belonging entirely to the institution).

Because we were unable, finally, to come up with an argument likely to convince opponents of gay marriage that they stand to gain by its institution, or even that they stand to lose nothing, in conclusion, we will pursue another line of thought, training our attention instead on the expressive possibilities available for those who find themselves excluded from public representations of their commitments. The question is whether or not we can find examples of what we've termed an "in-between" claim on public attention, a claim that recognizes the depletion of symbolic resources without thereby

giving up its stake. Such a claim would be one that is pressed not just in spite of the fact that it might not find recognition but *because* it might not, and in a way that renders public the opacity or problematic status of the unspecified needs for which it stands. On our account, to “render public” means to link what remains unspecified with what we take to be recognized and recognizable.

Theoretician of sexuality David Halperin will provide us with some suggestive materials for the discussion insofar as he cites gay male cultural forms that he takes to allow their participants to find a way to live in modern conditions “disabused but not disenchanted.” In his talk, “Tragedy Into Melodrama: Towards a Poetics of Gay Male Culture,”<sup>303</sup> he asks the question whether there is such a thing as “gay male culture,” and in answering this question in the affirmative, he argues that its practices turn “tragedy into melodrama.” For there to be a culture is, for him, for there to be a set of shared practices that help its constituents make public sense of their private lives, and, as it turns out, these shared practices have something to offer those beyond the confines of gay male culture per se. As we will see, our own treatment of his argument will be complicated by his ambivalent portrayal of heteronormative social practices as privileged and powerful, on the one hand, and unwittingly laughable or, to use our earlier terms, *borné*, on the other. Although we will suggest that he is, in a sense, right on both accounts – indeed, the line-up of web citations in defense of heteronorms in the last chapter all but makes that claim for us – Halperin’s approach prevents him from sustaining a tension between the pride and anxiety implicit in those positions.

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<sup>303</sup> David Halperin, “Tragedy Into Melodrama: Toward a Poetics of Gay Male Culture,” Big Ideas (February 16, 2008, broadcast by TV Ontario). (Hereafter *TiM*.)

One of the examples that orients Halperin's discussion is provided by a troupe known as "The Italian Widows" who performed for many years at the Fire Island 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, "The Invasion of the Pines." The troupe was comprised of gay men of Mediterranean descent who "dressed in the black frocks and veils worn by Italian women who have lost their husbands and whose permanent assumption of black clothing makes such women prominent figures of mourning, authority, seniority and autonomy in traditional Italian village life." We might, claims Halperin, be tempted to treat this as a mere spoof or "parody of straight society's high moral drama of family values, gender subordination, and deadly literal sentimental seriousness," if not for one fact: these were "all men who had actually lost their lovers to AIDS." Although he does not put it this way, this loss at the center of an otherwise comedic presentation is the source of its claim on us, the kernel of the real that gets acknowledged, but, as Halperin makes clear, not thereby rendered transparent or publicly specified. It is this combination of the parodic and the real which enables the men to "represent the fact of their suffering to the world without expecting pious acknowledgement." In their "overperformance of grief and national identity," they are acknowledging the ways their emotions have in general been "consigned to the realm of the incongruous, the excessive, the melodramatic, the hysterical, the inauthentic, at any rate, to the less than fully dignified."<sup>304</sup>

These performances, organized as they are around not only the love but also a loss that dares not speak its name, present us with a doubling of the problematic we saw with gay marriage. If we're right that the conditions of modernity enforce a de facto prohibition on association, so that the endless scare-associations (incest, polygamy, bestiality, pedophilia, etc., etc., etc.) depict what hell may break loose if we loosen our

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<sup>304</sup> *TiM*.

strictures, then that prohibition serves as the condition of the possibility for this parody. These are American men enacting Mediterranean widowhood, borrowing the trappings of another culture and gender in order to produce a comic-tragic breach by way of what are explicitly mistaken social forms. Doing so allows them to form a troupe that can communicate not merely an internal identity – indeed, if that were the aim, then we would be dealing with a tasteless case of group therapy conducted in public – but also an external difference that separates and connects them to the gay male community in a wider sense. These American men do not simply borrow the trappings of widowhood but those of Italian widowhood, thereby asserting that what they cannot say nonetheless has a specificity all its own. Although still unspecified, it is by performing that difference that they ask for acknowledgement and recognition. By calling on their Mediterranean descent, they admit that they are indulging in special pleading, asking for a recognition of their own finitude and contingency without, however, adopting in earnest the stultifying trappings of melodrama.

This parodic performance of grief, according to Halperin, exemplifies what he terms a “camp” orientation, which he describes more generally as a refusal “to exempt oneself from the irony with which one views all social identity, all performance of authorized social roles.” This refusal is different from that of Hegel’s bohemian artist since there the aim was to portray the self as infinite and unbounded, every bind as an artificial restriction, and every artificial restriction as beneath one’s dignity. Here, the players refuse to exempt themselves from ironic distance. Halperin accords this refusal a great deal of power, claiming that it “throw[s] a wrench into the machinery of social depreciation. By disclaiming all pretense to dignity, one enables community instead of

hierarchy.” Of course, this is community rendered possible only in the face of hierarchy, only against the backdrop of social institutions from which one has been explicitly or implicitly barred. Otherwise, Halperin could not have called this “shared recognition” an “anti-social aesthetic practice” that works to sustain a community in its “loving recognition of the ghastly object.”<sup>305</sup>

But, as this dissertation has tried to make palpable, the gap between social forms for expression and the unspecified needs that clamor for it is not a specifically gay problem. Indeed, it is a general problem to which Halperin is doing something like suggesting a gay solution, a solution, that is, from but maybe not only for the fringe. As we’ve said, Halperin alternates between sharing some version of this position and engaging in the fantasy of a much more powerful set of heteronormative social forms of expression than actually exist, which is perhaps just the fantasy that sustains and makes possible such a powerful parody. On the one hand, he acknowledges that “even for heterosexuals, the task of conveying what is felt inwardly has something histrionic about it.”<sup>306</sup> On the other hand, he claims that where men in general lack an appropriate social form for their grief (and what might an appropriate *form* for grief look like?), “women routinely claim this role.” (He cites Jackie Kennedy’s famous mourning of her husband as proof, uncharacteristically ignoring the irony of taking such a figure as an example of routine grief.) The tension between the specter of an all-powerful mode of masculine self-expression, which comes to be known in Halperin’s talk as the tragic, and the recognition of an explicit *absence* of compelling social forms in general, a situation that

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<sup>305</sup> *TiM*.

<sup>306</sup> Since we have, in a moment of poor judgment, opened the door to bumper sticker citations, I cannot refrain from mentioning the one I saw most recently: “Marriage is totally gay.”

results in the demotion of tragedy to “melodrama,” this tension is present throughout Halperin’s discussion.

Halperin treats camp as an orientation that grounds community at precisely the site of its denial. Although he does not explicitly make the point (and sometimes refuses it), the denial in question still serves an affirmative function in Halperin’s argument, grounding heterosexual claims to seriousness that otherwise have nothing on which to hang their hat. Halperin, in his discussion of tragedy, turns back to Greek tragedy, focusing in particular on the tragic scenes of male suffering so prominent in the *Iliad*, providing an especially moving reading of the scene in which Priam kisses the hands of his son’s slayer. Such scenes, argues Halperin, make it clear that social forms of expression connected to what is most overwhelming do not *show* emotion, but “represent, symbolize, or otherwise figure them.” “Human sociality,” Halperin argues,

depends on such symbolic transactions, on surrendering all hope of finding an adequate objective correlative of what we feel. Unless social mediations are understood to be necessarily symbolic and not expressive, all human communication breaks down and the fabric of human relationality unravels...<sup>307</sup>

Of course, the representation of such symbolic transactions *in* or *as* tragedy might involve surrendering all hope in this way, but this surrender is made public and shared, sustaining or constituting an audience and so a community. This it does by representing a shared opacity, shared insofar as the forms are recognizable and opaque insofar as they are recognizably and utterly inadequate. Again, although Halperin does not quite manage to integrate it finally into his analysis, he takes up as one of his themes the way what he calls the “refined aesthetic experience” proffered by classical tragedy has become unavailable. And, indeed, he traces out the emergence of the middlebrow melodrama

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<sup>307</sup> *TiM*.



precisely as a genre suited to the reflection of an emerging bourgeoisie, even in his way tying the transformation to the disappearance of authoritative figures: instead of royal families on the stage, we get private families as the reflection appropriate to bourgeois life.<sup>308</sup> In this way, at least, as Halperin jokes, melodrama manages to “retain its *focus on the family*.” This joking reference to the conservative political group we saw earlier calling “marriage” the glue of civilization points to the strange politics required to argue for the seriousness of now-debased public forms of expression *and* simultaneously to the way in which gay men find themselves debarred from even those debased expressions. It is thus that Halperin ends up (in what we might think of as a case of “the grass is always more tragic”) representing this abjection as though it were directly the exclusion of gay male expression from the realm of *tragedy* rather than melodrama.

As we’ve said, Halperin recognizes this new dramatic genre as marking the failure of tragedy, which, according to his own terms, was the genre that allowed us to recognize the ineliminability of some moment of serious opacity, symbolically marking the gulf between form and content. Without that, remember, “all human communication breaks down and the fabric of human relationality unravels.” There are moments in which Halperin seems poised to acknowledge that this very thing seems to have happened, so that one cannot help but laugh at the melodramatic self-portrayals of bourgeois life – as, for example, when he cites Wilde in the following: “One must have a heart of stone, as Oscar Wilde said, to read *The Death of Little Nell* without laughing. [...] By its very definition, then, melodrama is failed tragedy. It may be earnest, but it’s

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<sup>308</sup> Here, it is interesting to note the move from a symbolic attachment to royal families that surely were in no way direct reflections of the audience’s own circumstances, so that tragedy privileges royal authority but is able to lay claim on its audiences by way of this representation. Note too that the move is to a more direct “reflection,” which emphasizes identity but loses the claim to dignity and distance in the process.

not serious.” But he is torn between this claim and the recognition that people continue to live in these conditions, to make some manner of small-scale symbolic sense of their lives, connections, and losses, so that the very attribution of the term “melodrama” operates to denigrate, to “devalue the sentimental lives of other people, to refuse to accord to their suffering the dignity reserved for tragedy. [...] If in our perversity, we insist on taking pathetic suffering seriously, we convict ourselves of sentimentality, which is a failure of taste.”<sup>309</sup>

Halperin claims that “if melodrama has an erotics, it also has a politics. [...] The task of all gay politics can be summed up in a single, simple formula: it is to turn tragedy into melodrama.” This cannot be quite right, however, since the work of turning tragedy into melodrama has already been done by “history,” and since, further, the failure of taste that *is* melodrama is a failure of community and so of politics. Instead, what Halperin must mean when he claims that gay male culture gives us a way of imagining becoming “disabused without being disenchanted” is that it offers us a model of both seeing and acknowledging melodrama *as* melodrama, without thereby merely laughing it off. In some sense, this would not be to turn tragedy into melodrama but to turn melodrama into tragedy that we can both laugh *and* cry at, to see the fact of melodrama as tragic. This is not a directly political act but rather one that reveals melodrama as in lieu of politics.

Since we have suggested that the depletion of our symbolic resources has its roots in the split between production and consumption, the crisis in question cannot be resolved at the level of thought and representation. But insofar as the panicked tone that riddles defenses of the current symbolic order is symptomatic of a hysterical response, we can see that something along the lines of Halperin’s “camp” offers up at least the vision of a

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<sup>309</sup> *TiM*.

different orientation to the crisis. By acknowledging the mismatch between the available social forms and what seeks representation by their means, camp actually works to affirm not only the “excluded” content but to reveal the depth and meanings subtending the rigidly defended “included” identities. But there are plenty of things to worry about in this substitute solution. For example, is it only by becoming semi-comic figures, by distancing ourselves from what we simultaneously try to embrace, to mock and love or mock and grieve, that we can hope for any social joy? Is the conclusion then that this is just the shape of sociality today, under conditions of modernity? Finally, is this a model on which one is forced to celebrate one’s own exclusion, or, worse, theory is forced to celebrate and depend on the lucky-unlucky (or unlucky but plucky) few to show us what remains opaque but otherwise out of sight?

When we followed Verene in his reading of Hegel, we praised him for his attentiveness to the poetics of Hegel’s dialectical thought, but we criticized his willingness to embrace a vision of the world that replaced both “erotics” and “politics” with poetics, a backward-looking poetics at that. Further, we worried about his willingness to see philosophy sustained by what it also sees as genuinely other and opaque, without feeling called on to do any further interpretive or political work. Being haunted and compelled is, on that view, enough. How is the “camp” orientation to what sustains it different? It must be that, whatever else we mean by an “erotics” and a “politics,” these terms implicate all parties, mark their parodic participation as also interested. The camp orientation, as Halperin portrays it, neither takes up the refined mode of dissociation offered by tragedy nor requires the earnest identification of

melodrama; instead, it strives for something like identity-in-dissociation. It knowingly sustains the ambiguity between form and content.

Camp is not, however, politics.

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