

# The Dialectics of Decay: Rereading the Kantian Subject

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The palm at the end of the mind,  
Beyond the last thought, rises  
In the bronze decor,

A gold-feathered bird  
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,  
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason  
That makes us happy or unhappy.  
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.—Wallace Stevens,  
“Of Mere Being,” 1955<sup>1</sup>

As art historians, we labor under the legacy of the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant. Indeed, Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, published in 1790 when the philosopher was sixty-six years old, has figured the contours and mapped the coordinates for the aesthetic experience of works of art sanctioned by our discipline.<sup>2</sup> In the manner of all successful intellectual inheritances, the Kantian legacy has—until very recently, at least—been seamlessly incorporated into the discourse of academic practice: we have “spoken” Kant or “performed” Kant without being conscious of our debt. Using the philosopher’s own terms, we might say that our relation to his aesthetic theory has been dogmatic rather than critical. Rereading Kant, as this essay proposes to do, is thus to place the philosopher’s own critique, as well as our Kantian inheritance, under critical pressure.

The ruin offers a provocative site with which to begin a critique of Kantian philosophy. Considering the immense popularity of ruins at the end of the eighteenth century, it is striking that Kant never discusses the aesthetic experience of ruins in his third *Critique*, especially since ruins seem obvious catalysts of the Kantian sublime. More specifically, ruins appear exemplary of the Kantian dynamic sublime, an occasion that entails a presentation of nature’s unbounded force. This essay will offer an explanation for this absence by examining it within the architectonic of Kant’s aesthetic theory, as well as within the framework of his philosophy of history. An investigation of the dialectics of decay will allow us to interrogate the constitution and foundational premises of the Kantian subject through the sign of his own demise.<sup>3</sup> Like

James Ensor’s imaginative projection of a body in ruin, *My Portrait in 1960*, an etching of 1888 (Fig. 1), we will strain the Kantian edifice by incorporating the ruin—as emblem and as idea—within the framework of the philosopher’s own system, thereby yielding a picture of the subject in 1997 that may prove less coherent than Kant’s carefully crafted image in 1790.

By inquiring into the absence of ruins from Kant’s critical enterprise, I intend neither to take the philosopher to task for what he was not fascinated by nor to formulate a critique based on Kant’s failure to include ruins. One could, in fact, immediately conjecture why ruins do not make an appearance in the analytic of the sublime by pointing out how, for Kant, they may involve a determinate concept, and so may suffer the same fate as architecture or sculpture in his aesthetic theory. Yet, as we shall see, in his *Critique of Judgment* Kant mentions certain architectural structures as examples of the sublime in nature. The inclusion of these examples does not represent a contradiction in his system, since he considers these not as architectural structures per se but the *effect* of them on the beholder. As I will argue, ruins may have a similar effect on the beholder, and so may be considered—along with Kant’s architectural examples—as vehicles for experiences of the sublime. My query goes deeper, then, and investigates the ways in which Kant’s blindness to the contemporaneous cult of ruins may be emblematic of his own unwillingness to consider the ruination of his overconfident systematics, as well as a less than idealized, or “ruined,” subject. The implications of an idealized Kantian subject for the historical construction of a subjectivity defined through reason, and for the discipline of art history, as well as the corresponding location of the ruin at the underside of both subjectivity and art history, will be examined in this essay.

Seven years before he was to publish his treatise on aesthetic judgment, Kant wrote in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, “All false art, all vain wisdom, lasts its time but finally destroys itself, and its highest culture is also the epoch of its decay.” Kant’s statement is a diagnosis of his own culture, yet his words are directed more toward the faculty of philosophy than the larger field of society, since what he actually announces here is “the period of the downfall of all

1. Wallace Stevens, “Of Mere Being,” in *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play*, ed. Holly Stevens, New York, 1972, 398.

2. In this essay I cite from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. J. H. Bernard, New York, 1951. Where indicated, I have modified Bernard’s translation. As a historical note, it should be mentioned that Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762) was actually the first to use the term *aesthetics* in his unfinished *Aesthetica* of the 1750s. The uniqueness of the aesthetic was therefore established when Kant began his third *Critique*.

3. While I find it highly unsatisfactory to refer to a male Kantian subject, this is how Kant characterizes the subject. For consistency, I will follow Kant’s designation, though in what follows, I will criticize this and other aspects of Kantian subjectivity.



1 James Ensor, *My Portrait in 1960, 1888*, etching (from Auguste Taevernier, *James Ensor*, Ghent, 1973, pl. 34)

dogmatic metaphysics."<sup>4</sup> Kant's vision of vanity and decay is thus presented only to be circumscribed and ultimately rectified, for, it will be remembered, the decline of metaphysics was to be reversed through his own critical method. Kant's statement charts the course and the spirit of the subject in his own philosophical enterprise: "false art" and "vain wisdom" pass away as the subject of history gropes toward the "essential end of reason," defined as an internal condition of unalloyed morality and an external state of "ethical community." Though Kant viewed this trajectory as a path toward freedom, it is a totalizing freedom—a haunting oxymoron to which we will have occasion to return—that is the goal toward which the Kantian subject is driven.<sup>5</sup>

While Kant writes of the demise of "false art" and "vain wisdom," he does not concern himself with processes of decay. Rather, in his system reason casts a retrospective glance on a landscape of its own constitution only to propel itself toward a prospective, and more coherent, future. Kant's concern is not with the past but for the future, through the vehicle of the present. And it is the subject, as bearer of both an "unsociable sociability" and of reason, who, it is hoped, will drive historical progress forward toward ever greater

vistas of that freedom known as pure morality. Kant's so-called Copernican revolution in philosophy is a turn toward the subject as *Weltbaumeister*, a subject/architect who builds a world according to the texture and limits of human reason.

Kant wrote of his own "Copernican revolution" in the 1787 preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*. Whereas metaphysics had earlier posited that our knowledge must conform to objects (that objects exist a priori), Kant supposed that objects must conform to our knowledge (that is, that we have knowledge of objects a priori). Kant's turn toward the subject—and thus toward subjectivity—changed the course of metaphysics. As Ronald Beiner has recently remarked,

It is of course no coincidence that Kant introduces his philosophy with his famous reference to the astronomical revolution of Copernicus, for it is the need to come to terms with the sense of cosmological dislocation, displacement from the center, that Copernicus's revolution instilled that at least in part elicited Kant's philosophical reflection in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

4. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics Which Will Be Able to Come Forth as Science* (1783), trans. Lewis White Beck, New York, 1950, 115, 115–16.

5. Here I concur with Yovel, 141, when he characterizes the role of the idea in Kant's systematic works as "a rational concept that functions as a *principle of totalization*." In the Kantian system, freedom is equated with morality. Reason, as a regulative idea, guides the subject toward the "freedom" of the moral end. While this essay will concern itself solely with the nature of "freedom" as a term in and a goal of Kantian philosophy, the narrow and constricting pedagogical, philosophical, and political conditions that comprised Kant's own milieu must be kept in mind in order to better understand the urgency of his drive toward freedom, as well as his unflagging support of enlightenment. On Kant's theory of freedom within the context of intellectual history, see Charles Taylor, "Kant's Theory of Freedom," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge, 1985, 318–37.

6. Ronald Beiner, "Kant, the Sublime, and Nature," in *Kant and Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*, ed. Ronald Beiner and William James Booth, New Haven, 1993, 283.

7. See Voltaire's "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster; Or an Examination of the Axiom, 'All Is Well,'" in *Toleration and Other Essays by Voltaire*, trans. Joseph McCabe, New York, 1912, 255–63; as well as Kant's responses to the event in

*Immanuel Kants Werke*, I, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Berlin, 1912, 427–84.

8. *Kants Werke* (as in n. 7), 472.

9. Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, xx, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Walter de Gruyter, 1902, 208, quoted in Neiman, 50. This passage is from the first introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* and does not appear in Kant 1951.

10. Kant writes (1951, 21–22) that we need to assume such transcendental laws or principles, otherwise we would be left with "no guiding thread" by which to understand the world or our place in it. His use of the transcendental laws distinguishes his philosophy from the skepticism of David Hume, just as his use of the critical method distinguishes his labor from that of dogmatic metaphysics. Kant's first *Critique* negotiates a middle path between skepticism and dogmatism through an examination of the conditions of the possibility of reason itself. By finding the "eternal laws" of reason, Kant sought to rescue reason from both skepticism and dogmatism, or what Frederick Beiser terms "rational skepticism or an irrational fideism." For an examination of the 18th-century philosophical context as it relates to Kant's critical work, as well as of subsequent criticism of Kant's claims for reason, see Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

11. Neiman, 48.

12. Neiman, 50. Neiman contends (4) that "far from undermining tradi-

In addition to the sense of “cosmological dislocation” set in train by the Copernican revolution, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 proved a turning point in Enlightenment debates on the cosmos.<sup>7</sup> Kant concludes one of his essays on the Lisbon earthquake, “Man is not born to build eternal huts on this stage of vanity.”<sup>8</sup> In his philosophy, however, Kant provides the subject with such an “eternal hut”: a *Lehrgebäude*, or architectonic of systematic thought, within which the subject finds his steady ground. As I shall demonstrate, the experience of the sublime is especially useful for Kant, as it is in the sublime that the subject discovers a higher purposiveness, and thus his own unshakable foundation.

It is the subject as *Weltbaumeister* who makes sense of the world in the Kantian system. Just as the totality of nature is presumed to function according to a system of laws, so the mind of the subject is subjected to a world of order. The Kantian subject makes sense of the world precisely by matching his cognitive laws with those of nature, and it is in this reciprocal lawfulness that the subject finds himself at home in the world. Yet as Kant explains in the *Critique of Judgment*, it is not empirical laws but rather transcendental laws that form the fixed points around which understanding revolves:

We saw in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the totality of nature as the sum of all objects of experience forms a system according to transcendental laws, which the understanding itself gives a priori to appearances, insofar as their connection in one consciousness is to constitute experience. . . . But it does not follow from this that nature is a system comprehensible by human cognition through empirical laws, or that the common systematic unity of its appearances in one experience (hence experience as a system) is possible for humankind. For the variety and diversity of empirical laws might be so great that . . . we were confronted by a crude, chaotic aggregate totally devoid of system, even though we had to presuppose a system in accordance with transcendental laws.<sup>9</sup>

From the above passage we learn that the understanding gives to itself the transcendental laws a priori. The transcendental laws—those laws that bring order to the potential disorder of empiricism—are present from the outset and structure understanding.<sup>10</sup> Although nature may be witnessed in experience as nothing more than a “chaotic aggregate” of empirical laws,

tional belief in the significance of reason, Kant deepens and transforms it.”

13. Beiser (as in n. 10) aptly describes (8) what is at stake in such a definition of reason: “Reason was thought to be an autonomous faculty in the sense that it was self-governing, establishing and following its own rules, independent of political interests, cultural traditions, or subconscious desires. If, on the contrary, reason were subject to political, cultural, or subconscious influences, then it would have no guarantee that its conclusions were universal and necessary; they might then turn out to be disguised expressions of political, cultural, or subconscious interests.” In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (1951, 6) makes a claim for an uncorrupted and autonomous reason, writing that his “examination of the faculty of taste, as the aesthetic judgment, is not here planned in reference to the formation or the culture of taste . . . but merely in a transcendental point of view.” In spite of Kant’s claims for the autonomy of reason, and thus for a transcendental view on the faculty of taste, his conception of reason is nevertheless based on an interest: namely, his interest in a certain idealized notion of the subject, one guided by the ideas of pure morality and ethical community. It should be mentioned that late-18th-century critics of the autonomy of Kantian reason, such as J. G. Hamann, J. G. Herder, and F. H. Jacobi, believed that reason could not be separated from either society and history or desire and instinct.

14. On this point, see the *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp

the transcendental laws allow the subject to assume a systematic unity of the totality of nature, to operate as if this systematic unity were a law despite nature’s often “crude” appearances to the contrary.

In her book *The Unity of Reason*, Susan Neiman reminds us that “the development of a taxonomy of the human mind was a common project of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> Kant’s division of the mind into the faculties of sensibility, understanding, and reason therefore point to his own historical context. Yet Kant would reinterpret the role of reason: “Kant concludes that it is reason—the capacity freely to prescribe its own principles to experience, not understanding’s capacity to know it—that makes us human.”<sup>12</sup> Whereas the faculties of sensibility and understanding are tied to the world of experience, reason is fully autonomous of experience and therefore defined by Kant as the realm of freedom.<sup>13</sup> As the preceding quote from the *Critique of Judgment* demonstrates, for Kant the attempt of the faculty of understanding to connect the manifold data of experience according to empirical laws would likely result in nothing better than a “chaotic aggregate.” Reason, in offering to the faculty of the understanding the transcendental laws a priori, provides the ground for the possible unity of experience, or, as Kant tells us, “an order of its own according to ideas, to which it adapts the empirical conditions” given to the understanding.<sup>14</sup>

According to Kant, it is the subject’s desire to live in accord with reason’s demands, and reason’s “peculiar fate” to press itself toward questions and ends it often cannot answer or attain.<sup>15</sup> What Kant calls this “peculiar fate” is, however, anything but a failing. As Neiman rightly states, the “autonomy of the principles of reason permits them to function as a standard by which experience can be judged: by providing a vision of intelligibility that the given world does not meet, they urge us to continue our labors until this idea is attained.”<sup>16</sup> In his three *Critiques* Kant demonstrates how reason operates as a regulative principle, guiding understanding, moral action, and judgment. Operating on the world of experience rather than constituted through it, reason provides the possibility of organization and so shapes the world according to its own moral image.<sup>17</sup>

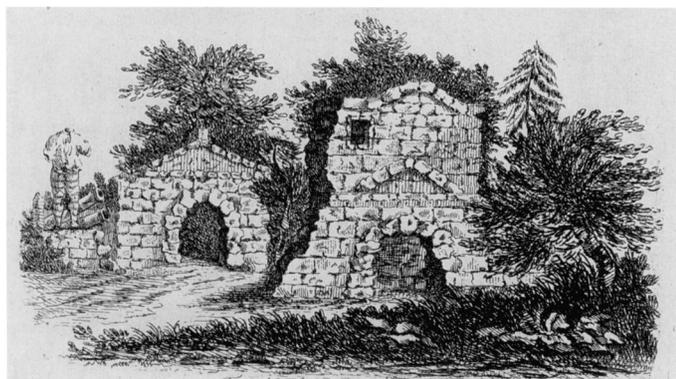
Unlike the faculty of the understanding, which enables the subject to feel at home in the world, reason is not of the

Smith, London, 1989, 303.

15. Kant begins the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, (A viii) “Human reason has the peculiar fate [*das besondere Schicksal*] in a species of its knowledge [*in einer Gattung ihrer Erkenntnisse*]; it is burdened with questions that it cannot dismiss—for they are assigned to it by the nature of reason itself—but which it also cannot answer, for they exceed [*übersteigen*] the power of human reason altogether”; quoted in Peter D. Fenves, *A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World-History in Kant*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1991. (I have followed Fenves’s improved translation of this passage, though I have substituted “exceed” for “overstep” in translating *übersteigen*.)

16. Neiman, 92.

17. Kant’s idea of a “moral image of the world” was shaped to a large extent by his reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau believed that without a moral image of the world to guide the thoughts and actions of humanity, human beings would fall prey to skepticism or waver in despair. Kant translates Rousseau’s theory into a regulative idea of reason. On the Kantian moral image of the world, see Dieter Heinrich, *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World: Studies in Kant*, Stanford, Calif., 1992, esp. 3–28; and Susan Meld Shell, *The Rights of Reason: A Study of Kant’s Philosophy and Politics*, Toronto, 1980, 20–32.



2 George Bickham, *The Temple of Modern Virtue*, Stowe, 1750, engraving (photo: Richard Caspole, courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)

natural world, nor is it at home in it. The faculty of the understanding is directed toward knowledge of the world as it is, whereas the efforts of reason are exerted in the name of the future—toward a world as it should be, or will one day become. Reason and nature are therefore constituted as separate spheres in the Kantian system. For Neiman, this “duality of reason and the world” makes Kant’s philosophy “profoundly modern.”<sup>18</sup> While a duality of reason and nature is certainly constitutive of the Kantian subject, “the unity of reason” is his ascendant principle. As a result, the Kantian subject is not so much implicated in nature as transcendental to it.<sup>19</sup>

In this essay I inquire into the ascendant position of reason and the idealized construction of the Kantian subject. In doing so, my aim is not to present an analysis “which seems to preen itself above all on the detection of Kant’s ‘contradictions,’” something Ernst Cassirer diagnosed in 1918 as an unfortunate trend in Kantian scholarship, and one that finds its simplistic afterlife in our own time. Rather, I will endeavor to retain a synoptic view of the Kantian enterprise while exerting pressure at certain of its points. In order to provide a more complete view of the Kantian subject for art historians conversant only with the philosopher’s *Critique of Judgment*, I have chosen to examine the subject of Kant’s aesthetic theory and his philosophy of history. Finally, I will indicate how a mistakenly idealized notion of the Kantian subject has been incorporated into the foundational matrix of the art historical discipline.<sup>20</sup>

The existence and unity of reason allow the Kantian subject

ultimate accommodation in the face of that which may initially overwhelm sensibility and understanding. Just as Kant does not use the ruin as an emblem of the sublime in his third *Critique*, so he does not allow the idea of ruin to overtake the subject. Ensor’s body in ruin has no place within Kant’s aesthetic theory or his philosophy of history.

### Responses to Ruin(s) and the Late-Eighteenth-Century Subject

History lies before Bayle like an enormous heap of ruins, and there is no possibility of mastering this abundance of material.—Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 1932<sup>21</sup>

Bearing in mind Kant’s omission, it appears a faint irony of history that by the time the philosopher had published the third *Critique* in 1790, the European continent was littered with ruins. While dilettantes and archaeologists were discovering and excavating sites in ancient Greece and on the Italian peninsula, artists were recording their findings for audiences longing for a connection with civilizations past. As George Bickham’s engraving of a sham ruin of midcentury, the Temple of Modern Virtue in the celebrated and highly cultivated English garden at Stowe, demonstrates, the contemporaneous cult of ruins encompassed not only discovery and illustration of the antique but also the construction of the artificial or sham ruin (Fig. 2). Artificial ruins, whether placed in gardens or painted on canvas, were quite popular in the eighteenth century. An increasing historical consciousness as well as a new emphasis on feeling and the picturesque contributed to the interest in actual and artificial ruins.<sup>22</sup> In the artificial ruin at Stowe, modern virtue is literally and satirically represented in ruin, a notion diametrically opposed to Kant’s idea of moral progress.

While artificial ruins were certainly popular, actual ruins, especially those of ancient architecture, were sought-after objects of study or contemplation at the end of the eighteenth century. In addition to the more customary drawings and paintings, cork models of ancient architecture carried a certain fascination. Busy in his Roman workshop, Antonio Chichi crafted cork models of the ancient architecture in the environs of his homeland, such as the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli (Fig. 3). Cork was found to be a perfect material for evoking the texture of decay, even for the depiction of the foliage that threatens to choke off the architecture in certain

18. Neiman, 203.

19. Indeed, as we shall see, in Kantian philosophy nature is dominated by reason. See also the provocative study by Hartmut Böhme and Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft: Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants*, Frankfurt, 1983.

20. In addition, as I agree with Michael Geyer and Konrad H. Jarausch (“Great Men and Postmodern Ruptures: Overcoming the ‘Belatedness’ of German Historiography,” *German Studies Review*, xviii, no. 2, May 1995, 253–73) that the “history of subjectivity and subjecthood and their constitution is yet to be written for Germany” (270), I offer this essay as a small but perhaps provocative step toward the writing of such a history.

21. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove, Princeton, 1979, 203.

22. See, for instance, Michel Baridon, “Ruins as a Mental Construct,” *Journal of Garden History*, v, no. 1, Jan.–Mar. 1985, 84–96; Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth*

*Century*, Charlottesville, Va., 1994; John Dixon Hunt, “Picturesque Mirrors and Ruins of the Past,” in *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in Landscape Architecture*, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, 171–91; Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*, London, 1953; Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation*, Princeton, 1981; Barbara Maria Stafford, “‘Illiterate Monuments’: The Ruin as Dialect or Broken Classic,” *The Age of Johnson*, 1, 1987, 1–34; Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, Minneapolis, 1991; and Paul Zucker, “Ruins—An Aesthetic Hybrid,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, xx, Winter 1961, 119–30.

23. Anita Büttner, “Korkmodelle von Antonio Chichi. Entstehung und Nachfolge,” *Kunst in Hessen und am Mittelrhein*, ix, 1969, 3–35. Very little is currently known about Chichi or his workshop. Aside from the museum catalogues of his works, there is scant literature on him.

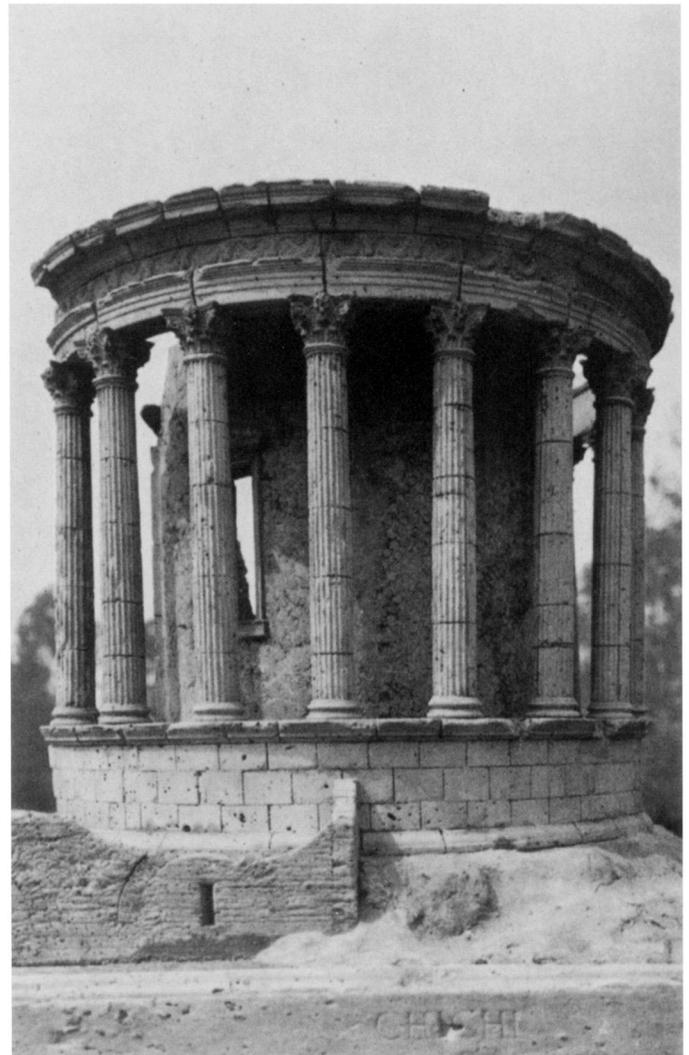
24. *Heroismus und Idylle: Formen der Landschaft um 1800*, exh. cat., Wallraf-

of Chichi's models, a sign of simultaneous erosion and renewal that imparts to these works an even greater sense of poetic melancholy. Known by the quality and quantity of his work as the most important cork modeler of his day, Chichi was mentioned by several of his contemporaries in the world of literature, including Goethe, who wrote of him in the 1786 diaries of his *Italian Journey*. Entire suites of Chichi's models were commissioned for princely collections in the German cities of Darmstadt, Gotha, Kassel, and Berlin, where they remain today.<sup>23</sup>

Paintings of ruins were divided at this time into the general categories of the heroic landscape, which included depictions of "extraordinary" ruins such as temples, pyramids, and antique graves, and the *parerga*, also known as the *style champêtre*, small paintings of wild and simple nature. While the heroic landscape turned on the means of grand ideas toward the ends of cultivation, the *parerga* were thought to appeal to the pure emotions. In the hundreds of eighteenth-century paintings of ruins one finds interpretations of the concepts of beauty and nature that form a visual analogue to the philosophical debates of the period concerning empiricism, rationalism, and sensualism or the role of understanding, reason, fantasy, and feeling in experiencing and knowing the world.<sup>24</sup>

A variant on the category of the heroic landscape is Giovanni Paolo Pannini's veduta of 1759, *Gallery of Views of Roman Antiquity* (Fig. 4). Pannini, the best known contemporary painter of this genre in Rome, executed innumerable canvases featuring Roman architecture and ruins. Large composite paintings, such as *Gallery of Views of Roman Antiquity*, which measures over seven by nine feet, were intended for wealthy tourists, while engravings of the paintings were available for those of more modest income.<sup>25</sup> In Pannini's painted gallery an extensive, "heroic" landscape is brought indoors and compressed into an intensive, virtual chamber of Roman antiquity. Here the heavy curtains are drawn aside to reveal a crammed space, one covered from floor to ceiling with paintings of architectural ruins, including at the upper left the Temple of the Sibyl modeled by Chichi, as well as sculpture, sarcophagi, and vases. As the gender of the human figures in the painting makes manifest, this is a site of male pleasure. Absent from the illustrated world of male collector and dilettante in Pannini's painting, women are present only in the symbolic realm, making their appearance predominantly in the guise of allegorical statuary and relief.<sup>26</sup>

Tucked away in a sarcophagus on the right-hand side of the



3 Antonio Chichi, *Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli*, cork model. Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt

canvas, beneath an imposing statue of Silenus with the Child Dionysus currently attributed to Lysippus, is a relatively small painting of a statue of Diana of Ephesus (Fig. 5). The painting most probably refers to the statue in the temple dedicated to the goddess on the Aventine in Rome, founded by the king Servius Tullius in the fourth century B.C.E. The so-called veiled goddess was often equated by ancient writers with the Egyptian Isis or the Greek Artemis and by more modern writers with the personification of nature.<sup>27</sup> The statue of

Richartz-Museum, Cologne, 1984, esp. the essay by Ekkehard Mai, "Kunsttheorie und Landschaftsmalerei: Von der Theorie der Kunst zur Ästhetik des Naturgefühls," 41–52.

25. These include the prints by Giuseppe Vasi and Piranesi. Vasi taught Piranesi the art of etching after that artist arrived in Rome from Venice in 1740. Piranesi's hundreds of prints of Roman architecture old and new proved exceedingly popular and even created a specialized market for specifically Roman antiquity. As Thomas J. McCormick writes, "The classical past became so well known through Piranesi's works that tourists flocked to Rome throughout the second half of the 18th and 19th centuries but were often disappointed when they saw the original monuments, which lacked the evocative quality, overpowering scale, and dramatic power of his prints"; McCormick, *Piranesi and the New Vision of Classical Antiquity in the Eighteenth Century*, exh. cat., Watson Gallery, Wheaton College, Norton, Mass., 1991, 6.

26. While this work by Pannini, its pendant of the same year, *Veduta of Modern Rome*, and *The Gallery of Cardinal Silvio Valenti Gonzaga*, a painting of a

decade earlier, feature only male collectors, dilettantes and admirers of art, his paintings of church interiors and his architectural *capricci* include figures of women as both protagonists and spectators. This discrepancy serves to underscore the historical fact that dilettante societies were exclusively male. As illustrated in the *Gallery of Views of Roman Antiquity*, women, denied the male subject's "freedom" of aesthetic judgment, become reduced to the passive objects of male pleasure.

27. Identified with the Greek Artemis, the cult of Diana spread from Greece to Marseilles, and from there to Rome. The goddess enjoyed a widespread following in Italy. Since the end of the 15th century, Artemis was known as a symbol of nature. See Wolfgang Kemp, "Natura: Ikonographische Studien zur Geschichte und Verbreitung einer Allegorie," Ph.D. diss., Eberhard-Karls-Universität, Tübingen, 1973; Guy MacLean Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesus: Foundation Myths of a Roman City*, New York, 1991; and R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*, London, 1971.



4 Giovanni Paolo Pannini, *Gallery of Views of Roman Antiquity*, 1759. Paris: Musée du Louvre

Diana depicted in Pannini's veduta is patterned after the Ephesian type of the goddess, recognizable by the breasts that cover her torso and the tapering and encased cylindrical form of her lower body. She is, in this instance, flanked on either side by hind, animals that refer to her role as the goddess of woodland and wild nature.

Upstaged as she is by the predominant compositional weight given to architectural ruins on Pannini's canvas, the Diana of Ephesus nevertheless plays an important epistemological role for the astute beholder. As Stuart Harten has recently observed, the veiled goddess enjoyed a certain popularity at this time because she symbolized a pressing philosophical problem concerning the nature of truth: that is, whether human reason was able to grasp an idealized truth, whether it was capable of "seeing" the truth behind the veil of sensory appearance.<sup>28</sup> Kant exposed his own fascination with the goddess when he claimed in the *Critique of Judgment*,

28. In his dissertation, "Raising the Veil of History: Orientalism, Classicism and the Birth of Western Civilization in Hegel's Berlin Lecture Courses of the 1820s," Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1994, Harten focuses mainly on the writings of Hegel, demonstrating how the philosopher employed the figure of the goddess (using Proclus rather than Plutarch's version of the inscription) to

"Perhaps nothing more sublime was ever said and no sublimer thought ever expressed than the famous inscription on the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature): 'I am all that is and that was and that shall be, and no mortal hath lifted my veil.'"<sup>29</sup> In his analytic of the sublime Kant equates the veiled goddess with the *Ding an sich*, or the thing in itself. For just as no mortal had lifted the veil of the goddess to reveal her secret, so, analogously, can no mortal know the *Ding an sich*, or what lies beyond the limits of reason.

In addition to what Kant refers to as a "suggestive vignette" on the title page of J. A. de Segner's *Einleitung in die Natur-Lehre* of 1754, the image of the unveiling of the goddess was also used as a frontispiece for treatises on the flora and fauna of nature. An interesting example of the latter is an engraving by Raphael Urbain Massard after a drawing by Bertel Thorvaldsen of the unveiling of a statue of Diana of Ephesus by her twin brother, Apollo, which serves as the

explain how the "truth" may be known when the veil is lifted in the course of history. Hegel, in other words, used the figure of the goddess to support his own theory of the unfolding of spirit through history.

29. Kant, 1951, 160 n. 44. Incidentally, Walter Benjamin also equates the veiled goddess with his definition of truth in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*



5 Detail of Fig. 4

dedication page, to Goethe, of Alexander von Humboldt's *Ideen zur einer Geographie der Pflanzen* (Fig. 6). As Humboldt explains in a letter to Goethe, the frontispiece alludes to a unity of the poetic arts, philosophy, and biology.<sup>30</sup> The poetic arts are represented in the drawing by the figure of Apollo, while philosophy is symbolized by the figure of the Diana of Ephesus and biology by the subject of the book itself. A tablet bearing the title of Goethe's famous meditation on the primal plant, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, rests on the base of the statue of the goddess. From this dedication page we therefore learn that like Goethe, Humboldt believed in the unity of the arts and sciences. Moreover, while his *Geography of Plants* rests on Goethe's earlier writings on the primal plant, his own study of the plants of the tropics will reveal more about the origins and mysteries of nature's appearances for the reader.<sup>31</sup>

In these frontispiece illustrations, then, a claim is being made for an analogous revelation: just as the statue is being unveiled on the frontispiece, so shall the content of the respective book reveal the secrets of nature for the reader. Such claims demonstrate the epistemological and scientific hubris of the late eighteenth century, a time when it was felt

that nature could be entirely known and classified. By designating something that cannot be known, Kant's *Ding an sich*, the noumenon in an otherwise phenomenal world, diverges from such claims for complete knowledge. Yet the *Ding an sich* actually functions in the Kantian system in the same way as the a priori: the *Ding an sich* allows the subject to understand the world even though the subject can never know it. We might therefore say that although the *Ding an sich* points to an inaccessible knowledge, as a structural element in Kantian systematics, it nevertheless facilitates intellectual mastery.

A literal and metaphorical frame within the frame of Pannini's painting, the veiled goddess provides us with a small but telling aperçu, or whisper of the sublime. While the triumph of human knowledge over the remains of the past may serve as a suitable subtitle to Pannini's canvas of diligent male dilettantes and their objects of study, the painting of the Diana of Ephesus symbolizes a truth that can never be known. For Pannini's dilettantes, who strive to know or collect the past, and therefore to have it for themselves, nature's secrets represent a potential source of anxiety and emasculation.<sup>32</sup>

(1928), trans. John Osborne, London, 1994, 36.

30. Humboldt to Goethe in Ludwig Geiger, ed., *Goethes Briefwechsel mit Wilhelm und Alexander v. Humboldt*, Berlin, 1909, 29; and Goethe's response, 299–301.

31. It should be mentioned that although Goethe studied and theorized

the origins of the primal plant, in some of his poetry he satirized contemporary attempts to lay bare the secrets of nature.

32. A further discussion of anxiety and emasculation as it relates to the goddess may be found in Harten (as in n. 28), chap. 1.



6 Raphaël Urbain Massard, engraving after Bertel Thorwaldsen, *Apollo Unveiling the Diana of Ephesus*, from Alexander von Humboldt, *Ideen zur einer Geographie der Pflanzen*, Tübingen, 1807, frontispiece. Stiftung Weimarer Klassik. Goethe-Nationalmuseum/Rupp. 4710 (photo: Sigrid Geske)

The desire for mastery and the threat of emasculation witnessed through the statue of Diana of Ephesus was often played out by Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers during the age of sensibility. While mastery could be obtained through knowledge or rational detachment, emasculation was found in an inability to gain knowledge and in an excess of feeling. Kant's own precritical work of 1764, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, may be read as a primer of appropriately gendered moral sensibility, stable virtues that would ease mastery, ward off emasculation, or simply relegate emotion to a fixed and proper place. While women, Kant notes, are creatures of the beautiful, men

possess noble sentiments worthy of the name sublime. Thus, a "woman who has a head full of Greek, like Mme Dacier, or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, like the marquise de Châtelet, might as well have a beard; for perhaps that would express more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strives."<sup>33</sup> And its pendant: "A man must never weep other than magnanimous tears. Those he sheds in pain or over circumstances of fortune make him contemptible."<sup>34</sup> Kant's reference to the suspiciously "noble" intellectual virtues of Mme Dacier and the marquise de Châtelet not only illustrates their gender transgressions, it also points to artificial, and consequently threateningly illegible, French codes of virtue and civility. In his text Kant opposes such "adoptive virtues," motivated merely by the "gloss of virtue," to the "genuine" and noble masculine virtues. For Kant, it goes without saying, the ideal subject is perform male.<sup>35</sup>

The figure of Goethe represents a useful site through which to explore further the constitution of the eighteenth-century subject, a brief excursus that will also tell us something about the contemporaneous role of ruins. Beginning with a scene from Goethe's novella *Elective Affinities*, of 1809, let us join Eduard and Charlotte, members of the landed nobility, on a walk amid the vast expanse of their cultivated grounds. Urging his wife to "take the shortest way back," Eduard found himself on a little-traveled path through the churchyard. On seeing Charlotte's renovation of the old graveyard for the first time, Goethe writes that Eduard was

very surprised when he discovered that here too Charlotte had provided for the demands of sensibility. With every consideration for the ancient monuments she had managed to level and arrange everything in such a way as to create a pleasant place which was nice to look at and which set the imagination working. . . . Eduard felt very moved when, entering through the little gateway, he saw the place. He pressed Charlotte's hand and tears came into his eyes.<sup>36</sup>

While this passage certainly bears the lugubrious traces of the age of sensibility, it nevertheless outlines how old monuments could stir the imagination and emotions of the beholder. For Eduard, the sight of the aged tombstones was poignant enough to move him to tears.

Turning now from this passage penned by Goethe to a painted portrait of the man himself, we see a much different response to the sight of ancient monuments. In *Goethe in the Roman Campagna*, Wilhelm Tischbein's well-known portrait of 1787, we find Goethe not so much stirred by as comfortably ensconced in the landscape of antiquity (Fig. 7). Tischbein's painting is a carefully crafted image of the celebrated "wan-

33. Kant, 1960, 78.

34. *Ibid.*, 82.

35. *Ibid.*, 61–62. Kant's use of the sublime as the more noble of the pair of aesthetic categories is carried forward, and more deeply articulated, in his subsequent *Critique of Judgment*. The literary style and tone of Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* bear the clear influence of Rousseau, particularly the latter's *Émile*, which, it is known, Kant read at this time. Kant would quickly abandon this style for the rigidly systematic presentation of the critiques. In the *Observations* Kant employs Edmund Burke's categories of the beautiful and the sublime in the service of national character. The "beautiful" surface virtues of the French are contrasted in his

text to the "sublime" feelings of the Germans. The "sublime" national character of the Germans fits well with a definition of German subjectivity characterized predominately through *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness or interiority). Defined in this manner, the German character is separated favorably from what was deemed at the time a French superficial civility. *De l'Allemagne* of 1813, a popular book by Mme de Stael, considerably reinforced and propagated for her French audience the characterization of a German subject defined through inwardness.

36. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Elective Affinities* (1809), trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London, 1971, 32.



7 Wilhelm Tischbein, *Goethe in the Roman Campagna*, 1787. Frankfurt, Städelisches Kunstinstitut (photo: Ursula Edelmann)

derer” resting languidly on a toppled obelisk amid the *disjecta membra* of ancient history. As Tischbein notes in a letter to Johann Kaspar Lavater, Goethe here stares off to the right “and reflects upon the fate of human works.”<sup>37</sup> The foreground and background of the receding Roman *campagna* are separated in the painting by a horizon line of Goethe’s favorite antique remains from the Via Appia, including the sepulchral monument of Caecilia Metella at the center of the canvas.<sup>38</sup>

The high classical bas-relief in the right foreground of the painting depicts the recognition scene between Iphigeneia and Orestes, a motif of friendship taken up by the Romantics. Green ivy, representing immortality, winds around the decaying relief, indicating how the antique is being brought to life again by the poet Goethe. In this setting, the overlife-size figure of Goethe takes on a heroic cast, as he is presented in Tischbein’s painting as the latest in a long and venerable line of cultural icons. Goethe’s self-advertisement becomes all the more hyperbolic when measured against Ensor’s more ironic and decidedly self-effacing portrait of 1888 (Fig. 1).

The emotional response to the “ancient monuments” in the scene from Goethe’s novella and the more detached, intellectual approach to the remains of antiquity captured in

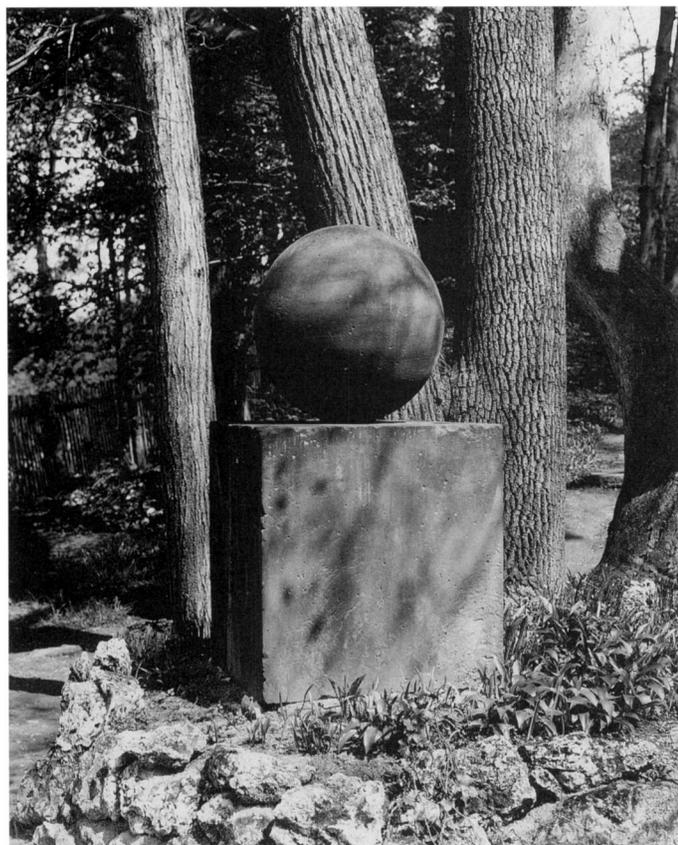
Tischbein’s painting outline two divergent reactions to ruins. Whereas an “elective affinity” conjoined the sight of the “ancient monuments” in the old graveyard and Eduard’s response to the scene in the novella, Goethe’s emotional relation to the ruins of antiquity in Tischbein’s painting may be described as nothing more proximate than a cool, historical detachment. Or, to put it somewhat differently, while it is the “age-value” of the “ancient monuments” that appealed to the senses and “set the imagination working” in the case of the lachrymose Eduard, in Tischbein’s rendering of *Goethe in the Campagna*, it is the “historical-value” of the toppled totems as signs of the lost greatness of antique civilizations that appeal to the intellect and that take precedence in perception.<sup>39</sup> Like Pannini’s *Gallery of Views of Roman Antiquity*, Tischbein’s painting is, among other things, an exercise for the intellect of the cultivated beholder, who is invited to identify the Greek relief, the Roman capital, indeed, the entire purview of antiquity assembled in the painting for our viewing pleasure.

The dialectical topoi of the “wanderer” and “the hut” in Goethe’s literary works offer a corollary to the emotional and intellectual responses to ruins found in the novella and in the

37. Quoted in Herbert von Einem, “Der ‘Wanderer auf dem Obelisk’: Zu Wilhelm Tischbeins ‘Goethe in der Campagna,’” in *Kunst als Bedeutungsträger: Gedenschrift für Günter Bandmann*, ed. Werner Busch, Reiner Hausscherr, and Eduard Trier, Berlin, 1978, 306–7. “The Wanderer on the Obelisk” is how Goethe referred to his portrait. See also Christian Beutler, *J.H.W. Tischbein: Goethe in der Campagna*, Stuttgart, 1962.

38. An interesting treatment of Goethe’s “passionate love affair with ancient remains” is Peter Leisching, “Goethe und das Entstehen des Denkmalpflegegedankens,” *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, xxv, 1971, 129–38.

39. The terms *age-value* and *historical-value* come from Alois Riegl’s 1903 essay, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin,” trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions*, xxv, 1982, 20–51. In the *Observations* (49–50) Kant (1960) does not mention ruins directly, though he writes of the sublimity of antique architecture: “A long duration is sublime. If it is of time past, then it is noble. . . . A building of the remotest antiquity is venerable.” Kant’s description accords more with a sense of historical-value than of age-value, and therefore aligns more with the response to ancient monuments captured in Tischbein’s portrait of Goethe than with Eduard’s response in the novella.



8 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Altar to Agathe Tyche*, Weimar, in the park of Goethe's garden house 1777, stone (photo: Stiftung Weimarer Klassik/Museen)

portrait by Tischbein.<sup>40</sup> The “wanderer,” led hither and thither by natural instinct and emotional inclination, is continually at odds with the seeker of “the hut,” the man who cultivates reason over instinct in the creation of society. Goethe, who framed a literature around the dialectic of emotion and reason in the figure of the “wanderer” and the need for “the hut,” even memorialized the continual struggle between steadfast virtues and restless desires in his stone altar to Agathe Tyche, to a smiling goddess Fortuna, of 1777 (Fig. 8).<sup>41</sup> Placed beside his garden house in Weimar, the altar is composed of a stone cube symbolizing the steady virtues, on top of which is placed the unsteady sphere of desires.

40. On this point, see L. A. Willoughby, “The Image of the ‘Wanderer’ and the ‘Hut’ in Goethe’s Poetry,” *Études germaniques*, vi, nos. 3–4, July–Dec. 1951, 207–19.

41. Goethe described “Tyche” as “that element of perpetual mutation which rotates along with us and within ourselves” (“ein Wandelndes, das mit und um uns wandelt”); quoted in William S. Heckscher, *Goethe and Weimar: An Address at the University of New Hampshire*, Durham, N.H., 1962, 8.

42. Peter-Klaus Schuster, “Grundbegriffe der Bildersprache?” in *Kunst um 1800 und die Folgen: Werner Hofmann zu Ehren*, ed. Christian Beutler, Peter-Klaus Schuster, and Martin Warnke, Munich, 1988, 425–46. The pairing of the cube and the sphere, with the attendant symbolism of steady virtue and restless desire, also finds its echo in another realm of the history of art. The art historian and founder of the Warburg Institute, Aby Warburg, put forth a theory of symbolic forms that recognized within them an inherent tension. Warburg believed that the tension—and constant drift—between the poles of rationality and so-called primitive instincts and desires he witnessed in symbolic forms signaled none other than the registration of the forces of rationality and irrationality forever at play within the subject itself.

Goethe’s simple monument draws on a long iconographic tradition, one that likewise extends into the twentieth century. The persistent use of the cube and the sphere in the history of art, and their symbolism as captured by Goethe in his garden monument, have led one commentator to query whether they might not, in fact, serve as a fundamental concept of the visual language of art.<sup>42</sup>

While Goethe had praised Kant’s release of the concept of morality from its equation with mere happiness, and thus for bringing us “all back from the effeminacy in which we were wallowing,” he nevertheless recognized that morality and reason could never be entirely divorced from the force of desires.<sup>43</sup> The Goethean subject, who wavers between emotion and reason, wanders down a tortuous path throughout the course of its fictional life. The Kantian subject, on the other hand, guided by the moral law as a regulative principle, follows a path of freedom to its end. Kant’s philosophy of history admits of an initial period of instinctual life, yet once his subject of history enters “the hut” of reason, he jettisons his wanderings and represses his instincts for the greater moral goal.<sup>44</sup>

Although Kant recognized that nature held her secrets, even naming these the *Ding an sich*, he was “always the philosopher of the a priori.”<sup>45</sup> To continue with the words of Ernst Cassirer, for Kant “a priori knowledge disclosed no distinctive and independent realm beyond experience. The a priori is rather a moment in the structure of empirical knowledge itself; it is bound to experience in its significance and use.”<sup>46</sup> Just as Kant himself had mastered feeling, so had his philosophy offered a counterweight to any potential threat of emasculation.<sup>47</sup> The transcendental laws and the a priori offered the mind a sure footing in the world of experience. Whereas the sight of ruins had brought tears of emotion to Eduard’s eyes, Kant fixed his gaze on “the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me,” and it is with this elevated bearing that he composed a critique of judgment in which both ruins and pure feelings would find no place.

Arguably Kant’s most famous utterance aside from the categorical imperative, “the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me” concludes the second volume of the critical philosophy, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of 1788. It is useful to follow Kant at length on this point, for in this conclusion he offers us the essential contours of an idealized

43. Goethe to Chancellor von Müller, Apr. 29, 1818, quoted in Cassirer, 271. Kant defines morality in terms of the categorical imperative (“Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”) and the highest good, a combination of happiness and virtue. Kant’s philosophy thus marks a turn away from eudaemonism, a popular moral theory of his day.

44. Thus I agree with Neiman, who points out (136, 154) that while for Kant “human virtue is a matter of struggle . . . the very recognition of the moral law as the supreme norm implies, for Kant, the existence of a motive for following its dictates. . . . Because we are under obligation to the moral law, we must make whatever judgments are required to orient us in fulfilling it.”

45. Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe: Two Essays* (1945), trans. James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., New York, 1963, 94.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Kant’s mastery of feeling is legendary, and may be hinted at with an anecdote concerning Rousseau. Kant was quite taken with Rousseau’s writings.

Kantian subject:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. I do not merely conjecture them and seek them as though obscured in darkness or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon: I see them before me, and I associate them directly with the consciousness of my own existence. The former begins at the place I occupy in the external world of sense, and it broadens the connection in which I stand into an unbounded magnitude of worlds beyond worlds and systems of systems and into the limitless times of their periodic motion, their beginning and their continuance. The latter begins at my invisible self, my personality, and exhibits me in a world which has true infinity but which is comprehensible only to the understanding—a world with which I recognize myself as existing in a universal and necessary (and not only, as in the first case, contingent) connection, and thereby also in connection with all those visible worlds. The former view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature, which must give back to the planet (a mere speck in the universe) the matter from which it came, the matter which is for a little time provided with vital force, we know not how. The latter, on the contrary, infinitely raises my worth as that of an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals a life independent of all animality and even of the whole world of sense—at least so far as it may be inferred from the purposive destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination which is not restricted to the conditions and limits of this life but reaches into the infinite.<sup>48</sup>

Whereas the experience of the starry heavens “annihilates” the “importance” of the subject by reminding him of his inevitable mortality, or to use the words of Kant, that he “must give back to the planet . . . the matter from which it came,” the moral law elevates the subject out of his station as “a mere speck in the universe” and into the possibility of infinity. The subject in his infinity is thereby rendered akin to the cosmos in its vastness, while he is also endowed with the capacity to grasp a seemingly infinite totality. It is this idealized subject, and not the subject constituted by a duality of reason and nature, that is championed by Kant. Guided by the moral law

as a regulative principle, the idealized Kantian subject discovers his superiority and his “universal and necessary connection” to the universe in the contemplation of the starry skies.

Kant will follow a similar paradigm in his analytic of the sublime. In the *Critique of Judgment*, the starry heavens will be replaced by an object whose vastness or might will initially overwhelm the subject; the “moral law within” will be translated into the ideas of a higher purposiveness, occasioned by the experience of the sublime. Just as “the moral law within” lifts the subject out of his own animal nature, so in the experience of the sublime the subject discovers his superiority over and above nature. In Kant’s second and third *Critiques*, mortality gives way to morality as nature is traded for reason.

### The Dialectics of Decay

We do not comprehend ruins until we have become ruins ourselves.—Heinrich Heine<sup>49</sup>

Such heavy traffic in ruins makes it all the more striking that Kant does not mention ruins as occasions for aesthetic experience in the *Critique of Judgment*. Although Kant omits any discussion of ruins from his aesthetic theory, other writers celebrated the ruin as offering a site in which the condition of alienation of humankind (the particular) from nature (the general) might be overcome in imagination.<sup>50</sup> In a short essay on ruins in his book *Philosophische Kultur* of 1911, Georg Simmel notes how the aesthetic experience of ruins leads to an imaginative overcoming of the alienation of modern life. According to Simmel, the ruin rests on the opposition between human *Geist* and the processes of *Natur*. While architecture represents “the most sublime victory of the human spirit over nature,” in the ruin this relationship is reversed, thereby demonstrating that the “legitimate claim” of *Natur* over *Geist* was “never entirely extinguished.” In this sense, a work of architecture destroyed by humankind “lacks the specific charm of the ruin,” for only the latter yields the “opposition between human labor and the effects of nature” that is the ruin’s defining feature.<sup>51</sup>

For Simmel, the overcoming of *Geist* by *Natur* in the ruin represents “a return to the good mother”—which, he reminds us, is how Goethe refers to nature. Simmel continues, “this character of *Heimkehr* [or return to the “good mother”] is nothing more than an interpretation of freedom, the mood of which encompasses the ruin.”<sup>52</sup> If the oppositional forces

An old chestnut of Kantian biography (quoted in *ibid.*, 6) recounts that the only time Kant missed his punctual daily walk—the citizens of Königsberg were said to have been able to set their watches by his daily constitutional—was when he received a copy of Rousseau’s *Émile*. While he was initially overwhelmed by Rousseau’s ideas and literary style, he writes characteristically, “I must read Rousseau until his beauty of expression no longer distracts me at all, and only then can I survey him with reason.”

48. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck, Indianapolis, 1956, 161–62. See also Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass., 1987, 52–64; and Rudolf Unger, “‘Der bestirnte Himmel über mir. . . .’ Zur geistesgeschichtlichen Deutung eines Kant-Wortes,” in *Immanuel Kant: Festschrift zur zweiten Jahrhundertfeier seines Geburtstages*, ed. Albertus University, Königsberg in Prussia, Leipzig, 1924, 340–70.

49. Heine’s aphorism is cited in an illuminating article by Wolfgang Ernst, “Signifikanten jenseits der Lettern: Archäologie, Museum and Archiv als Medien der Aufklärung,” in *Nach der Aufklärung? Beiträge zum Diskurs der*

*Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Wolfgang Klein and Waltraud Naumann-Beyer, Berlin, 1995, 277–96.

50. At the end of the 18th century, Denis Diderot—to cite one of numerous examples—wrote on what he termed the “poetics of ruins,” noting how the contemplation of ruins brings us “back to ourselves.” Diderot further implies that the personal, yet common experience to which the ruin refers is one of alienation and inevitable mortality. The passage from Diderot is quoted in Harries (as in n. 22), 91.

51. Georg Simmel, “Die Ruine,” in *Philosophische Kultur: Gesammelte Essays*, Leipzig, 1911, 137–54. Simmel captures the fascination of the ruin in a memorable description, one reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s evocation of the angel of history (145–46): “It is as though a part of existence must decay before it can become unresistant to the currents and powers coming from all corners of reality. Perhaps this is the charm of the ruin. . . .”

52. The ruin is nature’s revenge for the violence that the human spirit has wreaked on nature through “the entire historical process of humanity.” Simmel further describes this process in Marxian overtones; *ibid.*, 140–41.

at work in the ruin mirror the antagonisms of *Geist* and *Natur* in the human soul, then the ruin offers “the last formal ground for the enmity of aesthetic nature and ethical nature.”<sup>53</sup> In this sense, and in others, the ruin offers a *Rückblick*, or retrospective glance—toward a time when the intellect did not hold sway over the instincts, to a past to which we will all return by virtue of our own inevitable mortality. Simmel was certainly not alone in noting the existential alienation of modern humankind, or in regarding the aesthetic realm, or nature itself, as sites in which to overcome this condition. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, had recorded such nostalgic longing in his essay on “Nature” of 1836, explaining that the appeal of nature lies in the simple fact that “the mind loves its old home.”<sup>54</sup>

For Kant, on the other hand, any “wish for a return to an age of simplicity and innocence” is considered “futile.” As he continues in his 1786 essay “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” between the subject “and that imagined place of bliss, restless reason would interpose itself, irresistibly impelling him to develop the faculties implanted within him.” The trajectory of the Kantian subject is one clearly marked “from bondage, to instinct to rational control—in a word, from the tutelage of nature to the state of freedom,” and it is in this passage from nature to reason that human history is said to begin.<sup>55</sup> As we shall see, in the experience of the sublime, reason “uses” nature for its own ends, thereby elevating the subject out of nature and into “a higher purposiveness.” In this sense, the sublime is characteristic of the Kantian idea of the progress of human nature. According to Kant, the progress from barbarism to culture can only occur in society, for it is only in society that we can develop our morality.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant describes how the final end of nature can only be human culture. By human culture, he means not necessarily the “culture of skill” but rather the “culture of discipline,” which “consists in the freeing of the will from the despotism of desires” (p. 282). In this “freeing of the will,” the subject acquires a moral dimension. In doing so, the subject trades a lawless freedom, one ruled by the instincts and senses, for a freedom under the moral law. For Kant, culture is therefore part of the freedom of the moral order and can occur only within society. That the aesthetic plays a special role in the development of freedom is under-

stood. This is most concisely expressed by Kant in “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” when he remarks how “Natural impulse interferes with culture until such time as finally art will be strong and perfect enough to become a second nature. This indeed is the ultimate moral end of the human species.”<sup>56</sup> When art finally becomes a second nature, then morality will become one as well, and so “the ultimate end of human species” will be attained.

Whereas Simmel and Emerson locate freedom in nature (in a “natural” state of unalienated wholeness), and Simmel celebrates the ruin as offering a presentiment of this freedom, for Kant freedom lies in the reverse direction—in a prospective moral end toward which the subject only begins to move once reason has released him from the “womb of nature.”<sup>57</sup> The autonomy of the Kantian subject is predicated on this break from nature, and the illusion of the autonomy of the subject is maintained only insofar as the subject’s relation to nature has been minimized, or even covered over. In this sense, ruins open up (to borrow the poignant words of Kierkegaard) “the wounds of possibility” by exposing to view what had been covered over in the constitution of an idealized Kantian subject. Not permitted to linger in the realm of nature, the Kantian subject is a subject of reason, meaning that the subject is both constituted by and subjected to reason.

We may come closer to understanding the absence of ruins from Kant’s philosophical enterprise when we remember that the Kantian subject is none other than the *Weltbaumeister*, the architect of a moral world, the subject who possesses a priori knowledge and exercises it in forming a world of understanding. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant specifically defines the beautiful as a symbol of morality.<sup>58</sup> Yet Kant’s conception of the sublime might also be associated with this moral theory. In the experience of the sublime, the subject discovers ideas of “a higher purposiveness” that are associated with the faculty of reason and defined as universal. The importance of the moral law and of ideas of “a higher purposiveness” underscores how the Kantian subject is defined in orientation to the good.<sup>59</sup> In what follows, I will demonstrate how the orientation to the good in the Kantian sublime places the subject in a community of other reasoning subjects, as well as above nature, within and without.

While Kant’s future-oriented concern with moral perfectibil-

53. *Ibid.*, 144.

54. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, New York, 1983, 542.

55. On this passage, see Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” (1784) and “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” (1786), in White Beck, 11–26 and 53–68. It should be noted that the latter essay is a meditation on Genesis 2–6.

56. White Beck, 62–63. (Note that all page numbers given in the text refer to Kant, 1951, *Critique of Judgment*.)

57. Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” in White Beck, 59.

58. On the beautiful as a symbol of morality, see Kant, 1951, sec. 59; and Ted Cohen, “Why Beauty Is a Symbol of Morality,” in *Essays in Kant’s Aesthetics*, ed. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer, Chicago, 1982, 221–36.

59. In *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, 94, Charles Taylor writes of Kantian moral theory: “The motive which enables us to live according to the law is the sense of respect (*Achtung*) that we experience before the moral law itself, once we understand it as emanating from the rational will. Our recognition that rational agency stands infinitely above the rest of the universe, because it alone has dignity, brings with it an awe which empowers us morally. In Kant’s theory rational agency is the

constitutive good.” For a rich discussion of the identity of the modern subject and of the necessity of a moral orientation for self-definition, see Taylor, esp. 53–107.

60. As Kant (1951, 58) writes: “That taste is always barbaric which needs a mixture of *charms* and *emotions* in order that there may be satisfaction, and still more so if it make these the measure of its assent.” The use of the transcendental method in the realm of aesthetics separates Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* from Edmund Burke’s popular *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* of 1757, which Kant knew through a German translation. As J. H. Bernard notes (“Translator’s Introduction,” Kant, 1915, xviii), though Kant “quotes with approval” from Burke’s treatise, he “is careful to remark that it is as psychology, not as philosophy, that Burke’s work has value.” See Kant’s comments on Burke’s treatise in Kant, 1951, sec. 29. See also Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime*, Oxford, 1989, 7–37.

61. While Kant notes the importance of the free play of the imagination in the judgment of taste, this is actually a free play under the laws of the understanding (see Kant, 1951, sec. 22). In the play of the imagination and understanding that generates the mental representation (*Darstellung*) on which the aesthetic judgment is based, the imagination should ideally be given

ity would seem to offer one clear reason for his disregard of decay, ruins nonetheless appear noteworthy candidates for inclusion in the analytic of the sublime. For Kant, the beautiful and the sublime are no longer the preserve of the senses but the result of judgment, a faculty of mind that imposes form on the manifold of sensation.<sup>60</sup> Mediating between the higher cognitive faculties of understanding and reason, judgment books passage between the “great gulf” separating the realms of nature and freedom, making “possible the transition from the conformity to law in accordance with the former to the final purpose in accordance with the latter” (pp. 32–33). Judgment effects this transition by making “the supersensible substrate . . . *determinable by means of the intellectual faculty*” (p. 33). What is of signal importance here is that judgment enables the subject to discover the supersensible faculty, and in this way elevates the subject out of the world of experience—that is, out of his station as “a mere speck in the universe”—and into the moral realm.

In analyzing the aesthetic experience Kant is therefore not so much concerned with aesthetic objects as with how we come to judge them. Aesthetic judgment hinges not on the materiality of objects but on the play of perceptions known as “form.” This form arises when the imagination and the understanding unify, or bring themselves to a self-determined order.<sup>61</sup> Kant contends that this ordering of the data of sensation by the mind proceeds according to transcendental principles, and consequently, that it occurs in a similar manner for every subject. If taste as sensation is individual and idiosyncratic, as an aesthetic judgment taste is universal and consensual. Kant’s claim for what he terms the “subjective universality” of the aesthetic judgment will be taken up in the subsequent section of this essay.

Kantian aesthetic judgment is not only subjective and universal, it is also disinterested. Kant’s notion of disinterestedness is often misconstrued. Disinterestedness means that the subject has no interest in the continued existence of the object.<sup>62</sup> The distinction, which also resonates in German semantics, between the physical and the conceptual grasp, or *greifen* and *Begreifen*, might serve to illustrate this point most effectively. For Kant, it is not enough to not want to possess the object or to grasp it with the hand (*greifen*). Here the eye dominates the hand and renders it ineffectual. While the cognate roots of *greifen* and *Begreifen* point to an etymological

relation between the physical and the conceptual grasp, Kant separates and cancels this relation. According to the philosopher, the aesthetic object is grasped not by means of concepts of the object, but rather solely by the mental representation (*Darstellung*) that the object generates in the mind of the subject.<sup>63</sup> In this way, aesthetic judgment is removed from the customary notion of grasping in a double sense—one physical, the other mental—and thus far removed from the world of objects.

The detachment from the object opens up a space in the Kantian aesthetic experience for the imagination. Detachment is crucial since it is the workings of the imagination that provide the mental representation necessary for the aesthetic experience. Accordingly, there is no room for want or need of the object in Kantian systematics. The marking off of the aesthetic into a separate sphere directed toward a class of subjects who are not “hungry,” who are capable at some moment of disavowing need, begins in the eighteenth century.<sup>64</sup> If we agree with Richard Shusterman, then Kant’s definition of the aesthetic thereby introduces an element of “difference, distinction, and conventional prejudice” into a theory purporting to rest on “the idea of a natural uniformity of . . . response.”<sup>65</sup>

Kant’s notion of “purposiveness without purpose” follows naturally here, and further serves to demarcate the aesthetic both from the world and the nonaesthetic. The object should be “purposive,” that is, of such a lawfulness that it permits a mental representation, yet it must also be “without purpose.”<sup>66</sup> Kant registers this distinction most clearly in a footnote, which also provides the reader with an inkling of why art history will later part company with its disciplinary relative anthropology:

It might be objected to this explanation that there are things in which we see a purposive form without cognizing any purpose in them, like the stone implements often gotten from old sepulchral tumuli with a hole in them, as if for a handle. These, although they plainly indicate by their shape a purposiveness of which we do not know the purpose, are nevertheless not described as beautiful. . . . On the other hand a flower, e.g. a tulip, is regarded as beautiful, because in perceiving it we find a certain purposiveness which, in our judgment, is referred to no purpose at all. (p. 73)

as free a reign as possible. Yet, as Kant revealingly remarks (79–80), this should occur only “under the condition . . . that the understanding is to suffer no shock thereby.” Thus, he continues, all “stiff regularity (such as approximates to mathematical regularity) has something in it repugnant to taste. . . . On the other hand, nature, which there is prodigal in its variety even to luxuriance, that is subjected to no constraint of artificial rules, can supply constant food for taste.” Kant’s preference for nature over objects of human art is also found in his analytic of the sublime. Just as the understanding is not to suffer any “shock” at the hands of the imagination, so reason does not suffer any humiliation from nature in the experience of the sublime. Kant’s emphasis in this passage further underscores how the aesthetic is bound up with a moral bearing, for an ultimately imperturbable and undegraded subject is all-important for him. Indeed, the Kantian subject stands to reason, in both senses of the phrase.

62. Although there is an interest in Kant’s disinterestedness; see Kant, 1951, sec. 41, and n. 13 above. Some compelling reasons for the 18th-century preoccupation with disinterestedness in the fields of aesthetics and literature are given in Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*, New York, 1994, esp. chap. 1.

63. One of the paradoxes of aesthetic judgments is, then, that they are part of the cognitive faculty of the mind but they do not imply cognition, or knowledge. For a discussion of this and other ambiguities in the *Critique of Judgment*, see Michael Podro, *The Manifold in Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand*, Oxford, 1972, sec. 2.

64. Kant writes tellingly in this regard in the analytic of the beautiful. Making the distinction between the pleasant (that which gratifies) and the beautiful (that which pleases in itself), he states (1951, 44): “As regards the interest of inclination in the case of the pleasant, everyone says that hunger is the best sauce, and everything that is eatable is relished by people with a healthy appetite; and thus a satisfaction of this sort shows no choice directed by taste. It is only when the want is appeased that we can distinguish which of many men has taste or has not taste.”

65. Richard Shusterman, “Of the Scandal of Taste: Social Privilege as Nature in the Aesthetic Theories of Hume and Kant,” in *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Paul Mattick, Jr., Cambridge, 1993, 96–119.

66. See Kant, 1951, 54–56. Cassirer (353) eloquently defines Kant’s notion of “purposiveness” as “the lawfulness of the contingent.”

The aesthetic object may not be a means to an end existing external to it. It can only be a means unto itself, and as such fully self-sufficient and self-contained. Kant's *Critique* thus effects a separation of material culture and objects of aesthetic (read "high") culture through the very definition of the aesthetic itself, a definition predicated on an exclusion.<sup>67</sup>

The act of carnal renunciation instituted in the Kantian aesthetic experience contrasts sharply with the very sensual pleasures of fetishism. In a recent essay, William Pietz notes that the original theory of fetishism was also a product of the Enlightenment:

Both aesthetics and fetishism marked philosophical attempts to theorize certain subjective processes and creedal effects specific to the perceiving mind's direct relation to "sensuous materiality," a dimension of human experience inadequately accounted for by the established rational psychologies derived from René Descartes and John Locke. . . . The common view of European intellectuals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was that primitive fetishes were the exemplary cultural artifacts of the most unenlightened spirits and the least civilized societies, those remaining frozen in a historyless stasis before the threshold of true religious understanding and self-conscious aesthetic judgment.<sup>68</sup>

While the efficacy of the "primitive" fetish turns on a fusion—whether mental or physical—of subject and object, as well as a certain intentionality or endowment of supernatural powers, the Kantian aesthetic experience is predicated on a strict detachment from the object. Kant's third *Critique* can be said to describe a more advanced stage of human culture while also offering "a solution to the problem of fetishism."<sup>69</sup>

In the sublime Kant offers a relation to sensuous materiality that is both detached and inherently rational. In the experience of fetishism, it is the object that has power over the mind of the subject. In the Kantian sublime, it is the mind of the subject that is superior to itself and to the world of objects. In

this sense, the experience of fetishism and of the sublime mark out two distinct modes of thought, namely, mythical thought and scientific thought.<sup>70</sup> Kant's mode of thought negotiates the world from an exterior, scientific perspective and partakes of the common Enlightenment currency of the supremacy of reason as the defining feature of humankind. In attempting to translate the "inexpressible" into an "objective, describable *something*," Kant's analytic of the sublime also participates in efforts toward making the sublime classifiable, or the object of a kind of scientific discourse.<sup>71</sup> For Kant, however, making the sublime part of an "objective" experience was not the final goal. Rather, the detachment of the subject from the object in the experience of the sublime—a posture that apes so-called scientific objectivity—is a bearing that facilitates the discovery of "a higher purposiveness," the ultimate purpose of the sublime in Kantian systematics.<sup>72</sup>

The sublime holds pride of place in Kantian aesthetics. Whereas we can say that a natural object is beautiful, or fully presented as form, the sublime is occasioned by a "formless object," yet one whose "totality is also present to thought."<sup>73</sup> Kant writes that, strictly speaking, we cannot call an object of nature sublime.

All we can say is that the object is fit for the presentation of a sublimity which can be found in the mind. For the sublime, properly speaking, cannot be contained in any sensuous form. The sublime concerns only ideas of reason which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy which admits of sensuous presentation. . . . [In the sublime] the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility and to busy itself with ideas that involve a higher purposiveness.<sup>74</sup>

The sublime may be occasioned by a "formless object" because it leads us to discover not the purposiveness of nature, or empirical reality, but rather "a higher purposiveness," one residing in the subject itself.

67. In the essay "'Vision Itself Has Its History': 'Race,' Nation, and Renaissance Art History," (in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650*, ed. Claire Farago, New Haven, 1995, 67–88), Claire Farago offers an important discussion of Franz Kugler's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*, first published in 1841–42, a very popular study by the most widely read art historian of the day. As Farago notes, George Kubler cites this study as the moment when anthropologists and art historians parted company. The footnote to Kant's third *Critique* offers up in bold relief the ideational substructure on which this division was conceived.

68. William Pietz, "Fetish," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff, Chicago, 1996, 197–98. See also the series of articles by William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *Res*, IX, Spring 1985, 5–17; "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *Res*, XIII, Spring 1987, 23–45; "The Problem of the Fetish IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism," *Res*, XIV, Autumn 1988, 105–23. The Enlightenment construction of "primitive" art should be considered in this context as well, as it is in the study by Frances S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725–1907*, University Park, Pa., 1995.

69. Pietz, 1996 (as in n. 68), 199. Although Pietz discusses Kant's third *Critique* "as a solution to the problem of fetishism" for reasons other than those that I here highlight, my view concurs with his. Kant's particular use of the fetish in his *Observations* of 1764 demonstrates that from the outset detachment from the object was a defining feature of the sublime for him.

70. On the distinctions between mythical thought and scientific thought, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven, 1955–57. In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, a multivolume work of the

1920s, Cassirer defines the trajectory from mythic to symbolic thought as, among other things, a successive movement away from the physical grasp on an object toward the mental grasp of an object. Mathematical thinking, a purely symbolic form of cognition, is considered the highest form of thought. Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is therefore a history of successive detachment from the world of objects, a trajectory viewed as a story of progress. Such an enlightened path from mythos to logos likewise undergirds the disciplinary matrix of the history of art.

71. Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1982, 39. In his analysis of the "analytico-referential" discourse of modernism, Reiss notes (39) the highly interesting relation between the phrase *je ne sais quoi*, the first substantive use of which occurs in 1628, and its consecration "in the second half of the century as the object of discussions on the sublime, which will become in turn the foundation of discussions on taste and of the new science of aesthetics in the eighteenth century." While Reiss does not mention Kant here, we may consider him in this context. The sublime certainly has its roots in the *je ne sais quoi*, in that which initially eludes ready definition. For Kant, however, the experience of the sublime turns more on a *déjà vu*, as what the subject discovers is something unpleasantly familiar, namely the stubborn persistence of "a higher purposiveness" in his own faculty of mind.

72. On the other hand, see the path-breaking study by Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge, Mass., 1982. Gilligan demonstrates why detachment, which marks an important stage of moral development in the universal theories put forth by Jean Piaget and later developed by Lawrence Kohlberg, may be uncongenial for female subjects.

73. Kant, 1951, 82. The contained form of the beautiful versus the boundless form of the sublime is captured well in the original German, where

As an “earnest exercise of the imagination,” the sublime permits the mind to go beyond the limits of sensibility. Or, to use the words of the philosopher, in the sublime, reason “exercises its domination over sensibility,” or imagination. As a result, the experience of the sublime generates not the pure pleasure of the beautiful but the feeling of “negative pleasure” Kant calls “admiration or respect” (p. 83). It is in this sacrifice of imagination that we discover ideas of reason existing in our own minds, and so “become conscious of our superiority to nature within us, and therefore also to nature outside us (insofar as it has influence upon us).”<sup>75</sup> Indeed, our “use” of the sublime produces “in us a feeling of purposiveness quite independent of nature.”<sup>76</sup> In the experience of the sublime the subject discovers not so much his independence of nature as his power and purposiveness over and above nature.<sup>77</sup>

The sublime is that which alone is “*absolutely great*” or “*great beyond all comparison*” (p. 86). What qualifies as sublime in Kant’s account is not any natural object, but rather the feeling of the subject. In Kant’s words, “the feeling for the sublime in nature is respect for our own destination, which, by a certain subreption, we attribute to an object of nature (conversion of respect for the idea of humanity in our own subject into respect for the object)” (p. 96). In the sublime we *use* nature, or empirical reality, to discover “our own destination,” to find our own “higher purposiveness,” which, as “absolutely great,” exceeds our internal as well as external nature. That the domination of a totalizing reason in the sublime also entails a certain sacrifice of nature within and without has been pointed out by subsequent philosophers, including Martin Heidegger, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, as well as Hannah Arendt.<sup>78</sup> In the case of the Kantian sublime, however, the “sacrifice exacted from the sensible self is richly compensated by the renewed awareness of the subject’s pre-eminence over nature.”<sup>79</sup>

Unlike the affinity between mind and nature that is part of

the analytic of the beautiful, in the sublime the analogy between mind and nature is made only to be broken. Whereas the mind rests in contemplation of the beautiful object, Kant writes that the mind “feels itself *moved* in the representation of the sublime in nature” (p. 97). This movement of the reflective judgment begins when the imagination is confronted with an object for which it feels itself incommensurable. Kant describes this point of excess for the imagination as “an abyss in which it fears to lose itself” (p. 97). Yet this abyss incites not fear so much as a voluptuous terror, for despite the imagination’s failure to comprehend the sublime as a whole, the mind finds a principle by which to apprehend it. This principle is a law of reason. The subject then takes pleasure in finding a law for something that initially overpowered the imagination.

While Kant distinguishes between the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime, both of these movements of the sublime involve the reflective judgment. In contrast to the determinant judgment, which subsumes the particular under a given universal, the reflective judgment “is obliged to ascend from the particular in nature to the universal.”<sup>80</sup> Since, as a transcendental principle, the “reflective judgment can only give as a law from and to itself” (p. 16), the reflective judgment turns back on itself, rather than on nature. When the subject is faced in the experience of the sublime with something that eludes comprehension, he consequently treats the object as if it were purposive, as if it were a product of a mind with understanding like our own. In this way, the aesthetic judgment projects its own activity of determination on an object that eludes its grasp. The representation is therefore treated as past—as the product of an understanding—and yet in the suspended space of the aesthetic judgment, this representation is in reality yet to come: the reflective judgment must re-reflect, or turn back on itself, in the face of the initially inexplicable.<sup>81</sup>

In the experience of the sublime, it is not the size or quality of the object that is ultimately important, but rather the

Kant contrasts the *Begrenzung* of the beautiful form to the *Unbegrenztheit* of the sublime. The proviso that the formlessness—or boundlessness—represented in the sublime must likewise be present in its totality to thought means that, by definition, the sublime cannot exceed thought.

74. Kant, 1951, 23, 83–84, modified translation.

75. *Ibid.*, 104, modified translation.

76. *Ibid.*, 84, modified translation. While omitted from the English translation, the word *use* is italicized in the original German.

77. Kant states (69), “The only being which has the purpose of its existence in itself is *man*, who can determine his purposes by reason.” Writing generally about the role of reason and introspection in the Age of Enlightenment, Hannah Arendt evokes the broader claims of the autonomy of reason of which Kant’s sublime is only a part: “How can human freedom be so enormously extended that it no longer collides with limits; how can introspection be so isolated that the thinking individual no longer need smash his head against the wall of ‘irrational’ reality? . . . If thinking rebounds back upon itself and finds its solitary object within the soul—if, that is, it becomes introspection—it distinctly produces (so long as it remains rational) a semblance of unlimited power by the very act of isolation from the world. . . . Man’s autonomy becomes hegemony over all possibilities; reality merely impinges and rebounds”; Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, New York, 1974, 10 (Arendt’s book was first published in 1957, although the manuscript was essentially finished when she left Germany in 1933).

78. This is most specifically addressed in Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism,” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, San Francisco, 1993, 213–65, and his *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt, New York, 1977; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John

Cumming, New York, 1987; as well as Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, Chicago, 1958. See also Beiner (as in n. 6), who asserts (281) that the Kantian sublime “marks an apotheosis of Western subjectivism, as Heidegger might say.” In her essay “Sacrifice and Domination: Kantian and Kierkegaardian Paradigms of Overcoming,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, xx, no. 3, 1994, Vanessa Rumble makes the compelling point (33 n. 11) that the “very terminology of sacrifice (*Opfer*) and domination (*Herrschaft*) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* may well have originated in the description of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*. The sacrifice (*Aufopferung*) of imagination to the dominance (*Gewalt*) of reason, a process whose violence Kant acknowledged, is depicted with some zeal.”

79. Rumble (as in n. 78), 26.

80. Kant, 1951, 16. It is no coincidence that the sublime is defined by Kant as a reflective judgment. For just as the mind of the subject ascends in the movement of the reflective judgment, so the sublime elevates the subject by enabling him to discover “a higher purposiveness.”

81. It should be said that the sublime issues forth when the imagination cannot comprehend the object in the Kantian sense. Kant defines comprehension as the single intuition holding the many in the one. In the movement of the sublime the imagination is required to exceed beyond the maximum implied in comprehension (*Zusammenfassung*) in the direction of the infinite of apprehension (*Auffassung*). As the German word *Auffassung* indicates, in apprehension the imagination raises itself, exceeds itself toward the boundless, which Kant actually defines as bound by a law of reason. In the sublime, then, that supremely Kantian of subjects, the *Weltbaumeister*, suppresses and domesticates that which initially overpowered the imagination by bringing it within the canny domicile of its own mental architectonic.

mind's apprehension of it.<sup>82</sup> While Kant asserts that the sublime can be found only in the mind of the subject, in his analysis of the mathematical sublime he offers two monumental human constructions of stone: the pyramids and St. Peter's in Rome. In the case of the Egyptian pyramids, Kant writes that one must be neither too near nor "too far from them, in order to get the full emotional effect from their size" (p. 90). This careful positioning—neither too near nor too far off—is necessary to evoke the "vibration" between attraction and repulsion that issues forth when the imagination cannot initially comprehend an object. The spectator entering St. Peter's in Rome is likewise thrown into a state of "bewilderment" or "perplexity" (p. 91). Because of the sheer vastness of the interior, "there is here a feeling of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole" (p. 91). In these experiences of the mathematical sublime, it is reason that provides the imagination with the measure of absolute magnitude. In so doing, reason offers to the imagination the totality that could not be initially comprehended. In Kant's colossal examples, that which initially overwhelmed the physical eye is therefore tamed by the mind's eye, as nature is made comprehensible by a totalizing reason.

After discussing the pyramids and St. Peter's in Rome, Kant returns again to nature in his discussion of the sublime:

. . . we must not exhibit the sublime in products of art (e.g. buildings, pillars, etc.) where human purpose determines the form as well as the size, nor yet in things of nature *the concepts of which bring with them a definite purpose* (e.g. animals with a known natural destination), but in rude nature (and in this only in so far as it does not bring with it any charm or emotion produced by actual danger) merely as containing magnitude. (p. 91).

While Kant offers the pyramids and St. Peter's in Rome as occasions of the sublime in nature, he nonetheless saves his true praise for "rude nature." Unlike his two examples, in "nature's chaos, disorder and desolation," there exists no purpose of the object to distract the beholder. Hence, "rude nature" offers the opportunity for a pure judgment of the sublime.

To this end, the ruin appears a much more likely candidate as an occasion for the sublime than do the pyramids or St. Peter's in Rome. While the sheer size of these monuments may catalyze the movement of the mathematical sublime, they nevertheless remain bound up with human purpose. As opposed to the artificial ruin popular at this time, the natural

ruin is a kind of "rude nature."<sup>83</sup> This class of ruins offers a monument lying in state, one whose purpose has been effaced by the continual exertion and immensity of the natural forces that have acted on it. In this sense, the ruin meets with Kant's insistence on the purposelessness of the aesthetic object. Indeed, unlike those two grandiose monuments that the philosopher mentions, in ruins the achievements of human culture are undone.<sup>84</sup>

The absence of ruins from Kant's third *Critique* is especially notable in his account of the dynamic sublime. In this instance it is not a vastness that is initially incommensurable to the imagination but the limitless scope of nature's destructive capacities. In Kant's words, "If nature is to be judged by us as dynamically sublime, it must be represented as exciting fear." However, "He who fears can form no judgment about the sublime in nature, just as he who is seduced by inclination and appetite can form no judgment about the beautiful" (p. 100). Like the beautiful, the dynamic sublime is predicated on a Kantian detachment such that the fear aroused by the intimation of nature's might is rendered aesthetic.

Kant continues on a dramatic note:

Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like—these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security; and we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature.

Now, in the immensity of nature and in the insufficiency of our faculties to take in a standard proportionate to the aesthetical estimation of the magnitude of its *realm*, we find our own limitation, although at the same time in our rational faculty we find a different, nonsensuous standard, which has that infinity itself under it as a unity, in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and thus in our mind we find a superiority to nature even in its immensity. And so also the irresistibility of its might [*Macht*], while making us recognize our own physical impotence [*Ohnmacht*], considered as beings of nature,

82. In "The Nuclear Sublime," *Diacritics*, xiv, Summer 1984, 6, Frances Ferguson points out that "when Kant stipulates that no man-made objects, no products of human art, can be sublime, that exclusion constitutes an exclusion of objects that can be seen under the rubric of property. . . . The trouble with property is that its essential nature is not determined by its owner; it would not be property unless it were exchangeable. . . . The virtue of the sublime is that it cannot be exchanged, that each experience of sublimity is permanently bound not just to a subjective judgment but to its particular subjective judge." Perhaps this is also why in the third *Critique* Kant writes so adamantly against the frame. For not only is the frame *parergon*, but the very large frames made for late-18th-century paintings are substantial bits of property as well. After all, Kant was writing at the time of the formation of the bourgeois public sphere and the shift to a market economy.

83. My subsequent discussion of ruins refers solely to natural ruins rather than to artificial or sham ruins.

84. In this crucial sense ruins differ from nature per se, which does serve Kant as a representation of the sublime.

85. Kant, 1951, 100–101. An analogous passage is vividly captured by Friedrich Schiller in one of his letters in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, Oxford, 1989, 25th letter, pt. 3, 185.

86. The role of temporality, especially in its manifestation as narrative identity, has recently been found crucial for the constitution of the subject, as well as for self-understanding. See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago, 1992. Like the subject of the aesthetic experience of ruins, in Robert Musil's quintessentially modern novel *The Man without Qualities*, the "self figured here by the narrative is in reality confronted with the hypothesis of its own nothingness." Ricoeur continues (166), "To be sure, this nothingness is not the nothing of which there is nothing to say. . . . Why,

discloses to us a faculty of judging independently of and a superiority over nature, on which is based a kind of self-preservation [*Selbsterhaltung*] entirely different from that which can be attacked and brought into danger by external nature. Thus humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] in our person remains unhumiliated, though the individual might have to submit to this dominion [*Gewalt*]. . . . Therefore nature is here called sublime merely because it elevates the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make felt the proper sublimity of its destination, in comparison with nature itself.<sup>85</sup>

It is here that we find a distinct echo to the conclusion of the second *Critique*, Kant's famous passage on "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." Like the mathematical sublime, the dynamic sublime awakens in the subject the supersensible faculty of reason, and with it a feeling of superiority over internal and external nature. The *Haltung* of the subject, or the manner in which the self is performed in the sublime, is based on "a kind of self-preservation" [*Selbsterhaltung*] such that the subject is not only unhumiliated but rather elevated in his humanity. In order for the movement of the dynamic sublime to take place, the subject must be placed in a position of security. From this standpoint outside the scope of nature's power, the subject surveys the representation of the sublime in nature without himself ever being implicated in nature.

According to Kant's criteria, the ruin would also appear as a likely occasion for the dynamic sublime. While Kant's discussion of the dynamic sublime focuses exclusively on nature, it turns on a presentation of natural might. Displaying the scope and duration of the forces of nature that have acted on it, the ruin presents a visual record of natural might. Yet unlike overhanging rocks, volcanoes, and other examples of natural extremes that potentially threaten the beholder, in the aesthetic experience of ruins the essential safety of the beholder is never really at issue. Or is it?

Like the examples of the dynamic sublime given in Kant's *Critique*, the ruin offers the beholder a position of physical safety in relation to it. Unlike Kant's examples, however, the ruin does not provide a secure conceptual position outside of it. When we consider how the natural forces at work on the ruin are the very ones that will eventually overtake the subject itself, we witness how the ruin implicates the subject in the life cycle of nature. In this sense, we may call the ruin an occasion of the sublime in nature, one that may initially overwhelm the subject sensitive to its warning of mortality.

indeed, would we be interested in the drama of the dissolution of the identity of Musil's character, and why would it puzzle us, unless the nonsubject remained one figure of the subject, be it in the negative mode? A nonsubject is not nothing, as the semiotics of the subject of discourse or of action serves to remind us." For Kant, on the other hand, the nonsubject is nothing. The Kantian nonsubject, that is, the subject constituted by nature rather than through reason, is to be overcome by self-mastery.

87. Lewis White Beck makes this point in his introduction to *Kant on History*, xxv. For Kant's use of the phrase, see *Kant on History*, 21, 65.

88. Furthermore, when we consider how the history of reason constitutes an antinomy in Kant's own system, more light is shed on the absence of ruins from the philosopher's third *Critique*. What Yovel (21ff.) has termed the "unbridgeable dualism" in Kantian philosophy between "empirical history as a form of experience," on the one hand, and "rational history as a non-temporal processuality," on the other, means that "no mediation between

While the Kantian sublime elevates the subject above nature, the ruin implicates the subject squarely in nature. The detemporalization of moral feeling—or the supersensible—in the Kantian sublime thus stands in marked contrast to the temporalization of the subject memorialized in the ruin.<sup>86</sup> Without nature, Kant writes, there can be no morality. Without morality, on the other hand, culture is but "glittering misery."<sup>87</sup> As an emblem of the undoing of human culture—and by extension, the progress of morality—by the forces of nature, we might conjecture that ruins were nothing more for Kant than "glittering misery." Defined in this manner, ruins are certainly out of place in an account of the triumph of human reason over internal and external nature.

Consider Kant's remark:

Now of man (and so of every rational creature in the world) as a moral being it can no longer be asked why (*quem in finem*) he exists. His existence involves the highest purpose to which, as far as is in his power, he can subject the whole of nature, contrary to which at least he cannot regard himself as subject to any influence of nature. . . . Only in man, and only in him as subject of morality, do we meet with unconditioned legislation in respect of purposes, which therefore alone renders him capable of being a final purpose, to which the whole of nature is teleologically subordinated. (pp. 285–86).

Whereas the addressant of the ruin is a subject of mortality, it is as a "subject of morality" that the Kantian subject finds his final purpose over and above nature. Just as the moral end is the final purpose of the subject, the moral totality, what Kant calls the "highest good," is the ultimate goal of history. Addressed to a subject of mortality and displaying a culture undone, the ruin might therefore be said to overturn the rational history of the Kantian subject as well as the philosopher's belief in the progress of empirical history.<sup>88</sup>

As an "earnest exercise of the imagination," the sublime requires a higher culture than does the beautiful. For the "uneducated man," that is, for one "without the development of moral ideas," the sublime is merely "terrible." For this man, the sublime arouses feelings of "misery, danger, and distress," as he finds himself simply overwhelmed by the intimation of nature's force rather than discovering himself superior to it (p. 105). It follows, then, that the supremely sublime man, the one "who fears nothing, and therefore does not yield to danger, but rather goes to face it with complete deliberation," is the soldier.<sup>89</sup> As the example of the soldier

reason and empirical history is conceivable" in the Kantian system. Because of the antinomy between these two principles, Kant cannot explain the relation of a nonempirical history of reason to empirical history (21). Consequently, "for Kant empirical reality is a challenge and a difficulty vis-à-vis the history of reason" (24). When we note this aporia between a nontemporal history of reason and a temporal, empirical history, and remember how the Kantian subject is much more a "subject of morality" than one of mortality, we may better conjecture Kant's disregard of decay.

89. Kant, 1951, 102. In fact, Kant continues, "War itself, if it is carried on with order and with a sacred respect for the rights of citizens, has something sublime in it . . . while a long peace generally brings about a predominant commercial spirit and, along with it, low selfishness, cowardice, and effeminacy, and debases the disposition of the people." See also Kant's "Perpetual Peace," an essay of 1795, in White Beck, 111.

further underscores, the experience of the Kantian sublime is one in which the subject does not suffer a mental failure of comprehension. Rather, the subject remains "unsubdued by danger," even when confronted by an emblem of his own mortality.

While the aesthetic object is useful to Kant because it offers us a sensualization (*Versinnlichung*) of moral ideas such that we may see ourselves as independent of nature and thus free to determine ourselves by the law of reason, in the aesthetic experience of ruins we are confronted with our fate mirrored in traces of decay. The ruin offers a presentiment of freedom, yet it is not the freedom Kant finds in a subject bound by reason to unconditional laws so much as that of mortality, or complete release from the bonds of reason. Ruins—as emblem and as idea—threaten to topple the architectonic of the Kantian system by unseating reason from within. In the aesthetic experience of ruins the directing force of judgment, which leads the subject from the concept of nature to that of Kantian freedom, is stopped short, and the relation of nature and culture in Kantian aesthetics is overturned. The ruin, though not named by the philosopher of the third *Critique*, resides at the underside of the Kantian system as its necessary, and necessarily excluded, other.<sup>90</sup>

The aesthetic is ultimately useful to Kant not for the feelings conjured by the sight of the beautiful and the sublime but for the faculty of judgment the aesthetic experience inspires in the beholder. It is judgment, after all, that leads the subject from the realm of nature to that of "a higher purposiveness," making the aesthetic experience one of the faculty of reason rather than of the pure sensation of the faculty of sensibility. While the sublime is said initially to overwhelm the subject, the Kantian subject is never truly confronted by the possibility of his own ruin. On the contrary, the sublime serves only to elevate the humanity of the subject. Rather than a lasting intimation of mortality, the "higher purposiveness" discovered through the aesthetic experience of the sublime brings with it a sense of self-mastery and superiority through the seemingly infinite capacities of human reason itself.

90. In this sense, the role of the ruin shares some similarities with that of the folly. For a brief exposition on the folly as "a necessary evil," see Anthony Vidler, "History of the Folly," in *Follies: Architecture for the Late-Twentieth-Century Landscape*, exh. cat., Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, 1983, 10–13.

91. Anthony Giddens takes on the guise of the "critical critic" in his essay "Reason without Revolution? Habermas's *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*," in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, 95–121. The foundational premises and ideals of the Enlightenment have recently come under sharp criticism. For criticism of Kantian notions of Enlightenment, see the published debate between Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas: Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, New York, 1984, 32–50; and Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's *What Is Enlightenment?*," in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, trans. and ed. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, 173–79; as well as Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What Is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What Is Enlightenment?'" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy, Oxford, 1986, 109–22; and James Schmidt, ed., *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, Berkeley, 1996.

92. Jost Hermand, *Von Mainz nach Weimar (1793–1919): Studien zur Deutschen Literatur*, Stuttgart, 1969, 13. As registered in a remark by Ludwig Wekhrlin in 1784, the strength of public opinion was beginning to make itself felt at this

## The Judging Spectator

Surely it is at least somewhat suspicious that the highest forms of human reason turn out to duplicate the ideals of the Western Enlightenment!—A "Critical Critic," [Anthony Giddens], 1991<sup>91</sup>

Kant's general emphasis on freedom and morality bears the traces of his time. The desire to create a reasonable and moral world was professed by many Germans, including an increasingly enlightened public that could no longer overlook an outmoded and corrupt system of government and the despotic nature of rule in the "grotesque monster" of "some more or less eighteen hundred independent territories" that constituted the contemporary fabric of the German land.<sup>92</sup> The success of the French Revolution served only to fan the desire in Germany for social equality and constitutional government. In her book *Life of Schiller*, Caroline von Schiller recounts how she and her philosopher husband "often remembered how the destruction of the Bastille, a monument of dark despotism, seemed to our youthful minds the herald of the victory of liberty over tyranny."<sup>93</sup> While for Caroline von Schiller "the victory of liberty over tyranny" is both heralded and manifested in that consummately symbolic act of the destruction of the Bastille, other members of German enlightened society did not conceive of revolution as a legitimate means toward the end of enlightened reform.

How reform was to be effected expressed itself in primarily two different directions at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany.<sup>94</sup> On the one hand, one encounters a Rousseauian longing for the freedom of return to an undifferentiated natural condition, a sentiment well captured in an etching by Charles Eisen, which serves as the frontispiece to the Abbé Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* of 1753 (Fig. 9).<sup>95</sup> Although in this instance the way to freedom points clearly to the "primitive hut" of the past, rendering the architectural achievements of the subsequent centuries as no more than mere debris to be cleared, for others at this time freedom meant not a return but a future goal predicated on a sense of human perfectibility.<sup>96</sup> While the more radical German revo-

time: "At present, public opinion has the predominant power; in it speaks the voice of public reason, which is articulated by the writers and has already caused an incredible amount of good"; Wekhrlin, *Das graue Ungeheuer*, II (1784), 123, quoted in Rudolf Vierhaus, "'Sie und Nicht Wir': Deutsche Urteile über den Ausbruch der Französischen Revolution," in *Deutschland und die Französische Revolution*, ed. Jürgen Voss, Munich, 1983, 3. Wekhrlin's statement points to the necessity of the scholar-writer as the transmitter of reason to the reading public.

93. Caroline von Schiller, quoted in G. P. Gooch, *Germany and the French Revolution*, London, 1920, 361. Compare this with Goethe's response (383): "I, on the other hand, who with my own eyes observed the ghastly, ungovernable consequences of the violent dissolution of all bonds, and clearly perceived a similar secret agitation in my own country, held fast to the established order." It should be noted that the opinion of German intellectuals often changed during the course of the events in France. Initial enthusiasm frequently paled as the reign of terror set in. On the German response to the French Revolution, see, in addition to Gooch and Voss (as in n. 92), Jacques Droz, *L'Allemagne et la révolution française*, Paris, 1949; Horst Günther, ed., *Die französische Revolution: Berichte und Deutungen deutsche Schriftsteller und Historiker*, Frankfurt, 1985; Harold Mah, "The French Revolution and the Problem of German Modernity: Hegel, Heine, and Marx," *New German Critique*, no. 50, Spring–Summer 1990, 3–20; and Karol Sauerland, "Goethes, Schillers, Fr. Schlegels und Novalis' Reaktionen auf die neuen politischen, konstitu-

lutionaries tended to agree with Rousseau's vision, the majority of the German *Aufklärer* harbored monarchical sympathies, and so dedicated their efforts toward slow reform along the lines of constitutional monarchy rather than toward immediate—and riotous—revolution. Stressing evolution over revolution in his political writings, Kant captured the logic of this kind of reform.

As a firm believer in enlightenment, Kant was influenced in his vision by force of historical circumstance. Living as a German subject under the “benevolent despot” Frederick the Great, Kant was confident in his meliorist vision of society. With the death in 1786 of Frederick the Great and the ascension to the throne of the benighted monarch Frederick Wilhelm II, however, Kant witnessed a rise of repression and obscurantism that exacerbated the need for enlightenment. While this changing political tenor did not disturb the philosopher's belief in the historical progress of reason, it caused him to embrace more fully the causes of enlightenment and republicanism.<sup>97</sup>

In his 1784 essay “What Is Enlightenment?” Kant accords the scholar a primary role in the process of enlightenment. Kant tells us that the scholar, because he is not duty-bound to the statutes and formulas of a particular office, possesses complete freedom “to use his own reason and to speak in his own person” to his public, “the world” (which is actually, of course, a circumscribed world of educated male subjects).<sup>98</sup> Precisely because of the complete freedom the scholar possesses, he is called on to criticize the institutions of religion and government, and in so doing to further enlightenment. Whereas in the aesthetic experience the concepts of nature and freedom are bridged by the faculty of judgment, a process that occurs within the subject itself, here it is the scholar who performs a bridging between two conceptual realms, those of the empirical world and the “ethical community,” the ultimate end of moral freedom toward which the scholar enlightens his public. The subject is, therefore, an important agent in both Kant's aesthetic theory and in his philosophy of history.

Kant's description of the role of the scholar in the process of enlightenment provides important clues to the conception



9 Charles Eisen, *Allegory of Architecture Returning to Its Natural Model*, 1753, from M.-A. Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture*, Paris, 1753, 2nd edition, frontispiece (photo: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities)

tionellen und sozialphilosophischen Fragen, die die französische Revolution aufwarf,” in *Dass eine Nation die ander verstehen möge*, ed. Norbert Honsza, Amsterdam, 1988, 621–35.

94. On this point, see Hermand (as in n. 92), 22–36.

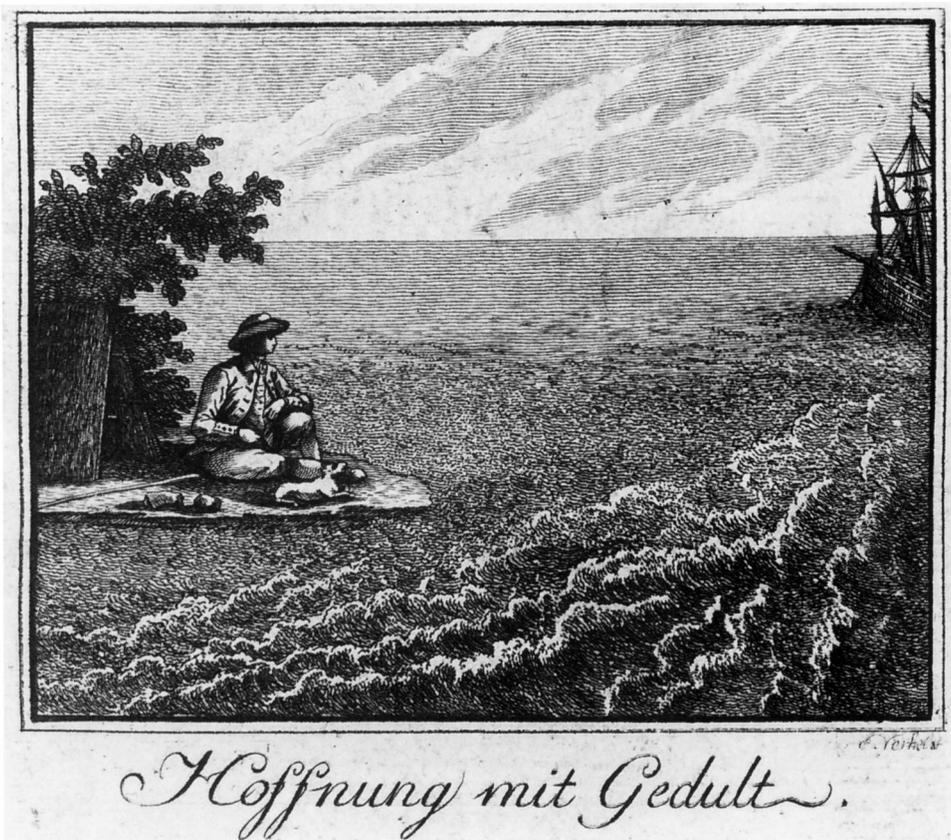
95. Laugier's “natural model,” and its historical and architectural context, is discussed in Anthony Vidler, “The Idea of Type: The Transformation of the Academic Ideal, 1750–1830,” *Oppositions*, viii, Spring 1977, 94–115; and in his book *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment*, Princeton, 1987, esp. 7–21. It should be remarked that whereas Rousseau (and Kant, for that matter) stresses the importance of sociability for a society, however primitive, Vidler notes (20) that “Laugier, in contradistinction to Rousseau, had chosen to eliminate altogether the social roots of dwelling, preferring architectural criteria derived from the internal logic of architecture to the external influences of customs or mores.” While this etching perhaps does not depict a Rousseauian sense of the social, it captures the spirit behind a certain kind of reform inspired by Rousseau, which was popular at this time.

96. By way of comparison, it might be useful at this point to mention Hubert Robert's famous painting *The Grande Galerie of the Louvre Seen as a Ruin*, exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1796. While the overgrowth of moss and ivy on the ruined gallery in Robert's painting clearly indicates that this is a meditation on destruction and the passage of time, the composition nevertheless points to a civilization that will remain. As Michelangelo's slave reclines on the rubble on the right-hand side of the canvas, an artist, purposely placed at

the center of the composition, sketches the very upright statue of the Apollo Belvedere. Despite human destruction or natural decay, we might say that here, at least, the ideal functions as both the origin and end point of a society not lost to the notion of human perfectibility.

97. This historical and political context is well articulated in Frederick Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800*, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, 13–56. On Kant's concept of enlightenment in its contemporary context, see Gisbert Beyerhaus, “Kant's ‘Programm’ der Aufklärung aus dem Jahre 1784,” *Kant-Studien*, xxvi, 1921, 1–16; H. B. Nisbet, “‘Was ist Aufklärung?’: The Concept of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Germany,” *Journal of European Studies*, xii, no. 46, June 1982, 77–95; and James Schmidt, “The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn, and the *Mittwochsgesellschaft*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, L, no. 2 (Apr.–June 1989), 269–91.

98. Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” (1784), in White Beck, 6. See also Willi Goetschel, *Constituting Critique: Kant's Writing as Critical Practice*, Durham, N.C., 1994, 144–66. For a critique of Kantian notions of the public sphere and of publicity, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, 102–17; and Pheng Cheah, “Violent Light: The Idea of Publicness in Modern Philosophy and in Global Neocolonialism,” *Social Text*, XLIII, Fall 1995, 163–90.



10 Egidius Verhelst, title vignette for the *Patriotisches Archiv für Deutschland*, Leipzig, 1788. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Abteilung Historische Druck

of the subject in his philosophy of history. Just as the sublime is useful to Kant because it leads the subject to the higher faculty of reason, so the subject of Kant's philosophy of history is marked by a drive toward moral perfectibility. Believing republicanism the goal of moral society, Kant viewed the initial results of the French Revolution as the summit of freedom. Yet in his own philosophy of history, Kant

offers the citizen no right of revolution.<sup>99</sup> Like the patriot in the title vignette of the journal *Patriotisches Archiv* (*Patriotic Archive*) of 1788, Kant advocates an exercise of "patient hope" while the work toward enlightenment of the scholars and "enlightened" despots brings the ship of freedom to the shores of the German land (Fig. 10). If the sun, to follow Kant, is "the point of view of reason," then the patriot

99. The reasons put forth for the philosopher's rejection of revolution are varied and offer no ready consensus. See, among others, A. C. Armstrong, "Kant's Philosophy of Peace and War," *Journal of Philosophy*, xxviii, no. 8, Apr. 9, 1931, 197–204; H. S. Reiss, "Kant and the Right of Rebellion," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xvii, 1956, 179–92; Lewis White Beck, "Kant and the Right of Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xxxii, 1971, 411–22; as well as the more recent discussions by Heinrich (as in n. 17) and Frederick Beiser (as in n. 97). Relevant passages from Kant's own writings are referred to below.

100. The sun is described by Kant as "the point of view of reason" in his final essay, "The Contest of the Faculties" (1798), in Reiss, 180. Kant continues (188), "What sequence can progress be expected to follow? The answer is: not the usual sequence *from the bottom upwards*, but *from the top downwards*." On the "obedience" of the citizen, see also Alfred Stern, *Der Einfluss der Französischen Revolution auf das deutsche Geistesleben*, Stuttgart, 1928, 179–84.

101. On "human actions" as the appearance of the freedom of the will, see Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" and "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," in White Beck.

102. Kant, "The Contest of the Faculties," in Reiss, 181. Since, to follow Kant (180), "we are dealing with freely acting beings to whom one can *dictate* in advance what they *ought* to do, but of whom one cannot *predict* what they actually *will* do," the notion of progress is a problem. Historical signs, however, enable the historian to impute the quality of progress to human affairs both past and present. To this end, we might consider the ruin an inversion of the Kantian historical sign.

103. *Ibid.*, 182. The philosopher also alludes to the French Revolution in Kant, 1951, sec. 65, where he makes an analogy between an organic organism and the organization of the body politic. See, as well, his 1793 critique of the cliché, *On the Old Saw: That May be Right in Theory But It Won't Work in Practice*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Philadelphia, 1974. When Kant writes of a sympathy "which borders almost on enthusiasm," he does not use the definition of enthusiasm in common currency. Rather, for him "true enthusiasm is always directed exclusively towards the *ideal*, particularly towards that which is purely moral (such as the concept of right), and it cannot be coupled with selfish interests." On fanaticism versus enthusiasm, see also Kant, 1960, 108.

104. In *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture*, New Haven, 1989, 158, Dorinda Outram makes the important point that "the public body on which the middle class founded its political legitimation during the Revolution was that of *homo clausus*, the male type validated by his separation of affect from instinct, by body control leading to an increasingly painful yet necessary sense of separation from other individual human beings. *Homo clausus* legitimated himself by his superiority to the somatic relationships enjoyed by other classes—aristocracy, peasants and workers—and by the other gender. In other words, what he possessed was a body which was also a *non-body*, which, rather than projecting itself, *retained* itself."

105. Kant, "The Contest of the Faculties," in Reiss, 184.

106. Yovel, 153.

107. When Kant advocates a division between theory and practice, he is among good historical company. In "Immanuel Kant, loyaler preussischer Staatsbürger und Anhänger der Französischen Revolution—ein Wider-

depicted here is a member of the *Volk*, a citizen deemed ill-equipped to effect change himself, and so one who must wait for the reason of those above him to illuminate his way.<sup>100</sup>

While Kant defined enlightenment as “the freedom to make public use of one’s reason at every point,” he did not circumscribe freedom to the sphere of intellectual criticism. The philosopher also viewed “human actions” as the appearance of freedom of the will, and in this sense the French Revolution had special resonance for him.<sup>101</sup> For Kant, the French Revolution was a “historical sign,” an event that enabled him “to conclude, as an inevitable consequence of its operation, that mankind is improving.”<sup>102</sup> More specifically, the French Revolution was a sign of the human will reshaping the world in accordance with a moral ideal. Kant writes of the French Revolution in a passage that vividly captures his enthusiasm for it:

The revolution which we have seen taking place in our times in a nation of gifted people may succeed, or it may fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such a price, even if he could hope to carry it out successfully at the second attempt. But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger. It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race.<sup>103</sup>

Like the patriot in the vignette, the subject of this world historical event is not an active participant but an inactive spectator. Since “the very utterance” of sympathy for the French Revolution was “fraught with danger,” this onlooker is relegated the role of judge, demonstrating enthusiasm solely through a disinterested regard. As in Kant’s critique of

aesthetic judgment, a detached bearing—a clear sign of the ascendancy of the reason of the subject—is here viewed as the sign of a moral character.<sup>104</sup>

While Kant heartily sympathized with the initial results of the French Revolution, in his political writings he repeatedly, and rather paradoxically, stressed how revolution “is at all times unjust.”<sup>105</sup> When considered *ex post facto*, the French Revolution may be a “historical sign,” or sign of progress, yet the philosopher does not condone it *a priori*.<sup>106</sup> Kant makes a distinction between theory and practice, offering his support to the idea, rather than to the practical events, of the French Revolution.<sup>107</sup> Such a distinction is commensurate with the superiority Kant accords the spectator over the participant: the judging spectator<sup>108</sup> becomes the model, or archetype, by which all others are measured.<sup>109</sup> Kant’s own participation in the events of the French Revolution was that of a judging spectator, although one who, in this instance, expressed his sympathy in essays written for the sake of enlightenment.

It is the subject as judging spectator, or *Weltbetrachter*, that binds Kant’s philosophy of history and his aesthetic theory. According to Kant, both aesthetic judgments and political judgments are disinterested and universal.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the Kantian *Weltbaumeister*, the subject/architect of a moral world, is none other than the *Weltbetrachter*: this architect is not so much a laborer as an intellectual planner, a subject of contemplative judgment rather than of physical action. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant defines the aesthetic attitude as both purely contemplative and subjectively universal. In making his claim for the universality of the aesthetic judgment, Kant presupposes a *sensus communis*, an internal sense common to all.<sup>111</sup>

In the analytic of the sublime Kant describes the three maxims of the *sensus communis*: “(1) to think for oneself; (2) to put ourselves in thought in the place of everyone else; (3) always to think consistently” (p. 136). The first, which refers to the faculty of the understanding, is the maxim of enlightenment. According to Kant, only the process of thinking for

spruch,” in *Deutscher Idealismus und Französische Revolution*, Schriften aus dem Karl-Marx-Haus, no. 37, Trier, 1988, 9, Peter Burg notes: “This attribute of German mentality stands in a long religious and intellectual-historical tradition. Martin Luther’s characteristic dualism of soul and world, inside and outside, freedom and obligation survived in secular consciousness.” To understand Kant’s separation of theory and practice in regard to the French Revolution, one must certainly keep in mind that at the time he was writing his essays, Prussia was operating under censorship laws. Kant’s rejection of revolution in his essays may therefore be considered—as it has been by certain authors—as a necessary means to insure the publication of his essays. Yet if we consider Kant’s general views on rationality for humankind, his division between theory and practice begins to make sense, since Kant always advocates judgment over action. For a philosopher still championed by contemporary proponents of liberalism, however, such an outright rejection of revolution is odd indeed.

108. I borrow this term from Hannah Arendt. See her *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, as well as the book’s useful interpretive essay by Ronald Beiner, “Hannah Arendt on Judging,” 89–156. Published posthumously, Arendt’s lectures demonstrate why Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* may be considered an important work of political philosophy.

109. See Arendt, 15ff. The separation between theory and practice and the absence of a faculty of action in Kant’s system point to the philosopher’s concern for the progress of the species over that of the individual. Arendt remarks (26) that this “escape, as it were, from the particular, which is itself meaningless, to the universal, from which it derives its meaning, is of course

not peculiar to Kant.” In the case of Kant, however, I would argue that this “escape” takes on a certain melancholy tinge, since Kant believed so strongly in the cause of enlightenment and in the “historical sign” of the French Revolution.

110. This is one of the points of Arendt’s *Lectures*. In his interpretive essay to her *Lectures*, Beiner (as in n. 108), 112, notes how “Kant’s analysis of taste provides the concepts of communication, intersubjective agreement, and shared judgment that Arendt seeks for the reconstruction of moral horizons.” Arendt’s use of Kantian judgment for this purpose appears, however, too hopeful. I would add that the supremely disinterested quality of Kantian judgment renders all judgments aesthetic. If judgments are so disinterested, how can they carry the moral weight Kant—and Arendt—wish for them? In answer to such a query, Arendt would most likely appeal to the “exemplary validity” of judgments, noting how they may function as examples for us to follow. Yet there remains an antinomy here, as in Kant’s own system: namely, the gap between the realms of reason and empirical history, between judgment and knowledge. Examples may have “exemplary validity,” but by Kantian definition, they can never become knowledge, and consequently, their effectiveness is effectively undermined.

111. Kant, 1951, 136. The idea of the *sensus communis* is better captured in the original German: “die Idee eines gemeinschaftlichen Sinn” connotes both a sense common to all as well as a sense that binds all. On the history of the idea of the *sensus communis*, see David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*, Cambridge, 1987, as well as his essay “Why Did Kant Call Taste a ‘Common Sense’?” in Mattick, Jr. (as in n. 65), 120–51.

oneself releases one from the “self-incurred tutelage” suppressing the nonenlightened subject.<sup>112</sup> The second maxim relates to the faculty of judgment and offers the subject an “enlarged mentality.” Kant informs us that “it indicates a man of enlarged thought if he disregards the subjective private conditions of his own judgment, by which so many others are confined, and reflects upon it from a *universal standpoint* (which he can only determine by placing himself at the standpoint of others).”<sup>113</sup> The universal standpoint assumed in judgment allows Kant to claim that while not all others *will* agree with the judgment of the subject, they *ought* to, for in making this judgment the subject has moved beyond self-interest by taking the viewpoint of others into account.<sup>114</sup> The universal standpoint is the impartial vantage point of the *Weltbetrachter*, of the world spectator.<sup>115</sup> The third, and final, maxim refers to the faculty of reason and is the most difficult to attain, for it involves the steadfast observation of the first two. Developing his reason enables the subject “always to think consistently,” and in so doing to be at one with himself, that is, to be at one with his own reason, or “internal moral legislation.”<sup>116</sup>

For Kant, however, it is not enough merely to effect a universal standpoint in judgment. What is even more crucial is that one communicate one’s judgment. As he writes:

It is only in society that it occurs to him to be, not merely a man, but a refined man after his kind (the beginning of civilization). For such do we judge him to be who is both inclined and apt to communicate his pleasure to others and who is not contented with an object if he cannot feel satisfaction in it in common with others. Again, everyone expects and requires from everyone else this reference to universal communication of pleasure, as it were from an original compact dictated by humanity itself. (p. 139)

The universal communicability of the aesthetic judgment acts as an original compact, binding subjects together in society through their role as judging spectators.<sup>117</sup>

112. Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” in White Beck, 9. Thinking for oneself is crucial for Kant in general, but it is also important for aesthetic judgment. As Kant writes in sec. 32 of the third *Critique*, the judgment of taste must be autonomous, for to make the taste of others the determining grounds of one’s own taste would be heteronomy. Kant’s claim does not simply point to the importance of the autonomy of the subject for him, it also demonstrates why taste may be not coercive but only consensual. And yet in making a judgment of taste, the subject is undoubtedly affected by the norms of taste of his society. These form a background for judgment and so help foster the consensus of aesthetic judgment. Although Kant notes the role of society in aesthetic judgment, he nevertheless insists on the complete autonomy of the subject, and in so doing greatly undermines the role of normativity. Bearing this in mind, we should recognize then that while the Kantian subject is inner-directed, guided as he is by the “moral law within,” he is nonetheless, as a member of society, directed toward tradition. In his philosophical work of 1887 *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche offers a critique of the tradition-directed subject, one he disparages as passively led by the “morality of mores”; Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York, 1969. Although we cannot explore it in detail here, it would be useful to consider aesthetic judgment as what Clifford Geertz calls a “cultural artifact,” and culture itself as a “set of symbolic devices for controlling behavior”; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, 1973, esp. 51–52.

113. Arendt translates *allgemeine Standpunkt* as general standpoint. See Arendt, 71 and n. 155. I have chosen the more customary translation of universal standpoint, for I believe Kant makes such a claim in his third *Critique*. The faculty of the enlarged mentality, so dear to Kant, would, in an ideally

What Kant terms in this instance the original compact is a judgment that defines humanity in sociability and binds it through taste. Because the aesthetic object is defined through the communication of it, the importance of the aesthetic object increases as the scope of its communicability widens.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, doubtless, in the beginning only those things which attracted the senses, e.g. colors for painting oneself (roucou among the Caribs and cinnabar among the Iroquois), flowers, mussel shells, beautiful feathers, etc.—but in time beautiful forms also (e.g. in their canoes, and clothes, etc.), which bring with them no gratification or satisfaction of enjoyment—were important in society and were combined with great interest. Until at last civilization, having reached its highest point, makes out of this almost the main business of refined inclination, and sensations are only regarded as of worth in so far as they can be universally communicated. Here, although the pleasure which everyone has in such an object is inconsiderable [that is, so long as he does not share it]<sup>119</sup> and in itself without any marked interest, yet the idea of its universal communicability increases its worth in an almost infinite degree. (p. 139)

While this sense is purportedly founded on a *sensus communis*, an internal sense common to all, in the above passage Kant makes clear that it is not developed to the same degree in every subject. Writing from the vantage point of civilized society, and with a more highly evolved *sensus communis*, Kant charts a history of aesthetic judgment at the same time that he argues for the universality of the *sensus communis*. Because the aesthetic has its own history, aesthetic judgments never really take the viewpoint of all others into account. Rather, Kantian judgment considers only the viewpoint of subjects similarly defined, that is, only those with whom one can communicate. Those with whom one cannot communicate are, so it appears,

extended state—that is, in theory—provide the subject with the point of view of the *Weltbetrachter*. According to Kant, such a position involves exercise. Or, to use Arendt’s felicitous phrase (43), “To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one’s imagination to go visiting.” In practice, however, the universal standpoint can be only a general one, a point I shall come to in a moment.

114. Kant, 1951, 75–76. Though Kant claims that judgment may be not coercive but only consensual, we are provided with a glimpse of how aesthetic judgment may nevertheless become coercive. For, as Kant writes in the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” 47, there must be a common taste, otherwise a universal aesthetic judgment could not exist: “Many things may have for him charm and pleasantness—no one troubles himself at that—but if he gives out anything as beautiful, he supposes in others the same satisfaction; he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says ‘the thing is beautiful’; and he does not count on the agreement of others with this his judgment of satisfaction, because he has found this agreement several times before, but he *demand*s it of them. He blames them if they judge otherwise and he denies them taste, which he nevertheless requires from them. Here, then, we cannot say that each man has his own particular taste. For this would be as much as to say that there is no taste whatever, i.e. no aesthetic judgment which can make a rightful claim upon everyone’s assent.”

115. Arendt, 44. Arendt contrasts Kant’s *Weltbetrachter* with the world citizen, for though “Kant does tell one how to take the others into account; he does not tell one how to combine with them in order to act.” Here we are reminded again of the antinomy in Kant’s system between the history of reason and empirical history.

either not considered at all or considered, yet distinguished, from the community of one's own aesthetic kin.<sup>120</sup>

Here it is useful to remember that Kant's third *Critique* was originally called the *Critique of Taste*. Because the universal standpoint of judgment takes the viewpoint of others into account, it involves a process in which egoism is overcome. And yet, historically speaking, taste has not been wholly disinterested; it has become normative through the passage of time. Instead of serving as a great leveler, Kantian judgment—the judgment of taste—becomes through time the great divider, as the aesthetic itself becomes a distinct sphere and a sphere of distinction.

In terms of the writing of history, Kant notes characteristically, "Only a learned public, which has lasted from its beginning to our own day, can certify ancient history. Outside it, everything else is terra incognita; and the history of peoples outside it can only be begun when they come into contact with it."<sup>121</sup> "Peoples outside" are, not surprisingly, those outside European civilization. To begin with, these peoples—the Caribs and the Iroquois among them—have no history before they come into contact with "civilized" society.<sup>122</sup> In addition, as the above passage demonstrates, they are characterized by a lower form of civilization, one in which "things which attracted the senses," or "in time beautiful forms also" constitute the aesthetic. While these societies may hold the beautiful as an aesthetic category, it would seem that they do not yet possess the sublime.

The subject of Kant's critical enterprise is not only reasonable, he is unabashedly European. If the purpose of Enlightenment is to release man from his "self-incurred tutelage," then that of enlightened European man is to bring those existing outside European civilization into "history" through colonization. Kant does not acknowledge the patrimony of his subject. Rather, he declares him a "universal" subject, a *Weltbetrachter*. Kant's Eurocentrism, however, must be acknowledged so that we may ask, along with Tsenay Serequeberhan, "whose humanity is at stake in Kant's writings?"<sup>123</sup> Kant's humanity

embraces European citizens and especially values those with full control of their internal nature and of the natural world. On the other hand, the humanity of non-European peoples is frequently negated in Kant's writings. The best Kant offers these "others" is the chance for humanity, and so for inclusion, through colonization.

If Kant contends that it is only in society where we can develop our morality, it follows that it is only in "civilized" society where we may find the sublime. The judging spectator, that quintessentially enlightened subject, is also the subject of the sublime. Fully detached from the fray, the judging spectator uses solely the faculty of his own reason to understand and change the world.<sup>124</sup> Because this reasonable subject is not an actor but a spectator, his task is communication rather than direct action, and so judgment is his most important attribute. Judgment, defined as the faculty of reason working in society, is said to further the moral feeling of the subject, and so to lead society toward the moral end. In this way, the idealized subject of aesthetic judgment merges with the Kantian subject of history, for both move toward the same goal over the *longue durée*.

For Kant, the work toward freedom and morality was primarily a philosophical or intellectual pursuit, although one that could and would, he believed, eventually effect change in society. In the German land of poets and thinkers he was celebrated for providing the "Copernican revolution" in philosophy, an intellectual revolution that Heinrich Heine esteemed as analogous to the material revolution in France.<sup>125</sup> Kant's subject of history may move closer to pure reason in the mental (*geistige*) realm, yet he is restrained—if not rendered impuissant—in the political realm. The destructive consequences of such a subject for German political history become all too apparent when we consider the Nazi architect Albert Speer's theory of ruin-value.<sup>126</sup> Speer purposely planned his buildings so that they would become picturesque ruins throughout the course of the thousand-year reich, an act of hubris that assumed that the Germans citizens would not rise

116. Kant, 1951, 286. The maxim of reason binds the subject to his own internal will and thus to the categorical imperative.

117. Compare Kant's notion of the judging spectator as one defined through communication, and thus in community, with Samuel Coleridge's judgment of William Wordsworth as *Spectator ab extra*, or "isolated spectator rather than as member of community," in McFarland (as in n. 22), 145.

118. Just as sociability is both origin and end point for Kant, reason "is not made 'to isolate itself but to get into community with others'" (Arendt, 40).

119. This is Arendt's useful emendation.

120. At this point the universal standpoint becomes Arendt's general standpoint, though she would not have considered it in this way.

121. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," in White Beck, 24 n. 7.

122. In *The Philosophy of History*, trans. James Sibree, New York, 1956, 98–99, Hegel makes a similar point about Africa. The view of Africa as a continent without memory and history receives its just critique in V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington, Ind., 1988. See also the important essay by Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man* (1959), trans. Elizabeth Wentholt, Middletown, Conn., 1988.

123. Tsenay Serequeberhan, "Eurocentrism in Philosophy: The Case of Immanuel Kant," *Philosophical Forum*, xxvii, no. 4, Summer 1996, 333–56. Kant's Eurocentrism is most painfully apparent in the last major work he wrote and edited, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell, Carbondale, Ill., 1978. See also Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Anthropology and the German Enlightenment: Perspectives on Humanity*, *Bucknell Review*, xxxviii,

no. 2, ed. Katherine M. Faull, Lewisburg, Pa., 1995, 200–41; and idem, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Oxford, 1997.

124. In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Iris Murdoch vividly remarks on the persistence of this Kantian subject: "How recognizable, how familiar to us is the man so beautifully portrayed in the *Grundlegung*, who confronted even with Christ turns away to consider the judgment of his own conscience and to hear the voice of his own reason. Stripped of the exiguous metaphysical background which Kant was prepared to allow him, this man is with us still, free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many novels and books of moral philosophy"; Murdoch, quoted in Taylor (as in n. 59), 84.

125. Heinrich Heine, "Concerning the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany" (1830s), in *Heinrich Heine: The Romantic School and Other Essays*, ed. Jost Hermand and Robert Holub, New York, 1985, 200. Heine's analogy demonstrates how German cultural identity was conceived at this time in relation to the modernity of the French Revolution. While France may have had its material revolution, Hegel, Heine, and Marx claimed an intellectual revolution for Germany, thereby supporting a notion of German modernity commensurate with the land of poets and thinkers, as well as a definition of German subjectivity predicated on inwardness. On this point, see Mah (as in n. 93).

126. On Speer's theory of ruin-value, see Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (1969), trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, New York, 1970, 65–66; and Angela Schönberger, "Die Staatsbauten des Tausendjährigen Reiches als vorprogrammierte Ruinen? Zu Albert Speers Ruinenwerttheorie," *Idea: Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle*, vi, 1987, 97–107.

up and destroy these monuments of “dark despotism,” as the French patriots had earlier done to the Bastille.<sup>127</sup>

### The Idealized Subject of Art History

The bridges of the Greeks. We have inherited them but we do not know how to use them. We thought they were intended to have houses built upon them. We have erected skyscrapers on them to which we ceaselessly add stories. We no longer know that they are bridges, things made so that we may pass along them. . . .—Simone Weil, “Metaxu,” 1947<sup>128</sup>

Twenty-six years before embarking on the critical project of the first critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781, Kant penned his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*. In this early work the young Kant sensitively describes how “the contemplation of a starry heaven on a pleasant night affords a kind of enjoyment which is felt only by noble souls. Out of the universal stillness of Nature and the repose of the senses, the immortal soul’s secret capacity for knowledge speaks an unnamed language and gives us implicit concepts which can be felt but not described.”<sup>129</sup> While the juvenile Kant was moved on communion with nature by “concepts which can be felt but not described,” the august philosopher of the critiques was driven—to use the telling words of his biographer—by the imperative “need to translate the unnameable language of feeling into the precise and clear tongue of the understanding, and to make the ‘secret capacity for knowledge’ itself manifest and lucid.”<sup>130</sup>

Consider the unfinished Temple of Philosophy at Ermenonville, modeled after the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli and built by the marquis de Girardin in about 1775 (Fig. 11).<sup>131</sup> A Latin inscription over the doorway to the temple, a quote from Virgil, urges those who enter “to understand the true nature of things.” The unfinished state of the temple symbolizes such a pursuit of knowledge. Unlike this artificial ruin, which memorializes at once the fragmentary nature of life and thought as well as a hopeful idea of progress, Kant was not

content with mere feeling or fragmentation.<sup>132</sup> In his own philosophy Kant offers us a *Lehrgebäude*, a completed edifice of systematic thought in which the subject plays an essential role.

It is the idealized subject who makes the passage between the worlds of nature and morality and understanding and freedom, and in this way secures the architectonic of Kant’s philosophical *Lehrgebäude*. While Kant clearly champions an idealized subjectivity, he nevertheless indicates how both nature and reason reside at the foundations of the subject. This being the case, if we peer deeper into the Kantian *Lehrgebäude*, we may well find an unsteady architectonic construction. We may discover that, contrary to what the philosopher had claimed for them, aesthetic judgment and the subject of his philosophy of history offer not so much a bridge, or *Brücke*, as the figurative sense connoted in the German word *Brückenschlag*, a rope bridge thrown across a conceptual divide, allowing tenuous linkage from one side to another. In Kant’s philosophical enterprise, however, it is assumed that an idealized subject will form a bridge rather than rely on a makeshift structure, thereby securing the edifice of his philosophical *Lehrgebäude*.

It is precisely this idealized, and mistaken, Kantian subject that is our inheritance in the discipline of art history.<sup>133</sup> Our discipline hinges on cultivated “noble souls” who can feel and also describe, who are not simply disinterested but wholly detached from bodily experience. Like his Kantian counterpart, the judging spectator of art history—once aptly described as the connoisseur—is neither embodied nor temporal. The class connotations and European complexion of this reasonable humanist subject are obvious, though until very recently they have been left unspoken.<sup>134</sup>

If Kant laid out the conditions of the possibility of judgment, Pierre Bourdieu has recently examined the social conditions of the possibility of aesthetic judgment, as well as of an ahistorical essence, or pure aesthetic. While not naming him, Bourdieu captures the logic of the judgment of the

127. Kant, of course, never considered the possibility of totalitarianism. According to him, evil would eventually destroy itself since by definition it must remain hidden. When evil makes its appearance on the public stage, it cannot stand up to the public, which for Kant represents the common interest as well as the force of enlightened opinion. Kant did not envision a time when the common interest itself would become perverted, as it did under German fascism. In this sense, as Hannah Arendt writes in “Understanding and Politics” (*Partisan Review*, xx, no. 4, July–Aug. 1953, 388), “For those engaged in the quest for meaning and understanding, what is frightening in the rise of totalitarianism is not that it is something new, but that it has brought to light the ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgment.” This ruin of the categories of thought, and hence collapse of the faculty of judgment, is poignantly memorialized in Arendt’s treatment of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York, 1963. In “Arendt’s Construct of the Political,” *New German Critique*, no. 50, Spring–Summer 1990, 21–39, Dagmar Barnouw notes how in her study of Eichmann (and, I would add, in her earlier biography of Rahel Varnhagen), Arendt puts herself in the place of the protagonist, thus exemplifying the Kantian idea of “enlarged mentality.” It is from this place that she comes to judgment, and it is precisely this act that made her treatment of Eichmann incomprehensible to some of her detractors, who claimed that her study “concentrated emotional and intellectual energy on the act of showing, not on the act of suffering” (24).

128. Simone Weil, “Metaxu,” in *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas, New York, 1977, 364. Weil here refers to the Platonic *metaxu*, which are bridges, or intermediaries, between temporal becoming and the fullness of being.

129. Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755), quoted in Cassirer, 56.

130. Cassirer, 56–57. This compulsive quest continued in Germany through the course of the following century, as the realm of the mind itself became scientific. The spirit of this enterprise is registered in the words of Wilhelm Dilthey, who declared in his book of 1894, *Die geistige Welt: Emlertung in die Philosophie des Lebens* (Stuttgart, 1957, 144), “We explain nature, we apprehend the life of the mind.” While nature (*die Natur*) and the life of the mind (*das Seelenleben*) constituted separate disciplinary branches, and thus required different analytical methods, even the newest inquiry into the *Seelenleben*, that of psychology, was believed capable of producing results as rigorously scientific as those of the natural sciences. On this trend, see Hermann Lübbe, “Die Einheit von Naturgeschichte und Kulturgeschichte: Bemerkung zum Geschichtsbegriff,” *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur*, no. 10, 1981, 3–19; and Rudiger vom Bruch, Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, and Gangolf Hübner, eds., *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaft um 1900: Krise der Moderne und Glaube an die Wissenschaft*, Stuttgart, 1989. To extend this inquiry further, it would be useful to analyze the conceptual history of *Kulturgeschichte* versus *Kunstwissenschaft* for what this may tell us about the genealogy of our art historical inheritance and its lingering pursuit of a unitary meaning in works of art that can only be described as scientific in spirit.

131. It is interesting to compare this artificial ruin with Hubert Robert’s highly romantic painting “Temple of Philosophy” at Ermenonville, in Hubert Burda, *Die Ruine in den Bildern Hubert Roberts*, Munich, 1967, p. 1. 58.

132. Harries (as in n. 22), 92, cites the Temple of Philosophy in Ermenonville as the antithesis of the “satiric vision of the present in the Temple of

connoisseur, a judgment that slides rather easily into normativity:

The pure thinker, by taking as the subject of his reflection his own experience—the experience of a cultured person from a certain social milieu—but without focusing on the historicity of his reflection and the historicity of the object to which it is applied (and by considering it a pure experience of the work of art), unwittingly establishes this singular experience as a transhistorical norm for every aesthetic perception.<sup>135</sup>

While this humanist subject has always had a gender, he has historically been a reasonable rather than a carnal subject, one distinguished by the eye rather than the hand, by the intellect rather than the senses. As the aesthetic itself is predicated on a material exclusion, so the judging spectator of art history has historically been characterized through a bodily renunciation, one that has afforded ample space to the role of reason in aesthetic judgment.<sup>136</sup>

Indeed, a mistakenly idealized notion of the Kantian subject has been fundamental to the discipline of art history. In his influential essay of 1940 “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” Erwin Panofsky asks, “How, then, is it possible to build up art history as a respectable discipline, if its very objects come into being by an irrational process?”<sup>137</sup> The answer, so we learn, lies not only in the elevation of the status of the art object and in a sufficiently scientific practice for its study, but also in the importance accorded to the role of the subject.<sup>138</sup> For the latter, we may look back to Kant, who, at the end of the eighteenth century, provided the beginnings of a resolution to this dilemma by making beauty a symbol of morality and the experience of the sublime one of discovery of “a higher purposiveness.” Drained of any “irrationality,” the aesthetic object was used by Kant to further the discovery of an attitude of mind resembling the moral by the means of the aesthetic experience. As we have seen, the subject of this experience is none other than the Kantian *Weltbaumeister*, a



11 Unfinished Temple of Philosophy, Ermenonville, ca. 1775 (from Oswald Sirén, *China and the Gardens of Europe in the 18th Century*, New York, 1950, pl. 85)

subject from whom all undercurrents of “irrationality” have likewise been suppressed.

Once presented, this idealized notion of the subject, and of the art object and its revered status, became established through repetition such that both the subject and the object

Modern Virtue at Stowe.” Harries argues that the classical forms of the work in Ermenonville, unlike the artificial ruin at Stowe, “echo the Temple of Ancient Virtue instead; its program suggests progress rather than decay, hope rather than despair.” After all, one of the mottoes on the monument is *Qui l’achevéra* (Who will finish it?). I agree with Harries’s hopeful reading of the Temple of Philosophy. While one could argue that Kant was in accord with such an idea of human progress, my point is that in his philosophy he offers not an unfinished temple but rather a completed edifice of thought.

133. In this concluding section I offer in very broad brush an argument that will be delineated in a subsequent publication. This forthcoming study will provide a historiographic review that will focus on how Kantian notions of subjectivity and the sublime have been incorporated into, and have shaped, the history of art. I will also address the relation of these Kantian notions to postmodern thought. Conjecturing the absence of ruins in Kant’s third *Critique*, and examining the philosopher’s construction of an idealized subject within the context of his own time, the present essay therefore provides the necessary beginnings of a larger project.

134. For a critique of the class connotations of the Kantian subject of aesthetic judgment, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, Mass., 1984. See also Carol Duncan, “Teaching the Rich,” in *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, Cambridge, 1993, 135–42; and Craig Owens, “Representation, Appropriation, and Power,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson et al., Berkeley, 1992, 88–113. Recent critiques of the “noble” subject appear to float over the disciplinary terrain of art history like the admonitory strains of a Greek chorus, and so alert the audience to ulterior meaning without their revelations having any real effect on the play being

performed.

135. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Historical Genesis of the Pure Aesthetic,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XLVI, 1987, 202. Tom Huhn rightly questions the novelty of Bourdieu’s claims in his review in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, LIV, 1996, 88–90. See also Tony Bennett, “Really Useless ‘Knowledge’: A Political Critique of Aesthetics,” *Literature and History*, XIII, no. 1, Spring 1987, 38–57.

136. In this context it is interesting to consider Richard Wollheim’s recent remarks (“Painting with Words,” *New York Times Book Review*, Jan. 7, 1996, 9) on *Diderot on Art*, two volumes of Diderot’s art criticism, edited and translated by John Goodman for Yale University Press, 1996. Wollheim informs us that on account of the “theoretical,” humorless, and “dour impersonality” of contemporary criticism, he found it “impossible to read the two volumes under review without being overcome with how much they have to offer us now.” He concludes, “What Diderot shows us is that criticism of a physical art like painting has something to tell us only so long as it retains its connection with the spontaneous reactions of the eye, the body, the mind.”

137. Erwin Panofsky, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Chicago, 1982, 16.

138. On the “self-evidence” of the status of the art object for Panofsky and the implications of this assumption for the discipline of art history and its canon, see Keith Moxey, “Motivating History,” *Art Bulletin*, LXXVII, no. 3, Sept. 1995, 392–401. As Moxey writes (397), “The principle of self-evidence is a profoundly conservative one, dedicated to the support of the status quo and ideally suited to the task of providing art history with ‘scientific’ respectability.”



12 Edward Steichen, *Isadora Duncan at the Portal of the Parthenon*, 1921, photograph. New York, Museum of Modern Art. Gift of the photographer (Reprinted with permission of Joanna T. Steichen)

became naturalized as unexamined (and unexaminable) facts within the space of the art historical discipline. It is through the mechanisms of disciplinarity and institutionalization that a mistakenly idealized Kantian subject has generalized and congealed into the idealized Kantian subject of the discipline of art history. The idealized subject of art history is no longer the single producer or consumer of art, but what Bourdieu aptly describes as “the entire set of agents engaged in the field.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, the idealized subject of art history is not so much a person as a framework, one within which and by which judgments are made in the history of art and on the objects of its study. Like its Kantian counterpart, the idealized subject of art history is inherently rational: serving as a normative framework, this “subject” also claims a judgment that is both disinterested and universal.

We would do well to remember, however, that the Kantian subject is actually one divided between nature and morality and understanding and reason.<sup>140</sup> Yet, as Kant would have it, reason and morality, those favored realms and necessary endpoints, constitute the “freedom” of the subject of Kant’s aesthetic theory and philosophy of history. The totalizing nature of this bias toward reason—of this trajectory toward freedom defined in and through reason—has worked historically to foreclose other aspects of the subject in advance. The idealized Kantian subject is a self overcome, a subject subjected to the kind of self-mastery necessary for disinterested, “objective” evaluation.<sup>141</sup> While the contours of this subject are clearly bounded, an unidealized subject would be one marked by what Charles Taylor has described as a more richly varied “topography of the self.”<sup>142</sup>

Rather than close on the idealized Kantian subject, let us therefore conclude by opening out the possibilities of an unidealized Kantian subject, a subject conceived somewhere between the ruin of Ensor’s imaginative projection and the immortal glow of Goethe’s intact self-presentation. In doing so, let us consider a photograph of Isadora Duncan dancing among the ruins of the Acropolis, as captured by Edward Steichen in 1921 (Fig. 12). Like the dancer, so, too, would an unidealized Kantian subject be unbound from the totalizing “freedom” of pure reason and set loose to roam in spaces where fragments collide and decay, to wander through the realms of nature and morality, understanding and freedom, with no particular destination in mind. Like the idealized Kantian subject, however, so, too, would the roaming subject

be halted and enframed, either by his own judgment or by that of another: once bounding among the ruins, now, through the act of (the camera’s) judgment, bound by the frame of reason, to come, in time, to celebrate the frame itself.

We here conclude with none other than the allegory of the idealized Kantian subject. While the philosopher fixed his subject in reason and morality, thereby arresting the dance of the instincts and desires, this idealized notion of his subject, when deployed in the discipline of art history, achieves a similar effect. Perhaps we cannot yet break the chains anchoring all the unexamined assumptions of the idealized Kantian subject and its counterpart in the disciplinary practice of the history of art. But as Nietzsche evocatively described in one of his aphorisms, we can dance in these chains and so shake up the dust a bit, if not unsettle the foundation. Indeed, it is only when we unmask the Kantian subject that we will discover the foundational premises on which it is conceived, and only when we do not—as yet—force a definition of an unidealized Kantian subject that we will leave open the possibilities with which a rereading of Kant will provide us.

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139. Bourdieu (as in n. 135), 205.

140. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche (as in n. 112) recognized this, describing the coming “to reason” of the subject as a cruel process (62). He rallies the philosophers of the future (119): “Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a ‘pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject.’”

141. For an interesting examination of the history of mechanical objectivity and its eventual fusion with metaphysical and aperspectival objectivity, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations*, XLIX, Fall 1992, 81–128. What Daston and Galison define (123) as metaphysical objectivity, which “makes objectivity synonymous with truth,” and aperspectival objectivity, which “identifies objectivity with the escape from any and all perspectives,” are certainly to be found in our own discipline. On the specific problems of objectivity for art history, see David Carrier, “Erwin Panofsky, Leo Steinberg, David Carrier: The Problem of Objectivity in Art

Historical Interpretation,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XLVII, no. 4, Fall 1989, 333–47; Moxey (as in n. 138); and Leo Steinberg, “Objectivity and the Shrinking Self,” *Daedalus*, xcvi, no. 3, Summer 1969, 824–36.

142. Charles Taylor, “The Moral Topography of the Self,” in *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, ed. Stanley Messer, Louis Sass, and Robert Woolfolk, New Brunswick, N.J., 1988, 298–320. In arguing for an unidealized Kantian subject, I am certainly not therefore advocating a gesture that would negate or repudiate the subject altogether. Rather, in pointing out how the Kantian subject is itself divided, I am not simply pointing to an antinomy in Kant’s own system. (And one that would need to be addressed in a longer study, especially as it is the subject who is to bridge this antinomy, though how this is to be effected remains a point of tension in Kantian philosophy, resolved only subsequently by the Hegelian dialectic.) I am also interrogating the foundational premises of the Kantian subject, which have been obscured through an idealized reading of it.