

## The Voice of Critique: Aesthetic Cognition after Kant

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The following, somewhat speculative remarks constitute part of a larger project concerned with the historical transformation of something frequently called "interiority" throughout the nineteenth century. Specifically, my aim is to explore how interiority during that period pivots on two fundamentally distinct models of aesthetic experience and, implicit in them, two opposed theories of aesthetic response. As I intend to show in some detail, the dynamics of interiority are dialectically bound up with the operation of aesthetic form, perhaps nowhere more so than in German culture during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Lyric poetry is often regarded as the privileged vehicle for expressing an inalienable subjective state. Yet what is expressed must also be communicated; hence quite commonly we also experience voice, even

<sup>1</sup> The literature on the historical and sociological aspects of an aesthetically conceived interiority in nineteenth-century Germany is abundant. Especially rich on the sociological structure of Germany during the pre-1848 revolutionary period known as *Vormärz* is Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 3 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1996), esp. in his account of the defensive constitution of the urban middle classes and of the origins of the bourgeoisie (2:174-240) and in his discussion of the expansion of the sphere of literary production (2:520-46). See also Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800-1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich: Beck, 1994), esp. his survey of social stratification and minorities (219-70) and of religious and cultural identity formation (403-593). See also James J. Sheehan, *German History, 1770-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 324-87, 451-587; and

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in the lyric, as something social and iterable. Figuratively speaking (and there really is no other way to speak about it), voice may be understood as a formal halfway house between a basic propositional or expressive content and the exigency of a socially valid form. Voice is then the specific form required by the balancing of individual against universal values.

To the logician, voice appears to be a paradox, whereas the rhetorician is likely to ponder its persistent oscillation between the inalienable status of the name and the as yet unrealized authority of the concept. However justified the skepticism of each, the position of neither quite addresses the most salient characteristic of voice. For in aiming to reconcile, even provisionally, the experience of a deep interiority with an articulation of its social significance, voice itself manifests a unique form of desire. It is what Kant terms a "postulate," a notion that entwines materiality and cognitive potential and that attempts to redraw the boundaries between subjective intuition and the discursive, public sphere.<sup>2</sup> However plausible it may be to charac-

Jürgen Kocka's extensive edition of more specialized research on nineteenth-century bourgeois culture. *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1985-94), esp. Reinhart Koselleck, "Zur anthropologischen und semantischen Struktur der Bildung," 2:11-46; Kocka, "Bildungsbürgertum—Gesellschaftliche Formation oder Historikerkonstrukt?" 4:9-35; and Dieter Langewiesche, "Bildungsbürgertum und Liberalismus im 19. Jahrhundert," 4:95-113.

<sup>2</sup>Speaking of morality in the finite world as a matter of "infinite progress," Kant notes that the latter notion rests on a further hypothesis, that of the immortality of the soul. Such a hypothesis, "inasmuch as it is inextricably linked to the moral law, constitutes a postulate of pure practical reason. The latter I define as a theoretical proposition, however incapable of proof, that is inseparably connected to the a priori valid practical law" [*also ist das höchste Gut, praktisch nur unter der Voraussetzung der Unsterblichkeit der Seele möglich; mithin diese, als unzertrennlich mit dem moralischen Gesetz verbunden, ein Postulat der reinen praktischen Vernunft (worumter ich einen theoretischen, als solchen aber nicht erweislichen Satz verstehe, so fern er einem a priori unbedingt geltenden praktischen Gesetze unzertrennlich anhängt*] (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, in *Werkausgabe*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, 12 vols. [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968], 7:252-3). Translation mine.

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terize voice as an outright paradox or as an irreducible trope, the very urgency and concentration with which it manifests itself as an articulate and sustained form give evidence that what is negotiated is always values rather than abstractions.

One nineteenth-century view, rooted in late-eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, presumes a categorical divide between aesthetic affect and a postlapsarian consciousness of the discursive world as a welter of discrete, often incompatible interests. The contrasting paradigm postulates a homology of the work of art's formal composition with its beholding intelligence. In this view, aesthetic experience inheres in a dynamic interaction between the work's progressively more complex and reflexive morphological units and the associated protoconscious, disinterested pleasure. The question at issue concerns the relation between the form of the aesthetic and the possibility of giving articulation to its experience: in short, the proposition of criticism as an official discourse/discipline of pleasure. Of seminal importance for so-called political readings of romanticism, as well as for the recent, intense debate over new hermeneutic developments in musicology (to name only two discourses), the question may also be formulated thus: Is the telos of aesthetic pleasure that of its critical articulation, its redemption by some kind of discursive intelligence?<sup>3</sup> If so, does the pleasure that is held discursively accountable merely constitute the object of the critical practice involved? Or does it effectively prepare the ground for the subject's epistemological authority? Does pleasure remain inaccessible to the claims and purposes of discourse and signification? Or, conversely, does it conceal from the very subject caught

<sup>3</sup> On political readings of romanticism, specifically, critiques of that period's widely noted tendency to encode ideological values in aesthetic forms, see Marjorie Levinson, introduction to *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1–13; and Alan Liu, "The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism," *ELH* 56 (1989): 721–71. On the conceptual tensions of romantic historicism see my *Wordsworth's Profession: Form, Class, and the Logic of Early Romantic Cultural Production* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 120–4, 247–68; and my "Reading beyond Redemption," in *Lessons of Romanticism: A Critical Companion*, ed. Thomas Pfau and Robert F. Gleckner (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 1–37. On the "new musicology" see Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1–32 and passim; and Kramer, "Tropes and Windows: An Outline of Musical Hermeneutics," in *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1–20.

up in (and consumed by) its experience the critical and social values that so vicariously flow from its experience? Finally, is the (belated) articulation of aesthetic experience, what we call criticism, strictly the other of pleasure, or is it but a more surreptitious strategy for partaking of that pleasure, namely, by continually professing to be on the other side of it (in the manner of Nietzsche's ascetic priest)?

Long before (and ever since) William Wimsatt's theory of a bipolar interpretive disorder of imitative and periphrastic fallacies, criticism had to confront these kinds of questions and, implicit in them, those of its own epistemological and institutional legitimacy. While such concerns are hardly novel, it may be that every generation must redefine the basic relation between the forms of pleasure and the objectives of criticism. To reflect on such matters is to involve oneself in a genealogy of critical thought that seeks to name the historical moment when pleasure became a constitutive and official problem for philosophical aesthetics and its subsidiary critical disciplines (e.g., poetics, compositional theory, and musical aesthetics). Once the point has been identified at which the idea of interiority became inextricably linked to a particular aesthetic paradigm (and thereby detached from older, overtly religious models of inwardness), other issues arise. We may then consider, for example, how aesthetic production itself began to respond to, or build on, the growing institutional authority of aesthetic criticism.<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, the authority and the boundaries of the critical reexamination here proposed are likely to remain uncertain. Indeed, we may be forced to conclude that critical thought, whether conceived of as overcoming the aesthetic or as reaffirming its unimpeachable integrity, can never amount to more than a self-referential and self-confirming pursuit. Either criticism yields a type of knowledge likely to be perceived as incommunicable, unintelligible, and potentially irrelevant, or it cultivates a propositional style destined to fall short of aesthetic experiences, notwithstanding its insistence on their merely proto-articulate character. The opposing paradigms entail curiously similar theoretical consequences.

<sup>4</sup>In the context of mid-nineteenth-century German literature, some of these questions have been considered by Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "The Institutionalization of Literature and Criticism," in *Building a National Literature: The Case of Germany, 1830-1870*, trans. Renate Baron Franciscano (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 104-39.

The teleological conception of the aesthetic as proto-articulate is key here. For it simultaneously opens up the two paradigms of the aesthetic that I outlined above: its eventual redemption by criticism and the alternative possibility that critical intelligence, judgment, and cognition might be constrained by the irreducibly contingent grain of the voice that utters them. Both historically and conceptually, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) is the key text for any attempt to determine the basic coordinates of these concerns. As Kant argues, the larger significance of aesthetic judgment inheres in its overall application to "cognition in general," as well as in its performativity as a distinctive type of utterance. By contrast, the propositional specificity and force of aesthetic judgments appear slight at best. For "in the judgment of taste nothing is postulated but . . . a universal voice [*allgemeine Stimme*], in respect of the satisfaction without the intervention of concepts, and thus the possibility of an aesthetic judgment that can . . . be regarded as valid for everyone."<sup>5</sup> The pleasure that attaches to aesthetic judgment is not the cause of it, for as such it would be purely sensual enjoyment. Rather, it is a pleasure growing out of the subject's reflexive understanding that its own "subjective condition" [*subjektive Bestimmung*] at the moment of aesthetic experience amounts to something "universally communicable" [*allgemein mitteilungs-fähig*]. The "proportionate accord" [*proportionierte Stimmung*] between the discrete faculties of cognition, Kant argues, constitutes both the cause and the substance of the aesthetic-reflective judgment (9.54). At its most general, all "cognition" [*Erkenntnis*] can thus be characterized as a way of being attuned to discrete phenomena, such that their contemplation will gradually "determine" [*bestimmen*] the subject via its affective experience of a "concord" [*Übereinstimmung*] or "conformity" [*Zusammenstimmung*] between the subject's sensory and discursive faculties: "The subjective universal communicability of the mode of representation in a judgment of taste . . . can refer to nothing else than the state of mind in the free play of the imagination and the understanding (so far as they agree with each other [*zusammen stimmen*], as is requisite for cognition in general)" (9.52). For Kant, that is, the concept of pleasure

<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), 8.50. All references to this text are to section and page numbers.

stands for the manifestation of cognitive potentialities at the level of affect. Harkening back to Leibniz's "monads," the aesthetic is conceived as an encryption of the very intelligence that will constitute itself through its interpretive discernment.<sup>6</sup> Yet Kant insists on the strict heterogeneity of the two faculties (viz., imagination and understanding) said to circumscribe any knowledge whatsoever, including all knowledge of self. Consequently, "th[is] subjective unity of relation" can never be objectified by consciousness as such but, instead, "can only make itself known by means of sensation [*Empfindung*]" (9:53).

With this assertion, however, the *Critique of Judgment* performs an abrupt shift from the abstract, formal dynamic said to determine our feeling of the beautiful to an inherently empirical and material vocabulary of "sensation."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the text's metonymic slippage from "feel-

<sup>6</sup>My conception of Kant's aesthetic form as a proto-articulate entity—or as the "encryption" of the discursive intelligence predicated on the "accord" [*Stimmung*] to which aesthetic experience gives rise—is echoed by Helmut Müller-Sievers. See his account of the epochal shift from theories of "preformation" to "epigenetic" accounts, especially his accounts of the epigenetic deduction of the "categories" in Kant's first *Critique* and in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, in *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature around 1800* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 44–64.

<sup>7</sup>On the uniquely convoluted relation between pleasure and judgment in section 9 of the *Critique of Judgment* see Stanley Corngold, *Complex Pleasure: Forms of Feeling in German Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 48–58; Jens Kulenkampff, *Kants Logik des ästhetischen Urteils* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1978), 81–6; Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 151–74; and Walter Biemel's still significant interpretation of the third *Critique*, *Die Bedeutung von Kants Begründung der Ästhetik für die Philosophie der Kunst* (Cologne: Kölner-Universitäts-Verlag, 1959), 122–34. Guyer's scrupulously developed thesis that in section 9 we witness a "confusion of the origin of aesthetic response with the condition of aesthetic judgment" (174; see also 152–5) ignores, in my view, the dynamic role of aesthetic judgment as a predicative, linguistic act. That is, we may need to stress the hortatory, indeed performative, character of the aesthetic judgment as generating, by means of its intrinsically positional rhetoric, a determinate, or at least a measurable, social effect. In other words, the value of "communicability" and, ultimately, of community is realized through the persistently self-justifying character of aesthetic predication. Thus, what stands to be inquired into is not a finally inscrutable, "logical" ground but the intrinsically dynamic and social activity of "grounding" communicability and community via discursive practice. Similarly, Kulenkampff views the Kantian aesthetic judgment as a type of linguistic proposition that is—by definition, as it were—not verifiable, because its very occurrence only establishes the affective, and hence strictly virtual, "ground" for the Enlightenment values of rational discourse and intersubjective verification.

ing” [*Gefühl*] to “sensation” [*Empfindung*] imperils the entire transcendental structure of the third *Critique*, and, not surprisingly, some readers have suggested that Kant’s argument (particularly his digression on music) exposes itself to an “intru[sion of] bodily pleasure into the space reserved for thought.”<sup>8</sup> At the very least, the conceptual rupture alerts us to empirical contingencies that lurk in Kant’s transcendental argumentation and, consequently, to the precarious balance of the “analytic of the beautiful.” Other evidence (as we have already noticed) involves the text’s often critical reliance on various cognates of “voice” [*Stimme*].<sup>9</sup>

What makes the shift from “feeling” to “sensation” so significant is the simple but crucial fact that all pleasure demands the materiality of sensation. Only then can it appear for the consciousness whose epistemic authority it underwrites. Speaking about an analogous crisis in Kant’s account of the sublime, Paul de Man goes so far as to characterize all transcendental discourse as a purely “topological system” wherein conceptual advances of any kind are “conceivable only within the lim-

<sup>8</sup> Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice*, 4. Carl Dahlhaus comments on how “the concept of sensation involves the confluence of sensory quality and affect” [*Im Begriff der “Empfindung” fließen Sinnesqualität und Gefühl ineinander*] (*Klassische und romantische Musikästhetik* [Laaber, Germany: Laaber, 1988], 295). Translation mine. See also Dahlhaus’s longer discussion of Kant’s remarks on musical aesthetics (49–55).

<sup>9</sup> Manfred Frank also remarks on the proto-articulate status of the aesthetic: “The purposiveness opened up by the judgment of taste is by definition only that of an *as if*. In the presence of the beautiful our situation resembles that of Siegfried listening to the bird in the forest: ‘I feel almost / as if the birds were speaking to me: / I distinctly seem to hear words.’ Even so, the ‘sweet stammering’ refuses (at least for now) to resolve itself into articulate words—into concepts—that is—and thus we are left with the *as if* of a significant utterance, the conditional anticipation of a *purpose* whose reality continues to elude us” [*Dagegen ist die dem Geschmacksurteil erschlossene Zweckmäßigkeit grundsätzlich nur die eines als ob. Uns geht es vor dem Schönen wie Siegfried vor dem Gesang des Waldvögels: “Ist mir doch fast— / als sprächen die Vögel zu mir: / deutlich dünken mich’s Worte!” (Richard Wagner, Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen, Leipzig, n.d., vol. 6, 139; s.a. 134–5). Das “süße Stammeln” will sich aber (wenigstens zunächst) in artikuliertete Worte—also in Begriffe, in Begreifliches—nicht auflösen, und so bleibt’s bei dem als ob einer sinnvollen Rede, der vorbehaltlichen Vorwegnahme eines Zwecks, dessen Realität sich entzieht!*] (*Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik: Vorlesungen* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989], 77). Translation mine. Citing a number of Kant’s *Reflexionen* (nos. 605, 288, 822, 712, and 715), Biemel has also remarked on the centrality of *Stimme* and its various cognates for a determination of “pleasure” [*Lust*] in Kant (126–7).

its of such a system." Yet once such tropologically conditioned insight is "translated back, so to speak, from language into cognition, from formal description into philosophical argument, it loses all inherent coherence and dissolves in the aporias of intellectual and sensory appearance." Given the sweeping nature of his conclusions, it is perhaps surprising that de Man should have never troubled himself to inquire whether a similar tropological strategy of generalization might also be at work in Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful."<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, there is reason to suspect Kant's transcendental argumentation of a pervasive debt to contingent empirical sensation. For inasmuch as the coherence of Kant's overall critical project depends on a unique feeling of pleasure, such feeling has to prolong itself in the realm of appearance. Put simply, such a realm of (supposedly) pure affect cannot simply be claimed as a theoretical fact, since the coherence of transcendental thought stands or falls with the hypothesis of "feeling," and that always means its potential detour through the social and material netherworld of appearance and representation. In short, pleasure has to manifest itself as an appearance at once philosophically pure and materially authentic. Linking the idea of pleasure to the politics of exile, Rousseau had already argued, in the fifth promenade of his *Reveries*, that pleasure rests on an uninterrupted (albeit contingent) empirical sensation:

<sup>10</sup> De Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," in *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 78. See also de Man's claim that "contrary to the beautiful, which at least appears to be all of a piece, the sublime is shot through with dialectical complication" (72). Specifically addressing Kant's formalist account of the aesthetic, and of music in particular, Kramer has expressed similar reservations about the restrictive nature of a transcendental knowledge that seems predicated on its incompatibility with linguistic signification (*Music as Cultural Practice*, 3-4). Kramer has since pursued the project of rethinking the rigorous formalist premises of much musicological argumentation and analysis, and he has done so to considerable acclaim. Perhaps as a result of his acutely programmatic approach, however, Kramer (among others) does not attend to Kant's far larger investment in developing a coherent account of epistemological and moral knowledge. To focus strictly on Kant's explicit references to the subject of music is thus to miss the far more subtle and wide-ranging suggestions, scattered throughout the third *Critique*, that all cognition is inherently practical, social, and therefore contingent on the polyvalence of the subject's voice and fundamental disposition [*Stimme/Stimmung*].

I would go sit in some hidden nook along the beach at the edge of the lake. There, the noise of the waves and the tossing of the water, captivating my senses and chasing all other disturbance from my soul, plunged it into a delightful reverie in which night would often surprise me without my having noticed it. The ebb and flow of this water and its noise, continual but magnified at intervals, striking my ears and eyes without respite, took the place of the internal movements which reverie extinguished within me and was enough to make me feel my existence with pleasure.<sup>11</sup>

Just as Rousseau contrasts “short moments of delirium and passion” with “a simple and permanent state . . . whose duration increases its charm to the point that I finally find supreme felicity in it” (68), Kant’s third *Critique* aims to configure the *punctum* of empirical sensation with the *durée* of an interior feeling. The result of this critical negotiation is a subject capable of “knowledge in general” [*Erkenntnis überhaupt*] or experience of what Rousseau famously calls “le sentiment de l’existence”—a state at once phenomenally distinct and transcendently pure.

It is important to note how the language that asserts the contingency of sentiment and pleasure on “a uniform and moderate movement which has neither shocks nor pauses” itself contributes to and prolongs the experience in question. Such uniformity manifests itself in “Rousseau’s evident satisfaction with his own language of analysis” (Sabin, 113). Similarly, Kant argues that “‘pure’ in a simple mode of sensation means that its uniformity is neither troubled nor interrupted by any foreign sensation, and it belongs merely to the form” (14.60; translation modified). Consequently, the representation of “knowledge” [*Vorstellung*] in Kant’s critical philosophy not only is founded on a basic “feeling of pleasure” but effectively attempts to extend that pleasure even where (as in the *Critique of Judgment*) it has been pro-

<sup>11</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, ed. and trans. Charles E. Butterworth (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 67. Margery Sabin’s characterization of “sentiment” in Rousseau’s *Reveries* strikingly anticipates the oscillation of Kantian *Gefühl* between a purely formal-transcendental and a phenomenal, material quality: “The word ‘sentiment’ . . . implies, as it did in the second *Discours*, both sensation and emotion, emotion reduced to the simplicity of sensation, and sensation as diffuse and pervasive as emotion” (*English Romanticism and the French Tradition* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976], 113).

posed as the object of critical reflection. Inasmuch as the virtual beauty of “harmony” and “proportion” that is said to prevail among the intellect’s discrete faculties is to prove vocal, audible, and lasting, the reflexive operation of critical writing is at least one way of producing that outcome. For the transcendental “disposition” [*Stimmung*] of our intellectual temper always strives to objectify itself through the formal-material continuity of a “voice” [*Stimme*].

What renders the trope of the voice so pivotal for Kant is its potential for establishing communication between two otherwise opposed spheres, the contingent world of appearances and their phenomenal experience, on the one hand, and the rational claims of formal-intellectual processes, on the other. With these concerns on his mind, Kant now supplements “voice” with the further hypothesis that aesthetic experience, far from being something ephemeral, is in essence “contemplative” and therefore invested in its own prolongation:

The pleasure in aesthetical judgments . . . is merely contemplative and does not bring about an interest in the object. . . . The consciousness of the mere formal purposiveness in the play of the subject’s cognition . . . is the pleasure itself, because it contains a determining ground [*Bestimmungsgrund*] of the activity of the subject in respect of the excitement of its cognitive powers, and therefore an inner causality. . . . This pleasure [of the aesthetic reflective judgment] is in no way practical, neither like that arising from the pathological ground of pleasantness, nor that from the intellectual ground of the presented good. But yet it involves causality, viz. of *maintaining* without further design the state of the representation itself and the occupation of the cognitive powers. We *linger* over the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself. (12.57–8; italics in the original)

To accommodate the almost instinctual desire of “pleasure” for self-perpetuation, “contemplation” seeks to recover from the spatiotemporal sphere of empirical sensation precisely those formal conditions that support Kant’s basic transcendental argument about “cognition in general” (viz., as resting on the proportionate interplay of the faculties). What Kant ultimately requires is the seeming paradox of a pure form that will become phenomenally distinct as empirical sensation: a “voice” untainted by the contingencies of interest, signification, and context. It is precisely this exigency that connects “voice” with “tone” and, finally, with music. For to the extent that the critical significance

of pleasure depends on its temporal duration, the “voice” that gave rise to it requires formalization.<sup>12</sup> That is, prolonged experience of pleasure is best realized in aesthetic forms of a particularly high degree of internal differentiation. For by reconstituting, in a specific medium, the basic “harmony” [*Stimmung*] that undergirds all critical activity, aesthetic form lends support to the mere postulate concerning the rationality of our representations: that they be internally consistent, verifiable, and communicable.

As it proclaims a basic continuum between the realm of pure form and the contingencies of empirical sensation, Kant’s notion of voice appears to be little more than a trope—desire masquerading as knowledge. However, given the pivotal role of voice for transcendental philosophy, as well as its palpable connection with music and lyricism, it would be imprudent to dismiss it on the grounds of an absolute, indeed self-privileging, linguistic skepticism. Rather, we ought to trace the role of voice in post-Kantian theory and take particular note of a possibly increasing emphasis on its musical connotations. Admittedly, Kant’s own thinking about musical form seems erratic and revolves around exotic or parochial examples. Yet the complex and altogether lucid deployment of *Stimme* and its cognates throughout the “Analytic of the Beautiful” contains all the seeds of the subsequent orientation of nineteenth-century aesthetics toward musical form. Thus we might note Kant’s stress on the ability of “tone” to operate simultaneously as “sensation” and as a “formal determination of the *unity* of a manifold of sensations” (14.60; italics mine). Such a claim underscores the prescient, indeed foundational, role of the *Critique of Judgment* for the subsequent aesthetic theories of Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Eduard Hanslick, among others. Still, the intellectual bequest of Kant’s aesthetic theory was almost immediately split into two competing models of aesthetic production and, by extension, into two competing models of aesthetic pleasure and criticism. Each model is premised on its own

<sup>12</sup> My argument about pleasure’s quest for duration runs parallel to Corngold’s recent account of a “circular temporality of self-reflection” that he sees at work throughout the third *Critique*: “The way we should proceed to rethink [temporality] is to recall the kind of analysis that Kant performs on the aesthetic judgment, and we are to endow the aesthetic judgment itself with the temporality that goes with this analysis” (55–6).

distinctive, nonnegotiable semiology of the aesthetic work, and each produces a response that—in sharp contrast to Kant’s central hypothesis concerning the “universal communicability” of aesthetic pleasure—is alternatively conceived as strictly self-referential or altogether ineffable.

The first of these paradigms insists, above all, on the epistemological significance of aesthetic experience, that is, on its ability to “attune” the mind and thus prepare the ground for what Kant called “knowledge in general.” The aesthetic, in other words, is conceived as a formal rehearsal of the subject’s cognitive mobility. Thus the subject of aesthetic experience focuses at first on minimal units of observation—say, a musical motif in a Beethoven piano sonata or string quartet, a figure of perceptual or intellectual activity in Hegel’s phenomenological narratives, or a temporalized set of morphological differences emerging in Darwin’s analyses of the geological record. In all of these cases, a listening, reading, or otherwise observing intelligence reflects on the imitative, differential, and recursive relationships of these minimal units so as to extract a developmental pattern. What Kant identified as the teleological nucleus of empirical “sensation”—namely, the anticipation of the form of its eventual, interpretive (re)cognition—thus unfolds as a process in which perception and analysis seem inextricably interwoven. As it gradually refines its raw morphological data into narrative textures of increasing formal and semantic complexity, aesthetic experience effectively constructs the subjectivity of the Enlightenment while also reaffirming its intellectual and social authority as a fundamentally interpretive intelligence. At the same time, Kant’s decision to summarize the affect associated with that operation in the word *pleasure* reflects his understanding that interpretive activity is fundamentally designed to “correct” sensation, that is, to redeem the materiality of being from its vagrant and unreflective drift through time.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Such a preliminary, admittedly general description of (aesthetic) cognition as the isolation and retroactive configuration of imitative and recursive patterns also benefits, no doubt, from the entire phenomenological school of philosophy and aesthetic theory. For apposite instances see Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973); and, building on that protostructuralist paradigm, Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

Remarking on the striking lack of thematic, much less melodic, substance in Beethoven's op. 31, no. 2 sonata (also known as "The Tempest"), for example, Carl Dahlhaus notes how that sonata's gradual distillation of its central musical "concept" presupposes a strong dialectic bond between "musical form" and the practice of listening. Both have to be "reflective." The intelligibility of musical form hinges on "an awareness of the pattern from which it deviates, and through this deviation draws attention to the change in the central category of instrumental music—the concept of the theme. The 'theme' is both an improvisatory introduction and a transitional pattern; instead of being presented in standard exposition, it dissolves into an *ante quem* and a *post quem*."<sup>14</sup> Arguably, the dominant models of nineteenth-century musical aesthetics and analysis (Hanslick, Hugo Riemann, Heinrich Schenker) are all premised on an active experience of music, demanding the silent, listening isolation of recursive, imitative, antithetical, or otherwise differential patterns in a given composition.<sup>15</sup>

Nineteenth-century musical aesthetics and theory insistently trace the formal operation of self-replicating units whose progressive organization, combination, and reconstitution in/as cultural "work" pivot on correspondingly evolved, "constructive" patterns of reception.<sup>16</sup> In the field of music theory, the first authoritative formulation of the formal-morphological paradigm of aesthetic experience as an encryption

<sup>14</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 14–5.

<sup>15</sup> For an account of transformations in musical theory, specifically, the rapid erosion of a traditional, mathematically founded concept of harmony, see Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984). As Dahlhaus explains, it is at the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century that the concept of dissonance yields to that of notes whose presence in the score can be legitimated only by the unique, contextual logic of a given work. See, e.g., his discussion of Johann Philipp Kirnberger's distinction between "essential" and "accidental" dissonances (9–13).

<sup>16</sup> The notion of an active, constructive mode of listening is one of the salient features of musical practice beginning with Beethoven. As Leon Boitein remarks, with reference to the especially pertinent case of Schumann: "The remembrance of emotional experience through the work of art helped to generate an internal sense of coherence. Music, therefore, had to be written in relationship to the capacity to recall it, even in fragments. Rereading—returning to the text—had its analogue in memory and rehearing" ("History, Rhetoric, and the Self: Robert Schumann and Music-Making in German-Speaking Europe, 1800–1860," in *Schumann and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991], 16).

of subjective intelligence can be found in Hanslick's 1854 treatise *On the Musically Beautiful*. Premising early on that "composing is a work of mind upon material compatible with mind," Hanslick conceives of musical form as the development of an abstract intelligence, alternatively engaged in its composition or its reconstruction: "Music consists of tonal sequences, tonal forms; these have no other content than themselves. . . . The[se] forms which construct themselves out of tones are not empty but filled; they are not mere contours of a vacuum but *mind giving shape to itself from within*."<sup>17</sup> Hanslick's formalist approach is succinctly captured by his much-quoted characterization of listening as "contemplating with active understanding," a process that compels us to "rigorously distinguish between the concepts of feeling and sensation" (3, 4). Unfolding in strict analogy to the compositional process, then, "listening" generates pleasure precisely insofar as it occasions reflexivity: "To take pleasure in one's own mental alertness is the worthiest, the wholesomest, and not the easiest manner of listening to music. . . . The most significant factor in the mental process which accompanies the comprehending of a musical work and makes it enjoyable . . . is the mental satisfaction which the listener finds in continuously following and anticipating the composer's designs. . . . Without mental activity, there can be no aesthetical pleasure whatsoever" (64). For Hanslick, interiority no longer comprises any affective experiences in particular. On the contrary, any romantic conception of "feeling" is quickly repudiated as a mere illusion, an unreflected verbal condensation (or trope) of the intricate structural effects that, in Hanslick's view, define the work of composing and listening. Far from positing some putative emotive or expressive content, Hanslick's post-classical theory conceives of musical composition as an increasingly complex encoding and recombining of formal possibilities said to have originated in the core datum of music: the motif.

Eventually, such recursive and differential patterns reach a point at which their organizational logic becomes self-conscious: replication

<sup>17</sup> Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Payzant (New York: Hackett, 1986), 31, 71, 30; italics mine. For a nuanced reading of Hanslick's famous remark, and of his general theory and "functionalist" account of musical form, see Dahlhaus, *Musikästhetik*, 291–318 and passim.

yields to reflexivity, generating a subjective self-awareness that Hegel's *Encyclopedia* of 1819 already described as the structural signature of subjective intelligence. Insofar as it merely furnishes the empirical substratum of all affect but no particular affective content, music is pure temporality—"motion" but not "emotion." Like Kant, who remarked on the tendency of pleasure to reproduce and strengthen itself over time, Hanslick predicates the "mental satisfaction" or pleasure of aesthetic experience on the complex, self-replicating morphology that allows the listening subject to distill musical form by retracing the temporal organization of all composition. Not surprisingly, the knowledge produced by such listening proves strictly nonpropositional and ineffable: "If we want to specify the 'content' of a theme [*Motiv*] for someone, we will have to play for him the theme itself" (81). In Hanslick's protostructuralist understanding of musical form, "pleasure" has been absorbed into the cognitive play of an attentively listening, analytic intelligence. Emptied of all affective content, and only incidentally attached to the materiality of sound and tone, musical experience has been pared down to an objective corollary of the analytic processes it sets in motion. What drops out of the picture, to overstate the case but slightly, is the music itself. No longer considered is the material and tonal specificity of music as "sonority" [*Klangbild*] as it is shaped by countless decisions in orchestration, instrumentation, and tonal color, to say nothing of the innumerable contingencies that shape a given musical performance. Here, then, Kant's purposely ambivalent conception of pleasure has been intellectualized to the point that the analytic aims of aesthetic experience have altogether erased its distinctive materiality—what Kant carefully preserved under the heading of "sensation" [*Empfindung*].<sup>18</sup>

Substantive differences now begin to emerge between Kant's original, cautious balancing of the formal organization and the material mode of appearance of the aesthetic, that is, our "feeling" of the potential determinability of appearances, as well as of their "communicability" in propositional forms. For Kant, configuring the material sensation of voice with the transcendental work of representation

<sup>18</sup> For a lucid account of the ideology of strictly formal listening see Kramer, *Classical Music*, 63–6.

always served an ethical purpose, namely, to define the conditions for (and so to work toward) the discursive production of knowledge and, by extension, of community. The Kantian "aesthetic" thus strives to reflect and represent the crucial balance between the subjective "intensity" of *Gefühl* and its phenomenal origination as *Empfindung*. It pivots on the (ultimately paradoxical) notion of a "pure sensation," a materially concrete, determinate construct devoid of any contingent or discordant features that would compromise its formal compatibility with the postulated, beholding intelligence. For the purpose of this utopian object lies at all times with the "communicability" of our judgment of it. In Kant's argument, "pleasure" unfolds as a metonymic series leading from contingent "sensation," via its contemplative extension to the purely formal inwardness of "feeling," to a parapraactice better known as the discourse of taste.

Some sixty years later Hanslick's musical paradigm of the aesthetic as an objective and immediate correspondence between the physicality of sound and the psychology of a listening intelligence effectively abandons this Enlightenment objective of "communicability." Thus Hanslick pares down the dynamics of Kantian affect [*Gefühl*] to a purely reflexive formalism that construes music as a total homology between the quantitative notations of a musical score and the "attentiveness" of a listening intelligence: it is a paradigm at once irrefutable, incommunicable, and (almost defiantly) irrelevant.

I will now take up the second, in some ways diametrically opposed aesthetic paradigm. A first impression of it can be obtained by considering the work of the later Keats, particularly the great odes. Though these poems are profoundly intellectual, their emphasis differs from the complex and conspicuous ironies of plot and style to the complex irony of narrative plot as it operates in "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "Lamia." Forever uncertain as to whether something by the name of interiority might ever be ascertained in that vast gallery of spectacles and commodities known as London, Keats vacillates between ironic abandon and melancholic longing. Indeed, to the author aspiring to a Shakespearean "life of allegory," either position may finally be nothing more than a way of acknowledging the unattainability of the other. Hence we are perplexed by a persistent, if equivocal, continuity be-

tween Keats's familiar idiom of erotic and cultural desire—extending from his earliest sonnets and romances to the opening of the abandoned third book of *Hyperion*—and his equally distinctive rhetoric of asceticism, even despair in the odes.

Particularly in the 1819 odes, Keats appears in search of a sphere of virtual (and no more than temporal) refuge from the cognitive and emotive limbo that is the price of uncompromising radical (self-) irony. Interiority here is sought precisely not in the domain of intellectual agility. Instead, the trope of the “heart” is once more resurrected as the essential repository of an abiding, subjective truth. As he promotes that heart as “the Mind’s Bible, . . . the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity,” Keats also seems to aspire to an emphatically material aesthetic.<sup>19</sup> Given the latter’s incompatibility with any expressly propositional and self-consciously theoretical language, Keats collapses all historically determined reference into a voice at once richly sensuous and altogether beyond the reach (and taint) of propositional and discursive obligation. Often it seems as though the imagery of the great odes (capstones of Keats’s so-called objective aesthetic) is designed to hypnotize the reader, and perhaps also the writer. Keats’s elaboration of the material and synesthetic richness of the image, and his correspondingly thorough elision of all narrative, appears preemptive of conscious awareness. What is preempted is, above all, a consciousness of the utterly constructed, textual character of the solution here proposed to the myriad antagonisms of the historical and cultural modernity by which author and reader alike remain entrapped.

We recall the pungent still-life of “To Autumn,” with its opening imagery of “mellow fruitfulness,” “ripeness to the core,” and “clammy cells”—a scene suffused with tactile and olfactory sensation. By the third stanza, however, that potentially scandalous plenitude has been subtly assimilated to a chorus of voices whose gradual ascent, from the lambs that “loud bleat” to the “red-breast” whistling “with treble soft,” completes the distinctive Keatsian transfiguration of desire into autonomous form with that last, evanescent image of “gathering swallows

<sup>19</sup> *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 2:103. Angle brackets identify obscure spellings in the manuscript.

twitter[ing] in the skies."<sup>20</sup> "Voice" here serves as the latently embodied sanctuary for anthropomorphic desires whose gradual muting or transfiguration organizes the stanzaic sequence of Keats's odes. In Keats's unique textual and imagistic world, tropes suggestive of natural reference and the aesthetic distillations of a second-order classicism often appear mutually reinforcing. The result is a poetry in which *physis* and *mnemosyne*—rerouted through the Keatsian image—ventriloquize his (and, perhaps, our own) deep-seated desire for an existence unburdened with the rigors of philosophical discourse or with the unrelenting ironic awareness of its impossibility. Abandoning his intermittent ideal of a pseudo-Hellenic sobriety, the late Keats thus appears to embrace a palpably simulated interiority—a position referred to as a "system of Spirit-creation" and, somewhat extravagantly, praised by its inventor as "a grander system of salvation than the chryst<e>ain religion" (*Letters*, 2:102).

The most thorough instance of this intellectual position can be found in the writings of Schopenhauer. For him, the aesthetic experience is the capstone of all finite existence in that it facilitates the self-transcendence and transfiguration of subjectivity by means of contemplation. To contemplate is to submit to the mesmeric force of material appearances whose concision and presence leave "the entire consciousness . . . filled and occupied by a single image."<sup>21</sup> In its very title *The World as Will and Representation* reacts to the deeply equivocal implications of Kant's "critical" project. For Kant, "knowledge in general" (or, simply, "Enlightenment") pivots on a transcendental condition of "feeling" [*Gefühl*], a strictly formal, harmonious interplay between the subject's intuitive and conceptual faculties that ensures the a priori "determinability" and "communicability" of all experience. Precisely because of its exclusive, transcendental status, however, the affective condition of feeling cannot be verified (or falsified) by the subject, whose representations it is said to ground and authorize as genuine knowledge. For any attempt to authenticate the transcendental condi-

<sup>20</sup> *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1970), 650–5.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 34, 179. All references to this text are to section and page numbers.

tion of feeling would have to scrutinize its contingent appearance in the world of empirical “sensation”—a world defined no longer by rational harmony [*Stimmung*] but by the grain, texture, and charisma of multiple styles, tropes, and voices [*Stimmen*].

Rather than insist on an analytic transcendence of such multiplicity, however, Schopenhauer affirms the potential uniqueness of all appearance. Rather than qualifying from some ultimate epistemological objective, voice constitutes for him a presence at once unsuspected, mesmerizing, and irreproducible. His aesthetic of contemplation thus demands an utter transmutation of the inchoate and narcissistic desires of the conscious intellect, or “will,” into an aesthetically embodied idea. The Enlightenment ideal of the intrinsic rationality, or transcendental coherence, of all representation gives way to a (Buddhist-inspired) conception of transcendence, a metaphysical ideal that demands asceticism [*Entsagung*] and promises ekstasis. But both the condition and the reward imply that the subject of aesthetic experience entrusts itself altogether to the mesmerizing, sonorous, and material presence of the aesthetic object, effectively surrendering all of the epistemological and moral objectives that Kant struggled to balance in his third *Critique*.

For Schopenhauer, the aesthetic functions as a sanctuary, a virtual sphere of refuge for the subject forever entangled in an inscrutable and inextricable nexus of preconscious motives, analytic claims, and conscious objectives. This inexorable causality, which Schopenhauer efficiently identifies as the “will,” is said to objectify itself exclusively in two forms, both supposedly immediate and hence authentic: music and the body. Arguing that the “will” manifests itself “through [everyone’s] actions and through the permanent substratum of . . . his body,” Schopenhauer reinstates the Kantian exigency (or paradox) of pure sensation. In its corporeal and musical objectifications, “the will constitutes what is most immediate in . . . consciousness. but as such . . . has not wholly entered into the form of the representation, in which subject and object stand against each other” (21.109). Reminiscent of the body in early Greek tragic ritual, music is essentially *dithyrambos*, the “immediate objectification and copy [*Abbild*]” (52.257) of the will. Such an apodictic definition notably forecloses on any accounts of music as generative of discursive meaning or as constitutive of the transcendental (formal) prerequisite for the production of such meaning:

Music expresses in an exceedingly universal language, in a unique [*einartig*] material, that is, in mere tones, and with the greatest distinctness and truth, the inner being, the in-itself, of the world, which we think of under the concept of the will. . . . Supposing we succeeded in giving a perfectly accurate and complete explanation of music . . . this would also be at once a sufficient repetition and explanation of the world in concepts, or one wholly corresponding thereto, and hence the true philosophy. (52.264)

Not only is the materiality of “tone” posited as the true locus of aesthetic experience, but the passage also attests to the underlying desire of philosophy to escape itself by embracing the inalienable, positively mesmerizing aura of body and sound as its ultimate sanctuary. In its sheer sonority music is said to absolve us of the inchoate, rough-and-tumble world of conflicting representations. The desire of philosophy to secure absolution for its fallen subjects—at its core a deeply antitheoretical fantasy—also accounts for Schopenhauer’s overtly Platonist notion of the aesthetic “idea.” Inasmuch as that idea requires ascetic self-transcendence, Schopenhauer sets it in direct opposition to representation [*Vorstellung*]. For only that may qualify as an idea which is not afflicted by the partial, finite, and contestable quality of discursive representation. As he puts it, the idea lacks “plurality” or, rather, precedes all plurality.

The aesthetic idea and its embodied appearance thus have become fully homologous. Irreducible to logical propositions and irrefutable in ways that discursive representation can never be, the aesthetic idea, as conceived by Schopenhauer, is *prima facie* a presence: embodied, material, and intrinsically “sonorous.” Realized as such by music and the body, this formulation of aesthetics allows post-Kantian theory to attain its most precious dream, materiality as “immediate representation.” The materiality of the aesthetic thus no longer mediates any epistemological concerns, nor is it any longer restricted to the incidental status of “sensation,” as was still the case in the *Critique of Judgment*. Instead, the proclaimed isomorphism of materiality and idea opens up the last frontier of philosophical writing, namely, the transfiguring of contingent experience into outright revelation.

A precursor of the New Criticism’s concrete universals, Schopenhauer’s conception of the body and music appears to challenge current critical techniques and hermeneutic methods that promise to

restore to the aesthetic productions of the past the consciousness supposedly lacking in their own ideological determinacy. Yet precisely because of its ostensibly antithetical intellectual tendencies, Schopenhauer's magnum opus urges us to consider the cognitive and moral claims of our own critical moment (and their possible limits). Does a theoretically inspired historical critique amount to authentic action, or does it merely seek to compensate for the deeper intuition that neither the antagonisms of the past nor those of the present can ever be resolved by any form of action?

Provided that its metaphysical rhetoric is not simply ignored or preemptively dismissed as a mere phase in the history of philosophy, Schopenhauer's account will be found to contain some important lessons for contemporary criticism. Perhaps this is so all the more because—again, like most critical writing today—it altogether lacks the saving grace of Keatsian irony. Above all, Schopenhauer makes the extraordinary claim that we may immediately access a world beyond “will and representation,” a world of wholly authentic (if mostly tragic) insight that can be reached only through the expressive inroads of the body and music. If such a metaphysical credo lies at the heart of his writing, it also seems uncannily prescient of the self-privileging, not to say hedonistic, forms of autobiographical and confessional critical writing that have taken center stage in the humanities during the past dozen years or so. Only very recently have the phenomena of “intimate critique” and “thinking through the body” (to appropriate but two of the titles in question) begun to receive proper theoretical attention. Thus, in his polemic *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Terry Eagleton offers a blunt indictment of the professionalized hedonism at the core of confessional and autobiographical critical writing. Eagleton appears to follow David Simpson's slightly earlier thesis that such insistently, even flamboyantly stylized critical voices are symptomatic of a pervasive methodological uncertainty and a flagging of genuine political commitment across the humanities.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). One of the more stylized transmigrations of midcareer ennui with the demands of working in a discipline of continually evolving methodological positions and theoretical debates can be found in Jane Tompkins, “Me and My Shadow,” in *The Intimate Critique: Auto-*

Of particular relevance for my purposes is Eagleton's questioning of the "new somatics," specifically the current fetishization of the sexualized and unfailingly "well-nourished" body (13). Indeed, it seems increasingly axiomatic to argue that critical work in the humanities and in literary studies can advance only insofar as it is cued by the obliquely glamorous aura of the body and its tantalizing promise of ever-new modes of transgressive and performative sexuality. Like Schopenhauer's twofold essence of body and music, the spectacle (or reality, as the case may be) of an anonymous, strictly physiological conception of the sexual subject finds its complement in the unwavering gaze and often sternly disciplinarian voice of postmodern critique. Such a model can presumably proceed only by continually intensifying the closeness and reflexivity of its focus on the embodied subject, an approach that risks appearing coldly analytic, narcissistic-confessional, or downright invasive. At the same time, the construction of the body as a subject of professional (if esoteric) critique confounds the very values of a humane, liberal society in whose name such writing is being pursued. For the more insistent the "outing" of the sexualized body, the more that body—together with the voice of critique itself—appears interchangeable, remote, and anonymous. At the very least, it

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*biographical Literary Criticism*, ed. Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Murphy Zauhar (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 23–40. Suburban languor here masquerades as institutional insurrection as Tompkins informs us that "I'm tired of the conventions that keep discussions of epistemology, or James Joyce, segregated from meditations on what is happening outside my window or inside my heart. The public-private dichotomy, which is to say, the public-private *hierarchy*, is a founding condition of female oppression. I say to hell with it" (25). I would argue that Tompkins's notion of the private is, if anything, more naive and narcissistic than the one whose disjunction from a (similarly unexamined) public sphere she so vociferously deplors. How else are we to take her catalog of wishes? "Would always be in some way a chronicle of my hours and days. Would speak in a voice which can talk about everything, would reach out to a reader like me . . ." (28). As Susan Bernstein notes, "Although the confessional mode does offer politically transgressive possibilities, its interrogative, even transformative potential is often undermined by critical neglect of the very categories it employs." In Bernstein's words, "Tompkins rehearses a retreat into sameness—a reader like me"—and an aversion to difference" ("Confessing Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 7 [1992]: 121, 129). See also David Simpson, *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 72–91.

has become hard to tell whether the soulless and abject appearance of the postmodern sexualized subject is merely the latest object of critical practice or, perhaps, its unwitting effect.

Arguably, in a profession as particularized as the humanities at the end of the twentieth century—a scene Fredric Jameson describes as “the delirious nonstop monologue of . . . so many in-group narratives”—questions like those raised above may well never be settled.<sup>23</sup> By comparison, it seems rather obvious that the recent view of the subject as almost exclusively determined by its embodied sexuality has eroded even the most basic criteria for verifying or falsifying intellectual claims. At the very least, the strenuously confessional approach to critical writing during the past decade has suspended any serious reflection on the conceptual and ethical questions that the Enlightenment (well before Kant) considered integral to any pursuit of knowledge. Inasmuch as a crudely material focus on the body and a correspondingly self-privileging conception of voice have eclipsed the basic Enlightenment goal of articulating the fundamental connection between the (aesthetic) phenomenon of pleasure and the communicability of knowledge, much theoretical ground has been lost. Thus the postmodern vision of the body as the site of incommunicable, irreproducible, though nonetheless spectacular experiences effectively collapses “pleasure” and “sensation” into one another. The body has become a “stubbornly local phenomenon . . . [that] offers a mode of cognition more intimate and internal than the much scorned Enlightenment rationality” (Eagleton, 70–1).<sup>24</sup>

Against the Enlightenment paradigm of critical knowledge as the open-ended progression of an intersubjective conversation, this new fin de siècle idiom posits a different, overtly subjectivist or self-referential form of small-scale discourse that ventriloquizes critical knowledge in the minimalist form of subjective reminiscence extracted, in turn,

<sup>23</sup>Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 368.

<sup>24</sup>See also Bernstein’s incisive account of confessional criticism: “Oblivious to its contextual and contingent positioning within a discipline, within a publication, both inscribed within a particular historical moment, it tries to construct a fantastic rhetorical space that is simultaneously outside and within the academy, a discourse to accommodate intellectual and emotional needs that are ascribed to the totalized identity of ‘women’” (130).

from autobiographical experience. As in Schopenhauer's aesthetics, the authority of the critical voice is intimately bound up here with its utterly unique [*einartig*], irreproducible, and hence incontestable character. Thus, for example, the preface to Marianna De Marco Torgovnick's *Crossing Ocean Parkway* already puts readers on notice that, however intense our assimilationist and educational yearning, life "invariably . . . shows me that ethnicity matters." Read in conjunction with the author's preceding stipulation that her text issues "from my special cultural situation: that of a female Italian American professor of English who lives in North Carolina and writes about American society," the reference to ethnic victimization effectively immunizes the book against dissent. For to take exception to the book's subsequent representation of what it means to be "white, female, and born in Bensonhurst" is liable to expose the dissenting voice to the charge of incompetence and/or insensitivity.<sup>25</sup> As Simpson notes in *The Academic Postmodern*, Walter Benjamin's essay on the "storyteller" already offers a historical analysis of what can be described as the shift from a diegetic to a transferential logic of narrative:

Story empowers its hearers as it—in Benjamin's phrase—lifts "the burden of demonstrable explanation" from the teller and makes space for "interpretation." . . . Listener becomes teller in the act of retention for the purposes of repetition; interpretation is always deferred; and in the cycle of repetitions our own lives become the story. We voice ourselves into presence, against the grain of a critical-historical analysis—Adorno's or Derrida's, for instance—that tells us that we have no authentic access to such presence. The performed mode of storytelling, in which the burden of meaning is passed on for further passing on, then becomes an act of transference or self-projection as much as an effort at consensus. (65)<sup>26</sup>

Simpson's account of the transferential logic of postmodern storytelling reveals some striking continuities between post-Kantian aesthetics and the recent upsurge of confessional and autobiographical

<sup>25</sup> Torgovnick, *Crossing Ocean Parkway: Readings by an Italian American Daughter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), viii.

<sup>26</sup> Other instances of this kind include Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Jane Gallop, *Thinking through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Torgovnick, *Crossing Ocean Parkway*; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Uni-

critical writing, a genre less invested in the cogency of its propositions than in the performative re-creation of its embodied subject(s) as a public spectacle. The transference logic underlying this “species of narcissistic activism” (Bernstein, 139) is the result of a persistent shift from public argumentation toward the subtly coercive dramaturgy of subjective reminiscence. Rather than retain the conscious position of an addressee, that is, readers are conscripted for an obliquely moral agenda that they may no longer contest without appearing to violate a covenant with the confessional subject. Inasmuch as it sentimentalizes, and ultimately privileges voice over text, disclosure over debate, confessional criticism reveals a fundamental “tension between a focus upon subjectivity and a construction of identity which is communal rather than individualistic.”<sup>27</sup>

Far from constituting some startling epistemological breakthrough, the authority of such affect-centered storytelling pivots on the “sweet enforcement” (to borrow Keats’s apt phrase from the “Ode to Psyche”) of that unsolicited covenant with its audience. The ultimate objective, in other words, is not knowledge but a smooth and fully collaborative professional relationship between teller and addressee. Attempting to forge a significantly personal and critical voice, Jane Tompkins expressly

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versity Press, 1993); and the anthologies edited by Freedman et al., *The Intimate Critique*, and H. Aram Veese, *Confessions of the Critics* (New York: Routledge, 1996). As I have argued elsewhere, the recent surge of supplanting an intersubjective and methodologically reflexive type of discourse with overtly (or extrovertly) autobiographical ruminations may have risen out of the intense eighteenth-century debates over the limits and social legitimacy of “self-interest” as it was waged, e.g., in the writings of Shaftsbury, Hume, and Burke (*Wordsworth’s Profession*, 263–302).

<sup>27</sup> Rita Felski, quoted in Bernstein, 131. Ann R. Jones further remarks on the “phonocentric emphasis” of autobiographical and critical writing, particularly as it restyles traditional feminist concerns (quoted by Diane P. Freedman in Veese, 4). See also Ellen Brown’s forthright assurance of her unimpeachable critical authority as a reader of *Jane Eyre*: “The fact is, I’m doing here what I can’t do elsewhere: I am speaking in my own voice(s). I am admitting that it is not Brontë’s [sic] narrative complexity or linguistic skill that attracts me to her book again and again. I am confessing that one of the reasons I keep reading *Jane Eyre*, one of the reasons I like it, one of the reasons I teach it is that it has continued to speak so powerfully to me as a girl, as a woman, as a teacher” (“Between the Medusa and the Abyss: Reading *Jane Eyre*, Reading Myself,” in Freedman et al., 233). Most revealing, perhaps, is Brown’s failure to consider that the ability of Brontë’s novel to “speak so powerfully” might have anything to do with its “narrative complexity or linguistic skill.”

forgoes argument in favor of transference: "I'm asking you to bear with me while I try, hoping that this, what I write, will express something you yourself have felt or will help you find a part of yourself that you would like to express" (28). Yet to lay claim to personal experience in the supposedly unmediated, extradisciplinary form of confession implicitly collapses cognition into performance and, as a further (and perhaps not unwelcome) consequence, forecloses the possibility of rational dissent. Freed from the methodological constraints of intersubjective discourse, the critical authority of the writer's voice now subsists solely on its ability to simulate or conjure the *proton pseudos* of ineffable, contingent experience—itself no longer represented to a critical reader but transferentially reproduced through an identically situated addressee.

Another consequence of this development involves the palpable aloofness of criticism when it comes to questions of class. Rather than demand consideration of the political, social, and cultural antagonisms that variously impinge on a given subject, the confessional voice is accredited almost exclusively by its established or presumptive connections with an audience of materially identical status. These relations, in turn, can be understood as the products of an intrinsically narcissistic pattern of narrative transference and self-replication, an open-ended Lacanian dialectic in which speaker and addressee subsist strictly on the basis of affective claims and an inherently confessional rhetoric. The social (even moral) authority of such claims is typically secured by the speaker's peremptory rejection and indictment of any alternative modes of cognition, such as might still rely on certain principles of evidence, falsifiability, or motive.

What we witness here is the final passing of the Enlightenment paradigm of intelligence, with its Kantian postulates of rational, dispassionate cognition and transparent representation. In its stead we find a postmodern, self-interested, and highly adaptive professional voice whose critical authority depends on its ability to imbue its subjective (and putatively transgressive) subject matter with an aura of public urgency. As Jeremy Bentham observed long ago, to collapse the work of cognition into the spectacle of confession misappropriates the reader's sympathetic potential for purposes of critical coercion. For affect "is not a positive principle itself, so much as a term employed to

signify the negation of all principle.” Consequently, attempts to predicate the authority of one’s voice on a purely subjective state are but “so many contrivances for avoiding the obligation of appealing to any external standard, and for prevailing upon the reader to accept of the author’s sentiment or opinion as a reason for itself.”<sup>28</sup> To indulge in such an approach for any length of time is very likely to replace the inevitably provisional and often disputatious logic of principled discourse with the supple and fluid logic of affective manipulation. The result may well be an intellectual environment where critical and social authority is vested in highly particularized forums and obliquely circumscribed “in-groups.”

Here, then, any intersubjective and deliberative conception of knowledge has been supplanted by the critical exigency of elaborating a distinctive professional persona and adapting its voice to a carefully mapped discursive environment. The result, as Theodor W. Adorno notes, is a “mysterious activity that bears all the features of commercial life without there actually being any business to transact.” Adorno’s prescient 1951 account of a quintessentially postmodern interiority—defined by the phony transactionalism of hyperprofessionalized communities—is worth quoting at length. The “nervous” subjects of this new order

believe that only by empathy, assiduity, serviceability, arts and dodges, by tradesmen’s qualities, can they ingratiate themselves with the executive they imagine omnipresent, and soon there is no relationship that is not seen as a “connection,” no impulse [that is] not first censored as to whether it deviates from the acceptable. . . . these murky connections are proliferating wherever there used still to be an appearance of freedom. The irrationality of the system is expressed scarcely less clearly in the parasitic psychology of the individual than in his economic fate. . . . Countless people are making, from the aftermath of the liquidation of professions, their profession. They are the nice folk, the good mixers liked by all, the just, humanely excusing all meanness and scrupulously proscribing any non-standardized impulses as sentimental. Indispensable for their knowledge of all channels and plug-holes of power, they divine its most secret judgements and live by adroitly propagating them.

<sup>28</sup> Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1988), 16–7.

They are found in all political camps, even where the rejection of the system is taken for granted, and has thereby produced a slack and subtle conformism of its own.<sup>29</sup>

In Adorno's account, which conceives of postmodern professionalism as a thorough adaptation of the subject to its chosen discursive or interpretive communities, the ethical integrity of "voice" has been abandoned—one might say, almost as a matter of principle.

Gone is the basic ethical imperative as it found expression in Kant's master trope of the "voice" [*Stimme*]. The latter, we have seen, postulates an agency at once unmistakably "subjective" yet intensely committed (in both an ethical and a teleological sense) to the objectives of cognition and community. Moreover, to the extent that this "voice" is said to manifest itself as the "sensation" and "feeling" of "harmony" [*Stimmung*], it also constitutes the most distinctive and articulate evidence for what the third *Critique* calls "communicability." Kant's ambivalent bequest to aesthetic theory was to name—in the precise way that the act of "naming" hovers between the creative and the recursive, the tropological and the referential—"pleasure" and "voice" as the nontranscendable conditions for the operation of criticism itself. At the same time, the much larger stakes of Kant's critical enterprise strongly militate against an exclusive, indeed narcissistic reflection that would promote pleasure and voice from a necessary condition for representation to the sole object of knowledge. Arguably, the question of how to conceive of a "voice" [*Stimme*] capable of investing the irreducible experience of "pleasure" with greater social significance undergirds the cognitive and confessional authority of contemporary historicist and "experimental-critical" writing, respectively. As I have suggested elsewhere, these discourses often enough turn out to repeat the logic of their disciplinary object (e.g., romantic "expressivism," the egotistical sublime), either by promising to overcome it in the supposedly autonomous modality of critical knowledge or by emulating it in the ineffable dramaturgy of critical confession.

<sup>29</sup> Adorno, "Fish in Water," in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), 23-4.

## Coda

A constitutive obligation of critical practice, albeit often unacknowledged at present, is to sustain at all times an acute awareness of its historical origins. As we have seen, the moment when a critical response to the phenomenon of “pleasure” and the aesthetic plays a seminal role occurs in those decades taking us from the Rousseau of the *Reveries* to Kant’s third *Critique*. Part of that struggle, especially in the *Critique of Judgment*, meant properly locating the voice of critical thought itself. Kant conceives of that voice as the expression of a balance between our intuitive and our rational faculties, between our idiosyncratic orientation toward the uniquely material textures of the empirical world and the crucial, if comparatively mediated, obligation to render that world more permanently inhabitable, or rational. To recognize that there ought to be balance between these two stances—the basic ethical demand of the *Critique of Judgment*—is to recognize that aesthetic production and critical knowledge are rooted in the same impulse. Sensibly, Kant chose to leave undetermined whether the voice of critique ought to be understood as an integral component of aesthetic experience or merely as one of its epiphenomenal effects. He did so not because he did not know how to answer the question but because he felt, perhaps intuitively, that it was the wrong question to ask or, in any event, a fateful one to answer. For any attempt to resolve the issue by pronouncing the work of critique wholly isomorphic with the contingent material experiences that have given rise to it—or, alternatively, to sublimate [*aufheben*] aesthetic experience into pure abstraction—invariably forecloses on the ethical implications of critical practice.

For such an embrace of a theoretical solipsism, or of a mystical or hedonistic materialism, severs the dialectical ties between experience and cognition, either by eclipsing the unique material qualities of aesthetic experience or by diminishing our capacity to articulate its significance. Inasmuch as a reflection on aesthetic experience seeks to avoid either predicament, it necessarily has to tread the thin margin between epistemology and ethics. Indeed, a voice of critique so understood ought to consider—though not resolve—the delicate boundaries between the social and spiritual dimensions of meaning and, correspondingly, its own precarious location between the spontaneous

and the providential, the self-affirmation of its subjective intelligence and its responsiveness to heteronomous material signs and "hints." As Hölderlin put it in his ode "Rousseau":

auch dir, auch dir  
 Erfreuet die ferne Sonne dein Haupt,  
 Und Stralen aus der schönern Zeit. Es  
 Haben die Boten dein Herz gefunden.

Vernommen hast du sie, verstanden die Sprache der Fremdlinge  
 Gedeutet ihre Seele! Dem Sehnenen war  
 Der Wink genug, und Winke sind  
 Von Alters her die Sprache der Götter.

[Your crest too, though but once, yours too  
 Is gladdened by the rays of a distant sun,  
 The radiance of a better age. The  
 Heralds who looked for your heart have found it.

You've heard and comprehended the strangers' tongue,  
 Interpreted their soul! For the yearning man  
 The hint sufficed, because in hints from  
 Time immemorial the gods have spoken.]<sup>30</sup>

If "Rousseau embodies the tension between an isolated subjectivity and the imperatives of social life," Hölderlin's strophic reflection on the citizen of Geneva shows how the development of one's own voice necessitates the cautious detour through an other, even one as seemingly close as Rousseau.<sup>31</sup> If the ode credits Rousseau with having been visited by the "rays" of the "distant sun," such semantic plenitude can be claimed figurally in what Derrida has characterized as the quintessential philosophical "heliotrope" of light and illumination. Moreover, the knowledge to which Rousseau is said to have been privy can be imagined only a posteriori, not by Rousseau himself but only transferentially, with Hölderlin speaking for him. Thus mediated through its

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Friedrich Beissner, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1943–85), vol. 2, pt. 1, 13; Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil, 1994), 125. Translation modified.

<sup>31</sup> Rainer Nägele, *Text, Geschichte und Subjektivität in Hölderlins Dichtung— "Uneßbarer Schrift gleich"* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985), 171.

own other (Rousseau), Hölderlin's voice does not establish itself in propositional form but, instead, motions toward a revelation that is itself perched between an unverifiable past and an anticipated future. Supported by its distinctly "paratactic" nature, Hölderlin's poetry here is presented as a type of scripture that expressly forgoes the desire for closure, as evidenced by the carefully open-ended reception of "the strangers' tongue" [*die Sprache der Fremdlinge*] that was "heard . . . comprehended . . . interpreted" [*vernommen . . . verstanden . . . gedeutet*].<sup>32</sup> The revelation at issue may indeed have come to the "yearning" man [*dem Sehnenen*], but it did so only if we believe that the Rousseau of the *Reveries* attained the perfect ratio of curiosity and restraint. For to discern meaning in a "hint" [*Wink*], that enigmatic sign of the gods, involves more than indolence and passivity. It demands a complex echo—what Hölderlin is to Rousseau—whereby the intimations of the other's voice are transfigured into the comparative specificity of a text. Hölderlin's aesthetic can thus be characterized as an ongoing attempt to fuse poetry and critique—to "grasp" [*fassen*] and articulate the otherness of his own voice in a provisional "text" [*Fassung*] and thus to achieve an instance of subjective "composure" [*Fassung*] for which Rousseau's repose provided the archetype.

Hölderlin's poetry may be the supreme poetic refraction of Kant's critical project, inasmuch as it articulates—in the necessarily transferential, figural recourse to an other such as Rousseau—the tension between the material and intuitive and the formal-rational dimensions

<sup>32</sup>See Theodor W. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 2:109–49. While rejecting a strictly "philosophical" reading of Hölderlin's poetry, such as the one offered by Heidegger, Adorno focuses on the tension between voice and silence that can be observed throughout the later elegies and hymns: "The alien quality [of that poetry] stems from something objective, the demise of its basic content in expression, the eloquence of something that has no language. What has been composed could not exist without the content falling silent, any more than it could without what it falls silent about" (112). The self-reflexivity of the poetic voice—a reflexivity, however, no longer obligated to an overarching *System*—finds expression in paratactic structures that render Hölderlin "the master of the intermittent linguistic gesture" (119). In so extending the abstract notion of nonclosure via the spatiality of a sustained lyric voice, Hölderlin imagines an altogether different type of "genius" that is intimately connected to the recurrent use of "openness" [*das Offene*] (146–7).

of knowledge. As his poetry ponders the interdependency between a material existence, past and future, that is conjured by the operation of tropes and images and the simultaneous reflection on the rational, or "critical," truth value of those images, Hölderlin's voice appears genuinely informed by Kant's critical enterprise. For like the philosophical idiom of late Enlightenment critique, his poetry shows the dialectic of intuition and concept, as well as the corollary tension between an imagistic and a propositional style, to be necessarily open-ended. Poetry so understood transcends (in a strictly nonteleological sense) the often arid and self-privileging claims of pure theory, yet at its best it also cautions against a hedonistic attachment to one voice or, for that matter, against the epigone's blind worship of aesthetic tradition. We have yet much to learn from it.