The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory

NEW READINGS OF BENJAMIN AND ADORNO

Edited by Nathan Ross

The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory

New Readings of Benjamin and Adorno

Nathan Ross

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction: The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory xi
Nathan Ross
The Relationship xiii
The Chapters xvii
Notes xxiii

1 Benjamin and Adorno on Art as Critical Practice 1
Georg W. Bertram
Adorno's Critique of Benjamin 2
Benjamin's Conception of Art 5
Art as Critical Practice 9
Art as Critique that Effects Change 12
Notes 14

2 The Benjaminian Moment in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: Spaciality and the Topos of the Bourgeois *Intérieur* 17
Marcia Morgan
Notes 29

3 Adorno's Critical Theory at the Crossroads of Hegel and Benjamin 31
Natalia Baeza
Adorno's Hegelianism: System and Totality 32
Adorno and Benjamin: Non-identity and the Non-conceptual 36
Conclusion: Adorno at the Crossroads of Hegel's Dialectic and Benjamin's Constellations 41
Notes 43

4 The Jargon of Ontology and the Critique of Language: Benjamin, Adorno, and Philosophy's Motherless Tongue 47
Eduardo Mendieta
The Purgatory of Language or the Theology of Language 49
The Liquidation of Philosophy, or Philosophy's Non-

Contemporaneous Contemporaneity 53
Facia Hioppocratica, or the Suffering of Nature 56
Language as Ruination, or *los Fílosofos Deslenguados* 59
Notes 63

5 "The Polarity Informing Mimesis": The Social Import of Mimesis in Benjamin and Adorno 67
Nathan Ross
"The Polarity Informing Mimesis" in Benjamin's "Artwork" Essay 68
Art's Mimesis of Social Rationality in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* 74
Notes 79

6 Walter Benjamin's Critique of the Category of Aesthetic Form: "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" from the Perspective of Benjamin's Early Writing 83
Alison Ross
The Concept of Aesthetic Form in Early and Late Benjamin 86
Distraction and Collective Experience 90
Conclusion 94
Notes 96

7 Walter Benjamin and the "Highly Productive Use of the Human Being's Self-Alienation" 99
Stéphane Symons
The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Mournfulness) 100
The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Possibility) 102
Conclusion 108
Notes 108

8 The Composer as Producer 111
Joseph Weiss
Locating the Truth of Technically Reproduced Music 114
Coda: The Public Studio 121
Notes 124

9 The Aesthetic Experience of Shudder: Adorno and the Kantian Sublime 129
Surti Singh
The Kantian Sublime and the Experience of Modern Art 130
Archaic Fear and Subjectivity 136
The Shudder and the Subject to Come 139
Notes 141

10 Ecological Experience: Aesthetics, Life, and the Shudder in Adorno's Critical Theory 145

Rick Elmore
The Ecological Dimension of Adorno's Critique of Nature 146
Life, the Shudder, and Aesthetic Comportment 149
Notes 156

11 Enigmaticalness as a Fundamental Category in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* 159
Andrea Sakoparnig
How It is That Artworks Appear to be Enigmatic—The Logic of Aesthetic Experience 160
The Relevance of Aesthetic Enigmaticalness 169
The Importance of Enigmaticalness in Adorno's Thinking in General 171
Notes 173

12 Aesthetic Education, Human Capacity, Freedom 177
Tom Huhn
Notes 188

Bibliography 191
Index 199
Contributors 205

Chapter Twelve

Aesthetic Education, Human Capacity, Freedom

Tom Huhn

The most striking kinship between Schiller and Adorno lies in their shared concern for the fate of human capacity. More specifically, we find in Schiller's schema of the genesis of human faculties the precursor of Adorno's contention that each of our capacities comes first to be severed from us only later to be turned against each of us by an administered society. Adorno's claim arrives by way not only of Marx, but still more fruitfully by way of Schiller's scenario in which our capacities begin in, and as, opposition to one another. This contrariness of all capacities begins in, and as, opposition to one another. This contrariness of all capacities proceeds to expand to each of us as whole entities.[1] More pointedly, for Adorno and for Schiller, our capacities turn to oppose us because they have been called into existence not merely by a fallen condition or a polluted environment but rather our faculties are called forth from us precisely in the service of dismantling our integrity. We find this idea previously formulated in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*,[2] where every human tool and convenience is portrayed as a yoke which, by constraining our creaturely—and human—integrity, thereby erodes our essential unity, both as individual creatures and with and within our environment. Most famously, or infamously, Rousseau sees even our sociability as a most profound threat to the primal unity of the lone human being. By means of the progressive expansion of our capabilities a new, pseudo-integrity is cobbled together, indeed designed, for a purpose aligned precisely against the potential (incipient) wholeness of each of us.[3]

As evidence of the undermining, false unity of human life, consider the infinity of self-destruction in modern life, the plague of self-mutilation among the young, our rampant drug and alcohol abuse, not to mention the unavoidable anxieties and depression of modern life. We might say these ills are not mere symptoms of the genesis of the modern self but rather a veritable engine of self-destruction, a mimesis as well as a protest against the very dynamic that brings our abilities into existence.

Kant, more even than Rousseau, is a touchstone for Schiller's thinking about the character of human capacity. If Schiller finds in Rousseau the thought of the fragile vulnerability of the integrity of the human being, he finds in turn in Kant's aesthetic theory the specification of the integrity of human capacity. What I have in mind is a speculation regarding how Kant's idea of disinterest landed on Schiller. Though many read Kant's famous specification of disinterest in aesthetic judgment as the attempt to police the merely personal from the more properly aesthetic engagement of the faculties *in general*, we might also interpret *disinterest* as the autonomy of the faculties *in general* from any determination whatsoever. And this understanding of what lies at the heart of the third *Critique* touches directly the very foundation of the project in Kant's discovery of the existence of reflective judgment in opposition to the seeming ubiquity of determinative judgment.[4] Reflective judgment is of course demarcated as the *condition of capacity* without the activation of capacity by anything extrinsic to capacity itself.

This is the true meaning of reflective judgment, and so too likewise is it a boundary that limits our present ability (capacity) to declare the meaning—that is, function—of capacity. This is, if you will, the "meaning" of aesthetic judgment. And this likewise reveals the irony of the term 'education' in Schiller's aesthetic education—for what education really denotes is not the instruction of human beings (even, or especially,

in how to be human, for example) but rather our liberation. Our freedom is to be won, first and foremost, from the determinations, and the very determinability, of our own capacities. The more properly aesthetic formulation would emphasize—instead of "first and foremost"—that education is the capacity to liberate ourselves *continuously* from the very faculties that, paradoxically, constitute us.

Let us, in response to just this paradox, therefore turn to consider Schiller's concern with balance, and perhaps include therewith the old aesthetic idea of harmony. Indeed, we might locate in Plato one origin of harmony, of this most fecund notion of beauty and of the aesthetic sphere in general.[5] Ironically, it is Plato's anti-aesthetic assertions that led to the idea that harmony is the most thorough characteristic of beauty. By describing the success of the work of art as due to imbalance, intoxication, divinely inspired madness, Plato thus set the stage for the positive ascription of order, balance, and rule to the sphere of the aesthetic. However, the harmony most important for Plato lies not in the object but the subject. One might hazard that regardless of whether Plato is a genuine source for the Kantian notion of the aesthetic balance and harmony of the faculties with one another, it is key to acknowledge that this is one of the most important ideas Schiller takes from Kant. The harmony of the faculties in relation to one another is the most influential Kantian idea in Schiller's characterization of aesthetic education. The harmony of the faculties, a profound *disinterest* of the faculties towards one another, is mimetically inspired by disinterest of the faculty of sensation, or the faculty of understanding, towards an object. Important to note here is the continuity from Plato's *Republic*—in which the harmony of the parts of the soul in relation to one another not only mimics but more importantly produces the harmony of the polis—to Kant's assertion that the aesthetic sphere is the only one in which a subjective universality might reign—and from there to Schiller's return to an explicit image of the ideal state as product of the balance which only the cultivation of the capacity of the aesthetic might produce.[6]

There is perhaps no better image of the kind of harmony he takes the aesthetic alone to be able to provide than the one provided by Schiller himself in the contrast between athletic and beautiful bodies.[7] The former is the product of muscles working against one another, indeed working at all, rather than the beautiful body that results from the lack of conflict and differentiation among its parts. Schiller's idea also reflects the Rousseavian notion of the perfectibility of human beings, that is, what Schiller calls our empty infinity, our ability to become determined and indeed over-determined by whatever capacity we develop. For Schiller, we are defined not so much by what we do with our capacities, as we are rather the *products* shaped by each capacity coming illicitly to constitute the whole of what we are. We are the *telos* then not of ourselves but of the inherent opposition between capacity and singularity, between, we might also say, capacity and capacity. In other words: our primal integrity comes to be disrupted, then usurped, by the monopoly of now one, and then another, faculty. Hegel found his solution to this dilemma in Schiller's *Aesthetic Education* by instead reading each successive capacity, sensuousness, consciousness, etc., as the recapitulation, expansion, transformation, as well as cancellation of the previous faculty. Our wholeness is compromised whenever our enhancement occurs by way of one capacity or another. Thus the Schillerian aesthetic, and the education within and toward it, can become anything *but* the development of *yet another capacity*.[8]

Our true—aesthetic—education is covered entirely by the distance we are able to place between ourselves and the alienation, shrinkage, and confinement inherent to capacity-ness. Here then is the dialectic of human becoming for Schiller: each capacity, regardless of the distinct progress it represents for human development, is also inescapably a loss of potential, a loss precisely of the possibility that whatever is most human in us might be retained. Any and every capacity any human being develops is de facto a human capacity (hence Hegel's citation of Terrence in the lectures on aesthetics).[9] And yet, à la Rousseau, every human capacity is also a prosthetic expansion, an artificial extension and enhancement that carries us literally beyond ourselves. Thus the implicit message of the aesthetic sphere is that there is nothing distinctly human to be gained in the development of capacities. The Schillerian turn of all education towards the aesthetic—indeed of all human becoming—is to acknowledge the unavoidable destructiveness—what will later be called instrumental rationality—of the expansion of our capacities. This brings to mind Rousseau's great claim regarding the true aim and genuine scope of education: that we need do no more (as if we can do it at all) than teach ourselves how to be kind to one another.[10] After successfully teaching and learning this lesson: be humane, what might possibly remain to be learned?

Semblance (*der Schein*) is the key term that expands this notion of subjective disinterest into objectivity and around which there is much to compare Adorno and Schiller to one another. Semblance is the shape, or better: the very form, of a certain kind of freedom, the freedom from actuality, the freedom we might say from the final stage of determination and determinedness. As it declares itself to be only image and appearance, and not reality or even object, *semblance* reveals its liberation from actuality. Insofar as semblance is nonetheless also a fixed bounded image it thereby participates in, and betrays its commitment to, determination and thus limitation.

Semblance, we might says, provides an *allegory of capacity*. The sound *of* something, the image *of* something, even the Aristotelian drama *of* some action, appears *as* semblance. Semblance is thus pervaded not only by that which exists in relation to something else but so too is semblance thus constituted as the preliminary per se, by the appearance of that which (it) is not. It is thereby also the origin of the fragment—of the broken off part that nonetheless purports to reflect the whole, precisely in its incompleteness. Semblance thereby allegorically enacts a better fate for our faculties. To appear, but always only provisionally, demonstrates—for the sake of our existence as exclusively capacity—that capacity too might take place without absolute conviction or full actuality. Further, and the other way around, it might well be imagined that all semblance comes into existence as a mimesis of capacity itself. The endlessness of aesthetic education is Schiller's acknowledgment that the dynamic of even this education must not be allowed to entrench itself as yet another ossified capacity. Recall here Adorno's suggestion that fireworks might serve as a prototype for all art, which is to say, an example of a thing (image) that in its very appearing at once also declares its transitoriness and lack of fixed actuality.[11] In this way, fireworks mimic the dynamic of aesthetic judgment as that which in its own disinterestedness refuses actualization.

A balanced imbalance is what aesthetic education seeks, a not becoming anything new or more. The more (*das Mehr*) in Adorno's aesthetics is a mimetic ironizing of the ceaseless *more* of human capacity. The more (*das Mehr*) of beauty, in its utter

gratuitousness, is more for its own sake, an autonomous more, if you will. We have instead somehow come to be *more* at odds with our own capacities. Does Schiller mean by this that we are at odds with any and every capacity or only those capacities which detract somehow from either our wholeness or our further becoming? As regards the wholeness criterion…every and any capacity is opposed to it. But the other criterion, against our further becoming, there perhaps not every capacity is automatically aligned against us. What then would be the way to judge between what limits and what advances us? The question is not so much what we are to become but whether we *continue* to become. Hence the theory of permanent revolution. How to then make sense of any and all moments of stasis? À la Hegel, I suppose, we can imagine each object or thing that we become is also the opportunity to become something else. Otherwise only just flux. Which thing is the real, the static moments or the motion away from them? Both, all, of course. A proper guide to life then would have to include the learning of the pleasure and necessity of both aspects. Schiller wants balance, the constant moving back and forth between stasis and dynamism. This movement shows that the aesthetic for Adorno and Schiller is about the provisionality of that which has already come into existence. The aesthetic then signals the reintroduction not of our wholeness but of the provisionality of each of our capacities and thus too the like provisionality of what we have become as exclusively capacity. Semblance then is the metaphysically most correct, or shall we say advanced, form of existence. Its top note and essence are provisionality, the provisionality of becoming rather than being. Artworks are existing things that paradoxically display themselves as fully formed and yet somehow also still on the side of becoming. They are ephemera…it is therefore a great disservice to call them finished or masterpieces, to insist upon their permanence, to conserve them. How ironic it seems then to conserve those things whose very existence is a rebuke to conservation.

Schiller and Adorno's concern with the fate of human capacity also manifests itself as a concern regarding the proper relationship to our own capacities. Both acknowledge that our capacities simultaneously constitute as well as exceed us. And both likewise wonder whether our capacities might also sometimes diminish us. So too do they both find an allegory of human capacity in the nature of semblance, which is at once both more than what strictly speaking is, and less than what might be. Both consider how semblance exceeds itself without causing harm, most obviously insofar as the very form of semblance is in contrast to the existence of finished things, of things completed with their meanings seemingly shining forth from them. Semblance provides an apparition of a thing, a view somewhat adjacent to the thing, regardless of however much we are inclined to assign the true meaning of this or that thing to its appearance *as* this or that. Balance, then, for Schiller comes to be presented as the proper relationship between all of what we have become—the sum of our capacities—and what might still remain undetermined by and for us. The aesthetic for him then signals a focus not on what model to follow, or what to become, but rather the aesthetic stands as a model for how to have an ambivalent relationship to one's own becoming. This is the key aspect of Schiller's taking up the Kantian notion of disinterest. Though it appears in Kant as a disinterest in regard to things, especially things of beauty, it ramifies into a disinterest more powerfully aimed against the interest in, and interests of, one's own capacities. We might say it is as if Schiller wanted to bring to self-consciousness an awareness of the momentousness of our

capacities, again, not the power of any capacity in and of itself but the fact that in coming to acknowledge the breadth and limitation of every capacity we ought then best be able to come to mediate the relationship between the human being and its capacities, whatever they may be. Note here that the gist of so many early writings on the sublime, from Burke, Kant, and Schiller, has to with the fate of the human being *after* the collapse of one or more of its capacities.

"Humanity has lost its dignity; but Art has rescued it and preserved it in significant stone. Truth lives on in the illusion of Art, and it is from this copy, or after-image, that the original image will once again be restored."[12] The English translation fails to capture the strong association, and indeed repetition, between *Urbild* (original image) and *Nachbild* (after image), which is to say between nature and art at the locus of the image. Dignity we might best understand in this context as being the moral aspect of wholeness and integrity. Dignity, for Schiller, stands in place of the lost totality of all things human. This is why the image, and indeed the formulation of art as the afterimage, becomes so important. The image is a symbol for precisely the human function that most pressingly presupposes the integrity of the whole. Every image begins, every image is made possible, only by the view that sees it as a single unified entity. Thus it is the *image* of art, regardless of its content, reference, or significance, that carries the primary function of art, which is to convey the reality of the wholeness of a thing. Recall too how important for Adorno is the Nietzschean insistence upon the absolute destructiveness of the principle of individuation.[13] It is this principle that serves as the greatest wedge into the wholeness—or might we say with Schiller—the dignity of the human. Art is to provide, according to Schiller, not only a restoration of the lost primal integrity within ourselves as well as a unity with others, but still more importantly, art is to transfigure the fact of our having lost that integrity.

That transfiguration of our lost integrity is to represent—literally—the means and method by which we achieve freedom from determination. Consider play, a central term in Schiller's *Letters*, especially as he notes a continuity between the animal kingdom and ourselves: "An animal may be said to be at work, when the stimulus to activity is some lack; it may be said to be at play, when the stimulus is sheer plenitude of vitality, when superabundance of life is its own incentive to action. Even inanimate nature exhibits a similar luxuriance of forces, coupled with a laxity of determination which, in that material sense, might well be called play."[14] The key nexus here is between "laxity of determination" and "superabundance of life," the latter precisely what we earlier considered in Adorno's notion of the more (*das Mehr*). That idea has to do with the absolutely crucial contention that all determination, however much it might rightly and successfully respond to human need, is nonetheless inescapably also a limitation on human becoming. It is crucial here to delineate need from capacity. Capacity, we might say, is the *overdetermination* of need. To have a need requires a response in the hope of quenching or fulfilling it. But to develop a capacity in response to a need is to make the need into a permanent, persistent force that shapes an organism into a persistent readiness to respond to just such a need having become absolutized. Though one needs to respond to need, one need not thereby become the instrument of need-responsiveness. One might also remark that domination is a close cousin of the instrumentalization of neediness. This is the dialectic in Schiller's thinking here: To be determined by what we

perceive that we are not yet, is the force that most powerfully cuts at the totality of what we have been thus far. This is exactly why need and interest and inclination, and all the rest, are just those things which disqualify us, not from satisfaction and pleasure and life, but more importantly, those things disqualify us from the aesthetic, which is thus the disqualification from just that which might make us free.

What, exactly, according to Adorno and Schiller, are we attempting to recover? Adorno describes it as the object; Schiller as sensation. Both are, on the face of it, misleading. Just as Adorno does not intend, by object, a return to things, so too does Schiller not prescribe a return to sensation pure and simple. Both instead are proclaiming the importance of recovering, on the one hand, the fully human, subject-infused object, and on the other sensation that has been fully traversed, and traversed again, by all that is human. Schiller wants a recovery of sensation—but call it now sensuousness—as a fully human capacity, rather than a capacity of an organism to absorb and reflect its environment.[15] Adorno wants the recovery of objects where object means a thing that exemplifies the entirety of what is human in tension with what is not.

And yet, this specification remains too static, because it imagines an image as an immovable thing, as a mere reflection of what is, even if it is also an uncovering of what it reflects. This leads us to Schiller's idea of the living image, of the image not simply of life, but the image which is itself alive.[16] It is an image, or better: a life, a proxy for that capacity of ours to be alive but which is nonetheless not yet fully alive. We are truly alive only in the freedom we gain from—and from within—each and every one of our determinations. Here is perhaps what we seek in our gazing at images, here is perhaps an explanation as to why images seem to hold so much for us: We somehow discern in them just this ability to be alive in ways that we are not yet. The image provides then a model of how to be, hence the mimetic character of all images, of these models of how to be alive. Every image, insofar as it is an image and not the thing itself, already demonstrates the capacity to be free of the objects it ostensibly reflects. Every image thus points out the way to be freed from matter and materiality, reference and repetition. This highlights the major conundrum regarding our freedom: It is not by means of yet another determination, not by dint of the development of yet another capacity that we might liberate ourselves from the history of our own development.[17] It is rather in adjusting our relations to our capacities, in freeing ourselves, at least in part, in relation to our history, that we have the most to gain.

What's important to recall here is that our freedom is not arrived at by way of jettisoning our history, determinations, and capacities. Our freedom is rather the result of our reclaiming our capacities *in* freedom. This is of course most powerfully shown in Schiller's characterization of the return of sensuousness, or we might say, our return to sensuousness as a free capacity rather than as a means of adjustment to the world and our environment. Sensuousness is a capacity that once (first?) took hold of us, and in taking hold of us shaped us in a very particular, indeed peculiar, way.[18] The famous Schillerian *Aufhebung* is the cancellation as well as the retaining of this capacity.[19]

This dynamic is in turn related to the question of form. If form means, in the first instance, the preference for the relations of things to one another over the content or meaning of a thing, then we might surmise that Schiller's particular brand of formalism is root and branch committed to the distance of the connection to content and meaning. Or

to put it as Kant has it: Appetite and inclination are what disqualify and thwart the human ability to put some distance between its hungers and its own capacities.[20] Again, the aesthetic cannot be formulated, at least in this tradition, as yet another capacity. It is rather the case that the aesthetic is to be imagined as a thing that happens, so to speak, behind our backs, in disinterest, and realized in things not directly aimed for. It is not that we are to be indifferent towards our relations to our capacities, as rather it is that we cannot bring ourselves forward here by means of those capacities. Perhaps that is not a terrible metaphor to use here: the formulation according to how we bring ourselves forward, how we come into life and into particular ways of being alive—this has always happened in our past by means of, and in fact as an expression of, our capacities. Our capacities can only bring us so far, can only bring us forward as beings who realize themselves in one form or another as ability. But Schiller would instead have us step back from ourselves, which is to say from our abilities as well as from reality: "As soon as ever he starts preferring form to substance, and jeopardizing reality for the sake of semblance (which he must, however, recognize as such), a breach has been effected in the cycle of his animal behavior, and he finds himself set upon a path to which there is no end."[21]

Form appears in this passage in its purest, well, form. It is primarily the movement of negation, to wit here, the negation of substance. Form is denial, most poignantly the denial of the priority of substance. In Adorno's aesthetics, this manifests itself as the autonomy of art, as the achievement by art of an independence from the material and the circumstances that gave rise to it.[22] But we see the beginning of this same thought in Kant's aesthetics, in the formulation there of artistic beauty appearing only as if it were natural beauty. In other words, humanly produced beauty must distance itself from—can we say disavow?—the very material and occasion out of which it nonetheless arises.[23] Schiller, too, is quite explicit about this, especially as it forms the core of what he intends by an aesthetic education. It means the cultivation of the preference for semblance over reality, for the balance of the faculties in relation to one another rather than in contest with the environment or those of others. And yet, again, *Aufhebung*, the insistence that that which has been cancelled somehow must also be retained. This is in Schiller the balance between and among the faculties, impulses, drives, inclinations, etc., as Schiller variously names these contrasting dynamics. Put differently, the disavowal is just that which sets in motion not merely the denial of a certain inclination and capacity but more importantly the first step by means of which the capacity will become a candidate for being taken up by human subjectivity as a fully free and human capacity, rather than a mere product of need, historical circumstance, and determination.

We become free, and at the same time more properly human, not by jettisoning our capacities and determinations but by recovering them as something more than determinations, as, we might say, elective affinities in regard to our own possibilities. The most genuine freedom, from Schiller's perspective, is the freedom we ourselves might attain in relation to our own limitations. What is so novel about this idea—akin we might also see to Kant's famous essay on the meaning of Enlightenment—is that it marks a retreat from the idea of human progress as the acquisition of more capacity and knowledge.[24] Schiller in effect acknowledges the limits of human development; this is not to say there is a limit to whatever capacities we might gain but rather that the path of increasing capacity and knowledge is a kind of dead end.

More strongly put: The path of human increase has become dysfunctional insofar as it has damaged whatever integrity or dignity we might once have had. Each and every determination is not just a limitation of what we might possibly become, but more importantly, each determination sets the parameters for every subsequent determination. This is how Schiller describes what Hegel will later term the dialectic. Form, for example, is not so much the product of a singular human capacity as it is rather the movement away from the previous determination of sensuousness. Form is then not a freely chosen human capacity but instead the negation of the previous determination of sensuousness. Form was for Schiller the inevitable product of the contentful determination of sensuousness. As Schiller has it, "All other forms of perception divide man, because they are founded exclusively either upon the sensuous or upon the spiritual part of his being; only the aesthetic mode of perception makes of him a whole, because both his natures must be in harmony in order to achieve it."[25] In other words, it is not more of our nature, more of any capacity of ours that is required, but less. We need less, fewer of our capacities to be in charge of us, less of everything that we are to be in the forefront of what we are and how we are in the world, toward others as well as toward ourselves.

"The transition from a passive state of feeling [*Zustande des Empfindens*] to an active state of thinking and willing cannot, then, take place except *via* a middle state of aesthetic freedom…In a word, there is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic."[26] This passage reveals that Schiller also sees the aesthetic as the means by which human beings might transition from being objects to becoming subjects. We are objects insofar as we are the products of the determinations that happen to us, which is to say we become that which our capacities have enabled. And one of the surprising implications of the passage above is the implied expansion of the meaning of aesthetic. The aesthetic becomes in this passage the name for the very movement away from the "passive state of feeling," which is to say, from the determination of sensuousness. More broadly then, the aesthetic denominates the beginning of our having created a distance away from our very capacity to be receptive [*Zustande des Empfindens*], to be the stuff out of which determinations are made. The aesthetic then is not so much the positive freedom to make and to do as one might please as it is instead the negative freedom from the fact and form of our determinations.

We are to become more truly ourselves to the extent to which we recover some place between what we have become and whatever else we are. One is even tempted to say: We recover ourselves in founding an ambivalence towards what we already are. Only there, and then, are we in some kind of possession of ourselves rather than remaining in the state of being possessed by our determinations. The balance among our faculties, which Schiller describes as the most important goal of aesthetic education and which, of course, he takes up as a version of Kant's harmony of the faculties within successful aesthetic judgment, is to be achieved precisely by means of the lessening of the influence of any one faculty over another. This harmony does not proceed by the exercise of some harmonizing of one faculty towards others but is the result of our retreat from the dominance of any one faculty or another. The harmony is thus understood by Schiller as a return to something like our previous undetermined condition, the most salient feature of which was that no one capacity dominated who and what we were. Aesthetic education is to have its aim as the restoration of that harmony, and with it of course the harmony of

ourselves with one another (shades of Kant's subjective universality of the aesthetic), harmony between ourselves and our environment, and perhaps most importantly, harmony and unity between what we have become and what we are to become, in other words, freedom to become.

The freedom for human begins, for subjectivity, has what Schiller calls its sensible pledge within the experience of material life, and that is beauty. Beauty is thus not an image of attractiveness but rather one of freedom from inclination. Beauty, following Kant's specifications, is then not a thing which causes freedom or harmony among our faculties as it is rather a reflection, or better: an *occasion* for that balance and harmony. As we have no faculty that might absorb or perceive the harmony of our other faculties, beauty remains an elusive experience, the experience towards which, for Schiller, all education, which is to say all cultivation of human capacity, ought to tend.

Schiller's elaboration of Kantian aesthetics is most visible in how he takes the Kantian notion of beauty as the ideal form of the appearance of harmony and expands it to the idea of aesthetic appearance, semblance, in general (*der Schein*): "Semblance we love just because it is semblance, and not because we take it to be something better," and semblance is "the very essence of the fine arts."[28] Semblance, not only one of the most important concepts in Schiller's aesthetic theory, is also a genuine advance over the Kantian aesthetics of beauty insofar as it provides an explanation for the fact of aesthetic appearance in general, regardless of whether any appearance achieves the ideal state of beauty. In other words, with semblance Schiller is able to devise an account of the *form* of aesthetic appearance rather than the Kantian focus on the ideal instance—beauty—of aesthetic appearance.

It should be noted as well that this retreat from beauty, this falling back into the ranks of aesthetic appearance in general—semblance—is itself an aesthetic move. That is, we might well see this Schillerian strategy of backing away from the idealized aesthetic appearance of beauty as precisely an aesthetic disavowal. Indeed, we might consider this an instance of aesthetic irony, of beauty coming to be considered insufficiently disinterested such that semblance comes to be presented as a more appropriately aesthetic form than beauty. This, by the way, would also reveal a kinship between semblance and the sublime. Both are the product of an inclination away from beauty's potential entanglements. Both share the premise that beauty might well be itself insufficiently aesthetic. And the germ of this thought can already be discerned in Kant's preference for natural beauty over artistic beauty. The limitation of the latter is that it is the issue of human intention, however accidental the final product in relation to some intention or another—indeed Kant will insist that truly successful works of art, beautiful that is, must be the products of their having overcome whatever intentions set their making in order. We witness this same dichotomy, and preference, ramify further in Kant's hierarchy within artistic beauty between free and so-called dependent beauty.[29] Free beauty, and no doubt this term came to have special significance for Schiller in his formulation of the centrality of semblance to aesthetic images, is beauty which relies upon no concept, and is therefore, we might say, pure semblance. Dependent beauty relies on a concept or we might say figure in order to give shape to its image.

In sum, human freedom is the core concern that animates the aesthetic theories of Schiller, Adorno, and Kant. (How ironic that some take an interest in aesthetics or art to

be instead a focus away from that which is most pressing for human existence, our freedom.) As we are not yet masters of our own destiny (indeed mastery might itself be a notion that thwarts our attempts at freedom), so, too, are we unable to directly encounter what remains unfree in and about us. The whole realm of the aesthetic then exists as both a symptom of our unfreedom as well as a potential "capacity" for encountering and addressing our continuing unfreedom. Perhaps the aesthetic is in fact the greatest possible symptom of our unfreedom insofar as it manifests in such myriad and robust shapes the dialectic of what limits as well as what liberates us. Schiller's great hope was that the aesthetic would prove to be the only means by which human freedom, whose very ground rests in human capacity, might encounter itself. He saw the long history of human development as the unfolding of the capacities to do things, as the construction of *homo faber*. So too was Schiller convinced that the history of being human had reached a most momentous moment: the potential to free itself from having been shackled to the development of its capacities. The alternative path of human development would disavow the further capacity to *do* something or other and instead take up the possibility of *becoming* something free from all exercise of capacity. The aesthetic is the place where, in the heart of our unfreedom—in the exercise of our capacities, we might nonetheless liberate ourselves from our servitude to those capacities. Likewise for Adorno, every successful work of art demonstrates the tension between constraint and freedom. We cannot yet find freedom within ourselves, at best we might hope to spy an image of it in something else.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, transl. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 33. This ought not be confused with Heidegger's construction of a standing reserve, which suggests that capacities might be taken up for one end or another. This Heideggerian notion, I'd like to suggest, is akin to the weak version of ideology, which has it that ideas, opinions, etc., are somehow neutral entities detachable from the context (or, as Schiller would say, unity) in which they arose and thereby deployable for one purpose or another.
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992), 2.
3. Most helpful here is Fred Neuhouser's *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
4. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, transl. James Creed Meredith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952) 37-38.
5. See Plato, *The Phaedrus*.
6. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 45.
7. Ibid., 44.
8. This marks his difference from Kant who saw the aesthetic as a capacity of the whole being, of the systematicity of the whole being, whereas Schiller is far more keen to keep this "capacity"—call it aesthetic judgment or taste—a capacity that never fully arrives.
9. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, transl. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin Books, 1886), 51.
10. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, transl. William H. Payne (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1918), 45. "O men, be humane; it's your foremost duty. Be humane to all classes and to all ages, to everything not foreign to mankind. What wisdom is there for you outside of humanity?"
11. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, transl. Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York: Continuum, 2002), 81.
12. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 57.
13. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, Vol. I*, transl. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003), 352-53. "Just as the boatman sits in his small boat, trusting his frail craft in a stormy sea that is boundless in every direction, rising and falling with the howling, mountainous waves, so in the midst of a world full of suffering and misery the individual man calmly sits, supported by and trusting the *principium individuationis*, or the way in which the individual knows things as phenomenon." Quoted by Nietzsche in Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music," in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, transl. Raymond Geuss (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16-17.
14. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 207.

15. Ibid., 79.
16. Ibid., 121.
17. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, transl. Charles Lan Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967) 10. "Man's tragedy, Nietzsche said, is that he was once a child."
18. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 139.
19. Ibid., 124-25. "Since, however, both conditions remain everlastingly opposed to each other, there is no other way of uniting them except by destroying (*Aufgehoben*) them."
20. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, transl. James Creed Meredith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952) 42.
21. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 207.
22. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 1-7.
23. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 140-41.
24. Immanuel Kant, "An answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1784), 54-60. In Kant's essay this is presented as the necessity to withdraw from all authority insofar as authority functions as that which limits one's own capacity to realize the self—regardless how misguided a self might be produced—as just that disavowal of the power of something or someone else over oneself.
25. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 215.
26. Ibid., 161.
27. Ibid.,173-81.
28. Ibid.,193.
29. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 39-42.