On May 1, 1778, Mozart wrote his father about a salon concert he gave at the duchesse de Chabot's in Paris: "Madame and her gentlemen never interrupted their drawing for a moment . . . so that I had to play to chairs, tables and walls" (Johnson 1995, 76). Even when the music was not intended as background for other activities, salon audiences were seldom very attentive (fig. 35). If people didn't listen in the salons, the situation was no better in the opera houses, where the aristocrats who sat on the stage and the mixed company that stood in the pit talked, blew whistles, threw apples, or started fights. At the Paris Opera, the rowdiness was such that forty soldiers carrying muskets were assigned to patrol the halls. Orchestra conductors tried to keep time above the noise by beating a wooden stick against the podium, scene changes took place in full view, and the hall was brightly lit by thousands of candles that maximized the spectator's view of each other, although the smoke sometimes obscured the stage. Even the physical layout favored socializing over listening because the boxes along the sides of the second and third levels were deep and had floor to ceiling walls set at right angles rather than slanting toward the stage, making it easier to carry out liaisons or to see people across the way than to attend to the actors on the stage (Johnson 1995, 10) (fig. 36). The situation was no better in London. Hogarth's painting of a climactic scene in the Beggar's Opera of 1728 humorously exploits the fact that some of the aristocracy sat on stage by having Lavinia Fenton, playing Polly, look past the other actors toward her lover, the duke of Bolton at a table along the side (Paulson 1991-93, vol. 1) (fig. 37).

In 1759 the French eliminated stage seating, and the English followed in 1762; later in the century the walls of boxes in new theaters were slanted toward the stage and fixed seats were installed in the pit, although this did not quiet audiences as much as hoped (Rougement 1988). The removal of aristocrats from the stage not only signaled an attempt to eliminate distraction but also swept away one of the last vestiges of the social/ritual aspect of the theater. Serious operas and plays were now supposed to be the experience of an art illusion, and theater audiences began to be encouraged to sit in respectful and attentive silence (Caplan 1989). It would take until the mid-nineteenth century for the new behavior to become typical; meanwhile, the physical changes and the exhortations to silent attention helped prepare the way for theories of the aesthetic.

This is not the place to trace the history of particular theories of the aesthetic since Alexander Baumgarten first coined the term in 1753; instead I will describe some signs of a split in the traditional responses to the arts that divided the satisfactions of utility and diversion from the special kind of pleasure that came to be called aesthetic. The crucial difference between taste and the aesthetic is that taste has always been an irremediably social concept, concerned as much with food, dress, and manners as with the beauty or meaning of nature or art. From the ancient Greeks through the nineteenth century, literal taste, as facilitated by the tongue, as well as the senses of touch and smell, were downgraded as too sensual and bodily compared to vision and hearing (Korsmeyer 1999). In the eighteenth century, for example, Lord Kames begins his influential discussion of taste by distinguishing the dignified and "elevated" senses of sight and
hearing from the “inferior” bodily senses of tasting, touching, and smelling (Kames 1762, 1–6). Most of those who contributed to the theory of taste in the eighteenth century similarly tried to separate taste in the fine arts from the word’s natural association with ordinary sensual pleasures or the satisfactions of utility. The advantage of the new term “aesthetic” was that it did not carry such metaphorical baggage. But before examining the intellectual process by which taste was transformed into the aesthetic, we need to consider the emergence of certain “aesthetic” behaviors—like the calmer attention aimed at by eliminating aristocrats from the stage or by installing seats in the pit.

Learning Aesthetic Behavior

A particularly telling example of this new kind of behavior was the “picturesque tour” so popular in Britain during the last third of the century. To experience a landscape as “picturesque” was to look at it in the way one looked at a painting. This purely visual attitude seems so natural to us that it is easy to overlook the change from a moral and utilitarian to an aesthetic behavior. Early eighteenth-century estate grounds were often laid out with quiet vales for meditation and adorned with exemplary statuary and structures such as Stowe garden’s neoclassical “Temple of Virtue,” conceived after the old Horatian ideal for poetry: “The End and Design of a good Garden is to be both profitable and delightful” (Andrews 1989, 52). By mid-century, however, many newer designs eliminated exemplary statuary and laid out estates to provide a gallery of landscape views solely to please the eye.
According to William Gilpin’s influential guidebooks on the picturesque, regular fields and well-built houses might give us moral satisfaction, but they excite no “pleasure in the Imagination” (Andrews 1989, 48). Appreciating picturesque beauty meant attending to the purely visual factors of lighting, distances, rough contours, and ruins (Gilpin 1782). Moreover, only certain kinds of people could appear in a genuinely picturesque scene without spoiling the effect: “Milk-maids . . . ploughmen, reapers, and all peasants engaged in their several professions, we disallow . . . they are valued, for what in real life they are despised—loitering idly about” (Bobls 1995, 96). Coached by writers like Gilpin to eliminate moral and utilitarian interests in favor of purely pictorial ones, the new domestic tourists set off for the river Wye and other sites armed with guidebooks, sketchpads, journals, and a most telling piece of aesthetic equipment: the “Claude glass,” a dark tinted, convex mirror that conveniently reduced a scene to the scale and tonality of a miniature Claude Lorrain painting (fig. 38). Today, we are likely to sympathize with Jane Austen’s parody of the picturesque tourist in Northanger Abbey where Catherine Morland looks down from the top of Beechen Cliff and rejects “the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape” (Austen 1995, 99). However banal it now seems, picturesque tourism, with its Claude glasses, guidebooks, and journals, was an important step toward the behavior we call aesthetic.

Figure 38. William Gilpin, sketch from Observations on the River Wye (1782).Courtesy Rare Book and Special Collections, University of Illinois Library, Urbana-Champaign.
of the academy's Salon exhibition of 1779, "I perceive a sentiment worthy of unifying the human species...the passionate love for the Fine Arts" (Crow 1985, 4, 19). Already the cult of art was beginning and the inflated, quasi-religious rhetoric that goes with it.

In Hazlitt's response we recognize the late eighteenth-century Romantic sensibility of a cultivated gentleman. But what of the motley assortment of Louvre Salon visitors earlier in the century that included a great noble, a lady, a Savoyard odd-job man, a fishwife, and a "rough artisan," the latter, "guided only by natural feeling" yet coming out with "a just observation"? (Crow 1985, 4).

Was that "natural feeling" something universal, something common to both Mairobet and the rough artisan? And if it was common, why did people disagree so widely in their tastes? These questions formed part of what historians of aesthetics call the "problem of taste," the issue of whether there is an objective or inborn standard of taste. If the fishwife or artisan already possesses this subtle judgment, it would seem so. However, if people had to learn how to behave toward the fine arts, taste would seem to be a social matter requiring education and leisure.

The Art Public and the Problem of Taste

In chapter 5 on the category of fine art, we saw that a major criterion for separating fine art from craft was fine art's appeal to the finer pleasures of taste rather than to utility or sensual enjoyment. Moreover, frequent experiences of this refined sort distinguished the polite public from the ignorant poor or the boorish rich and their "grosser" pleasures. Yet it was not only the laboring poor or the booby squires who were believed to lack the fine sensibility requisite to good taste but also the colored races, most women, and, on the wealthier side, the idle rich who mixed art and luxury.

Although many eighteenth-century writers on taste suggested that laborers lacked the capacity or means to acquire a refined taste, others, like Kant, believed that literacy would eventually make almost everyone part of the public. A good example of the differences over who was capable of refined taste was the debate over who was qualified to judge the French Academy's annual Salon exhibition. At one extreme, Louis de Carmontelle could idealistically declare that "all classes of citizens come to pack the Salon...and the public, natural judge of the fine arts...renders its verdict" (Crow 1985, 18). But the academy director, Charles Coypel, declared that "the public changes twenty times a day...What the public admires at ten o'clock...is publicly condemned at noon..."
By 1785 the annual salons of the academy drew large crowds and vigorous critical commentary; Jacques-Louis David, whose *Oath of the Horatii* of that year has often been described as a harbinger of several Revolutionary ideals, knew how to play off parts of this public against the more conservative leaders of the academy.

After having heard them all, you will have heard not a true public, but only the mob" (Crow 1985, 10) (fig. 40). A similar distinction was made with regard to the audience at the theater and concerts. In the first half of the century, the noisy parterre continued to be the place of cheap standing-room-only tickets, filled by merchants, students, law clerks, and a smattering of shop assistants, self-employed artisans, and servants (Rougemont 1988). Dubos asserted that the public of *the parterre*, without knowing the rules, judges a play as well as the playwrights," but immediately added that he did not "include in the public the lower classes ... but only people who have acquired ... taste through comparison" (Dubos 1993, 279). Many observers in the second half of the century claimed that the judgment of the parterre was declining because too many of the working classes were showing up: "Workmen and mercenaries decide the fate of music. They fill the theaters; they attend the musical competitions and they set themselves up as arbiters of taste" (Le Huray and Day 1988, 125). Although these alarms were probably exaggerated, they are evidence of a combined cultural and class anxiety.

A small but significant segment of the European working population in the eighteenth century were African slaves and servants who can be seen in paintings of the time as a sign of their owner's wealth and status. Two of the leading eighteenth-century writers on aesthetics offered the opinion that people of color were by nature incapable of a refined taste for the arts. David Hume's comments are the most notorious and sweeping: "I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion ... no ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences ... Not to mention our colonies, there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity" (1993, 360). Although James Beattie and others refuted Hume's inaccuracies and prejudices, Kant thought enough of Hume's essay to cite it in support of his own contention that "the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling" (Kant 1960, 110; Eze 1997, 63).

The exclusion of women from those capable of the "fine taste" was not as sweeping as the exclusion of the dark-skinned races or the laboring class. Although a few male writers believed women were actually more discriminating than men, others, such as Shaftesbury and Kant, for example, believed women lacked the requisite intellectual powers to go with their sensibility. Instead of becoming connoisseurs of the fine arts, women were generally expected to become practitioners of the lesser arts or crafts. In Jane Austen's unfinished novel, *Sanditon*, the "two Miss Beauforts" have been brought by their parents to a seaside resort to display their female attainments in the search for husbands: "They were very accomplished and very Ignorant," Austen writes, "with the hire of a Harp for one, and the purchase of some Drawing paper for the other" (Bermingham 1992, 14).

Of course, it was not only the vulgar poor, the colored races, and the majority of women who were identified as lacking the intellectual capacity for a sound comparative taste but also the vulgar rich who had no interest in the fine arts. Yet there was still another group of the rich and high born who, although they did collect paintings or host salons for noted writers and musicians, nevertheless still failed to exhibit a properly aesthetic attitude. Although highly sophisticated, they were excluded from that class of people with good taste, not because they misused their fine taste for display, decoration, and diversion—what the eighteenth century called "luxury." The critique of upper-class luxury was probably as important to the construction of the modern idea of the aesthetic as the rejection of the lower-class and female-identified pleasures of sense and utility. Of course, luxury in the simpler meaning of conspicuous expenditure had its eighteenth-century defenders—for example, Hume, Bernard Mandeville, Adam Smith, and Charles-Louis Secondat de Montesquieu. But from mid-century on, many critics began to focus on luxury's
deleterious effects on the arts, attacking conspicuous consumption and rococo prettiness in the name of nature, morality, and the ancients. When Lord Kames described the sort of people who are in touch with the universal standard of taste, he eliminated not only those “who depend for food on bodily labour” but also the sensualists, especially the opulent who use riches “to make a figure in the public eye” (1762, 369).

An important subtext in the attack on luxury was the blame many authors laid on women. Shaftesbury faulted women for the success of a rococo style that appealed primarily to the senses rather than to “rational” pleasures (Barrell 1986, 38). Gabriel Sénac de Milhan warned that women, particularly mistresses, were threatening the survival of the French nobility by encouraging the acquisition of lavish houses, gardens, furniture, paintings, and statuary (Saisselin 1992, 41). Louis-Sébastien Mercier attacked the prevalence of portraits over history painting in the annual salons, declaring that “as long as the brush sells itself to idle opulence, to mincing coquetterie, . . . the portrait should remain in the boudoir” (Crow 1985, 22).

But once the dark-skinned savages, the ignorant poor, the boorish middle class, the luxurious rich, and the frivolous or merely accomplished women were eliminated, there still remained the problem of identifying the characteristics of a “fine taste” on the part of the small group of upper-class men and women who were left. Writers like Hume or Kames were content to identify further characteristics of the kind of person who would exercise such a taste, whereas a Dubos or Mendelssohn attempted to define the nature and operations of the fine taste itself. Thus the “problem” of taste involved not only the question of universality and innateness but also the question of what special social or mental characteristics were requisite to a fine taste. This was not an entirely new problem, of course, since taste had long been defined as a special kind of tacit knowledge, an “I know not what.” Now, however, a distinct category of fine arts had been constructed and had been conceptually and institutionally separated from contexts of use and everyday pleasure, inviting a similar separation of the experience of fine art from other kinds of experience. Over the course of the eighteenth century, innumerable artists, critics, and philosophers tried their hand at answering these questions in a flood of books, essays, and letters and, in the process, constructed the modern idea of the aesthetic.

The Elements of the Aesthetic

Three major elements of the older idea of taste were transformed into the modern idea of the aesthetic: (1) ordinary pleasure in beauty developed into a special kind of refined and intellectualized pleasure, (2) the idea of unprejudiced judgment became an ideal of disinterested contemplation, and (3) the preoccupation with beauty was displaced by the sublime and eventually by the idea of the self-contained work of art as creation.2 The most important of these elements was the idea of a special refined pleasure that set polite or fine taste apart from the older notion of taste as preference. In the old system of art, pleasure, as well as use, was conceived of instrumentally; the pleasures of the arts provided diversions and amusements that contributed to health and civic peace. And something useful that fulfilled its purpose gracefully was also a source of satisfaction. But once the new system of fine art versus craft had been codified, the crafts were said to aim at a merely sensual pleasure or at bare utility, whereas the fine arts were said to be the object of a higher, contemplative pleasure. This was already suggested by the tendency of the polite classes to withdraw from popular culture and stigmatize it as “mere” recreation compared to the more refined pleasures of the imagination. The refined pleasures of polite taste now became the object of close psychological and philosophical analysis.

Early in the century, many writers argued that the pleasure of taste was something like a distinct faculty, an “inward eye” (Shaftesbury), an “internal sense” (Francis Hutcheson), a “sixth sense” (Dubos). Yet the idea of taste as a spontaneous faculty jostled uneasily with the need to develop taste by social experience. Addison assured his Spectator readers that if they wanted to know whether their spontaneous response showed good taste, they need only compare their reactions to “The Politer Part of Our Contemporaries” (1712, no. 409). A remark by Anne-Thérèse de Lambert nicely captures the tension between taste as a social attainment and taste as a quality of mind: “Up to now people have defined good taste as a usage established by the polite and spiritual people of high society. I believe that it depends on two things: a very delicate sentiment in the heart, and a great precision in the mind” (Lambert [1747] 1990, 241). Lambert’s call for combining “sentiment in the heart” with “precision in the mind” shows that the shift from “taste” to the “aesthetic” came about partly as a result of giving a more intellectual character to the pleasures of the “higher” senses of the eye and ear in order to further distance them from ordinary sensual enjoyments.

Here again Addison was prescient in describing the “pleasures of the imagination” in the Spectator as located somewhere between the grosser satisfactions of sense and the more abstract enjoyments of the intellect (1712, no. 411). A number of writers, including Hume, Diderot, Rousseau, and Sulzer, not only distinguished sentiment from sensuality and feeling from emotion but also joined sentiment and reason in a kind of spontaneous or tacit knowledge,
suggesting a third kind of experience combining elements of both. D'Alembert, for example, speaks of taste as having its own kind of “logic,” which discovers the “truths of feeling” (Becq 1994a, 687). Hume claimed that taste for the “polite arts... improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions; at the same time that it renders the mind incapable of the rougher and more boisterous emotions” (Hume 1993, 12). Diderot contrasted those who cry over any sad story with the true judges of art who possess “that gentle emotion in which feeling does not injure comparison” (Becq 1994a, 680).

If we want to get a sense of what the broader public was experiencing, two visual representations of refined taste can be of help. Anne-Marie Link (1992) has explored the representation of taste in the Goettingen Pocket Calendar of 1780, a middle-class almanac filled with maxims for everyday living. This almanac featured a set of twelve essays accompanied by engravings that contrasted the “Natural” with the “Affected Practices in Life,” a sort of compendium of good and bad taste. The March/April section had two sets of drawings and essays comparing natural versus affected “Sentiment” (Empfindsamkeit) in relation to nature and to art, respectively. The engraving depicting a “natural” sentiment or feeling in the presence of nature shows a middle-class man and woman with heads bowed before a sunset, and the accompanying essay by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg speaks of their “quiet,” “innocent,” “un-self-conscious” behavior. The contrasting engraving, depicting an “affected” sentiment toward nature, in contrast, shows a similarly dressed couple wildly gesticulating at the sunset (fig. 41). When we turn to the drawing depicting a “natural” sentiment toward art, we see two middle-class men standing side by side, their arms folded, as they gaze up respectfully at the statue of a woman. But in the contrasting “affected” sentiment engraving, one of the men points to the bunch of grapes held by the statue while exclaiming to the other man who is throwing up his hands in enthusiasm (fig. 42). The almanac illustrations and text reject irrational outbursts of feeling in favor of a calmer, more reflective sentiment of just the sort Diderot described—“that gentle emotion in which feeling does not injure comparison.”

A less direct but equally telling example of the new experience of refined sentiment can be found in the changed behaviors and attitudes toward music in France from the mid-1770s onward. In the first half of the century, when purely instrumental music was still regarded as inferior, the passages in operas and symphonies considered most thrilling were the imitations of sighs, shouts, cries, battle sounds, birdsongs, rushing streams, storms, and avalanches. Significantly, most of these passages could easily be heard above the din of conversation and the beating of the conductor's stick. By the 1780s, as audiences began to quiet down, both the kind of music written and audiences' experience of it had begun to shift toward the musical expression of human feelings rather than the clamor of storms and battles. A turning point was the arrival in Paris of the composer Christoph Willibald Gluck, whose subtler scores and staging brought a shift from spectacular effects to expressive harmonics and orchestration. In describing an opera premier of 1779, one writer spoke of “an extreme and uninterrupted attentiveness” despite “the strongest emotions visible on every face” (Johnson 1995, 59). As in the case of the Goettingen drawings, these fine art spectators are at once moved yet calm, combining intellectual concentration with intense feeling, the sort of attitude later theorists would call “aesthetic.”

Yet before the modern idea of a distinctive aesthetic experience could be fully formulated, two further refinements in the idea of taste had to occur. First, the attempt to specify more closely the nature of the pleasure involved in “fine
taste” led to the idea of disinterested contemplation. Second, the investigation of the objective qualities of the beautiful led to the separation of the beautiful from the sublime and the picturesque, opening the way toward a more general concept.

In the old system of art, taste was usually tied to an “interest” or stake in the purpose of works of art, whether moral, practical, or recreational; in the new system of fine arts, the response believed most appropriate became one of disinterested contemplation. Paradoxically, the idea of “disinterestedness” involved an intense “interest,” in the sense of focused attention, but a complete absence of an interest, in the sense of a desire for possession or personal satisfaction, even of a moral or religious kind. There seem to be two sources for the general idea of disinterestedness, one aristocratic/political, the other philosophic/religious, each leading to a slightly different emphasis, although the two could be blended. According to the political perspective known as civic humanism, only those who have the wealth and leisure for reflection are able to rise above self-interest and take a view of society as a whole. Most British and French writers adopted some form of this patrician ideal of disinterestedness.

It is assumed in Addison’s often-cited line from the Spectator, “A Man of a Polite Imagination ... often feels a greater Satisfaction in the Prospect of Fields and Meadows, than another does in the Possession. ... He looks upon the World, as it were, in another Light” (1712, no. 411). Shaftesbury combined the aristocratic conception of disinterest with a Neoplatonic philosophy that encouraged the rational contemplation of the true, the good, and the beautiful. In an often-cited dialogue examining the proper response to the beauty of the ocean, a landscape, and a human body, he contrasted “eager desire” with a “rational and refined contemplation” (Shaftesbury [1711] 1963, 128). Sometimes, as in Dubos, Hutcheson, Hume, or Archibald Alison, disinterestedness seems to have meant little more than an ability to rise above prejudice or narrow self-regard (Townsend 1988, 137).

The religious and theological concept of disinterestedness goes back through medieval mysticism to Augustine, who emphasized that all genuine love of God must be for the sake of God alone. Karl Philipp Moritz, whose idea of the work of art as a “self-sufficient world” we have already considered, described the appropriate response to such works in the vocabulary of the contemplative love of God: “As the beautiful object draws our attention completely to itself, it makes us forget ourselves for a while so that we seem to loose ourselves in it; and precisely this loss, this forgetting of ourselves, is the highest degree of pure and disinterested pleasure that beauty grants us ... a pleasure which must be ever closer to disinterested love, if it is to be genuine” (Moritz 1962, 5; Woodmansee 1994).

A third element that helped turn the notion of taste into the aesthetic was the addition of the ideas of the sublime and picturesque to the traditional focus on beauty. Rooted in theories of rhetorical or poetic style where it meant grandeur of effect, the “sublime” began to be widely used in the eighteenth century for anything in nature or art that produced an impression of overpowering greatness. At first the sublime was treated as an aspect of beauty but soon came to be contrasted with it. The sublime was variously described as an experience of something that is vast, awesome, or terrifying and yet gives pleasure because we contemplate it from safety—for example, an enormous mountain rising from a plain or a storm at sea or Milton’s portrayal of Hell. When contrasted with the sublime, the beautiful was often described as charming, sympathetic, harmonious, something we experience as immediately pleasurable (De Bolla 1989). Like other components of the modern system of art, many versions of the sublime were male gendered from the beginning. Even some of Burke’s male contemporaries noticed that his description of beauty, in contrast, was almost
a caricature of stereotypes of femininity—delicate, timid, small, soft, light (Burke 1968, lxxv). Kant devoted an entire chapter of his early book on the beautiful and sublime to the idea that men are sublime (noble, heroic, powerful, deep), while women are beautiful (charming, sensitive, weak, superficial) (Kant 1960). Theories of the sublime achieved considerable complexity by the end of the century, and the sublime has been seen by many artists and philosophers from the Romantics to the present as far more powerful and aesthetically important than the merely beautiful (Ashfield and De Bolla 1996). The rise in importance of the sublime, the picturesque, and other qualities alongside the beautiful opened the way for a new concept and term that might embrace what was most important in the responses to each (Cassirer 1951).

Alexander Baumgarten originally coined the term “aesthetic” for the kind of response he believed appropriate to the “sensate discourse” of poetry; he wanted a name for sensation’s own logic—and he called it “aesthetic” from the Greek aisthēsis, having to do with the senses (1954). By providing a separate term for the joint working of sense and imagination in the arts, Baumgarten did three things: he gave feeling or sentiment a more important role in the panoply of the mental powers; he provided a technical term whose range of meaning could be more easily stipulated than the word “taste,” with its inevitable physiological and social associations; and he opened the way for the term “aesthetic” to become the name for a special mode of knowing. Since it was a new coinage, it could easily be given several significations, and there has been an equivocation from the beginning between the broad use of “aesthetic” for any sort of value system having to do with art or beauty and “the aesthetic” as a special form of disinterested knowledge, uniting feeling and reason.

Kant and Schiller Sum up the Aesthetic

Although I have avoided following particular theorists of art or the aesthetic, I want to close this chapter by looking briefly at Kant’s and Schiller’s way of integrating the concept of the aesthetic with the new concepts of fine art and the artist. By doing so, they provided the first systematic justifications for the modern system of art as a whole. According to Kant, theories that make taste the application of concepts or rules, of sensual pleasure or utility, all admit of an “interest” or desire, whereas true “aesthetic taste” is a pure, disinterested pleasure in which we only contemplate an object. Put positively, aesthetic experience, for Kant, is a “harmonious free play” of our imagination (percepts) and our understanding (concepts). In a true aesthetic experience, imagination and understanding do not gear into each other in their normal workaday fashion of classifying or concluding but spin freely in a pleasurable harmony. So long as understanding and imagination remain in this aesthetic mode they simply explore and enjoy the world contemplatively (Kant 1987, 45, 51–52, 61–62).

Although Kant’s description of the aesthetic was almost completely taken up with what happens inside our heads, he did identify a quality in objects most conducive to stimulating this harmonious play of our faculties: “the form of purposiveness,” or “purposiveness without a purpose.” Some objects seem to be “purposely” made, to have a form, yet we do not directly see a purpose or use for them. The forms of objects like “flowers, free designs, lines aimlessly intertwined” simply offer our mind an occasion to enjoy its own powers at play with no ulterior desire or interest (Kant 1987, 64–66, 49).

By making disinterestedness the key to the universality of aesthetic judgment, Kant distinguished the autonomy of aesthetic experience not only from the ordinary pleasures of sense or utility but also from science and morality. This seems to run counter to the many eighteenth-century writers on fine art who stressed art’s moral functions and, also, to Kant’s own conviction that moral freedom defines our dignity as human beings. Yet Kant did claim a highly indirect connection between the aesthetic and morality: beauty is a symbol of morality since both aesthetic and moral judgments are similarly free of external rules, and the sublime—our aesthetic pleasure in the midst of nature’s overpowering force—reveals our dignity as rational-beings. An aesthetic experience of beauty or the sublime does not teach us particular “moral lessons” but makes us aware of our freedom as moral agents (Kant 1987, 225–30, 119–32). For Kant, there is no way to escape the fundamental paradoxes of aesthetic judgment: it is pleasurable yet disinterested, individual yet universal, spontaneous yet necessary, without concepts yet intellectual, without moral instruction yet a revelation of our moral nature.

Once Kant had established the specificity of the aesthetic, he used it to explain the new polarities of fine art versus craft and artist versus artisan. Kant’s discussion of the fine art versus craft dichotomy remarkably recapitulates the history of the split in the older idea of art, although Kant presented the division as a logical rather than historical process. He begins by recognizing the older idea of art as any kind of human production in contrast to nature, then distinguishes within the general idea of art between the liberal and the mechanical arts. Next, Kant distinguishes two classes within the liberal arts: the “agreeable arts,” which aim at ordinary sensory satisfaction, and the “fine arts,” which aim at the properly aesthetic “pleasures of reflection.” Kant’s examples of merely agreeable arts are storytelling at a party, a nicely furnished table, or music at a banquet (Kant 1987, 170–73). Kant’s list of fine arts includes the usual core of...
ART DIVIDED

poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture, to which he adds oratory and landscape gardening. Yet Kant also recognized that some things usually categorized as crafts because they aim at use could be treated as fine arts if they were intended “to be merely looked at, using ideas to entertain the imagination in free play, and occupying the aesthetic power of judgment without a determinate purpose” (Kant 1987, 193).

Kant also interpreted the ideal of the artist as creator in terms of the aesthetic by making works of fine art the product of spontaneous genius and works of craft the product of diligence and rules. Craft work (Handwerk), Kant claims, is merely labor, something people do only if paid, whereas making fine art is an activity pleasurable in itself, a kind of “play.” Unlike the artisan or craftsman, who follows a specific concept, the artist uses his genius “aesthetically,” exercising the imagination and understanding in free play (Kant 1987, 171–75).

By systematically integrating the polarities of aesthetic versus purpose, artist versus artisan, and fine art versus craft, Kant offered a powerful philosophical justification for the modern system of art. Even though Kant himself was as interested in the aesthetic response to nature as to fine art, those who built on his work connected the aesthetic almost exclusively to fine art. Moreover, despite Kant’s attempt to show that the beautiful and sublime reveal our moral nature, the long-term effect of his work has been to reinforce the separation of art, science, and morality.

Kant’s younger contemporary, the poet and playwright, Friedrich Schiller, was deeply impressed by Kant’s formulation of the aesthetic but felt Kant had perpetrated a dualism between the spiritual and sensual that would be ruinous to society. When Kant’s Critique of Judgment appeared in 1790, the French Revolution was in its first hopeful phase, and Schiller’s warm support of liberty led the French Assembly to make him an honorary citizen. But when the Revolution took a bloody turn in 1792–93, Schiller rejected revolutionary politics in disgust, convinced that without authority the deep divisions in the human soul lead to chaos rather than freedom. Schiller’s Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man, written between 1793 and 1795, claim that it is not political revolution that will bring freedom without chaos but the aesthetic experience of fine art. Knowing that his claim for the redemptive power of aesthetic fine art would seem grandiose, he set out to prove it in a spiraling argument based in part on Kant, in part on a vision of human nature divided between spirit and sense and desperately needing integration (Schiller 1967).

In the genuine work of fine art there is already a harmony of freedom and necessity, duty and inclination, the “spiritual drive” and the “sensuous drive,” a union that Schiller called “play.” The artist-genius embodies the transcendent truth about life in the work of art as play, yet this truth is not a specific content but resides only in the form of the work. “In a truly successful work of Art the contents should effect nothing, the form everything, for only through form is the whole man affected . . . only from form there true aesthetic freedom” (Schiller 1967, 155). True fine art never aims at some particular result like stimulating emotions, teaching beliefs, or improving morals. Only when people renounce all such instrumental aims and exercise “a disinterested and unconditional appreciation of pure semblance” will they have “started to become truly human” (Schiller 1967, 205).

But how can such idealized works of fine art bring the political freedom and equality that have escaped the grasp of political revolutionaries? Schiller believed that art would change society by healing the inner divisions within each individual so that moral and political actions would no longer be a self-imposed duty but a spontaneous expression of the whole person. The exemplary images of fine art would draw each person toward a harmonious life in which the good can flow from natural inclination. For Schiller, fine art was not merely a symbol of morality as in Kant but the incarnation of a higher truth that will transform us by restoring our lost unity. “Humanity has lost its dignity; but Art has rescued it . . . . Truth lives on in the illusion of Art, and it is from this copy, or after-image, that the original image will be restored” (Schiller 1967, 57).

Given Schiller’s lofty understanding of aesthetic experience, it is not surprising that he considered only a few people capable of it. What Schiller called “the aesthetic state,” in contrast to the purely political state, exists only among a saving remnant; it is like the “pure church or pure Republic,” found only “in some few chosen circles . . . governed . . . by the aesthetic” (Schiller 1967, 219). The “aesthetic education” of Schiller’s title, therefore, is not mere art appreciation but a dynamic process of salvation by art; art, just by being art, can redeem us by reuniting our sensual and spiritual natures. Schiller’s Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man exalted the new ideals of fine art, the artist, and the aesthetic to their highest pitch at the end of the eighteenth century. Whereas Moritz applied the language of the love of God to the love of art, Schiller gave fine art the redemptive power of God incarnate.

Although it would be nice to end our discussion of Kant and Schiller on this high note, we need to reconnect their elevated and exciting visions of aesthetic experience to more earthly realities. Both Kant and Schiller were admirable figures in many ways and more liberal than most of their contemporaries, but they were not immune to the prejudices of their time. We have already
mentioned some of Kant’s racial and gender attitudes, although the *Critique of Judgment*, like his other two critiques, moves on the high plane of analyzing the universal faculties of the human mind. Yet it seems fairly obvious that only those who have attained a certain level of middle-class comfort could easily adopt a purely disinterested attitude: “Only when their need is satisfied can we tell who . . . has taste and who does not” (Kant 1987, 52). One of Kant’s examples of the type of person who lacks aesthetic disinterestedness, is “that Iroquois sachem who said that he liked nothing better in Paris than the eating-houses” (Kant 1987, 45; Shusterman 1993, 111–17).

Schiller’s passionate and self-sacrificing devotion to fine art is legendary, and, partly because of his high ideals, he had trouble supporting himself through the market, finally accepting the patronage of the duke of Augustenburg to whom he dedicated the *Aesthetic Letters*. The *Letters*’ main themes were not only a response to the Revolution, however, but had been worked out two years before in a fierce attack on the poetry of Gottfried Bürger, who was not only commercially successful but had even argued that poetry should be accessible to the broad public, invoking the old Horatian ideal of please and instruct (Woodmansee 1994). Schiller shot back that the true artist will appeal to “the elect of a nation” against “its massa” and claimed that the only permissible criterion for the success of a work of art is its internal perfection (Berghahn 1988, 79). Schiller was convinced that only a class freed from labor would have sound “aesthetic powers of judgment” and “maintain the beautiful entirety of human nature, which is . . . thoroughly destroyed by a life of work” (Hohendahl 1982, 56).

Obviously, the personal motives or class prejudices connected to Kant’s and Schiller’s ideas do not invalidate them as ideas, but it would be equally mistaken to ignore the specific historical context of their justification for the modern system of fine arts. The larger issue is not whether Hume or Kant, or Schiller shared the race, class, and gender prejudices of their time, but whether this kind of prejudice was an essential part of the new system of fine art and the aesthetic. Obviously, many of the same Enlightenment thinkers who held these social biases also believed in a universal human nature. In the French debate over who made up the true public for the Salon or the concert hall, there were not only those who systematically excluded the lower classes and most women as inferior by nature, but also others who believed that almost anyone could learn the proper behavior and attitudes. One writer claimed that any worker who saved up in order to frequent concerts of serious music had by that fact become part of the legitimate art public (Lough 1957, 218). On a more philosophical level, many British and German writers on taste often exhibited a universalizing commitment that implied everyone is in principle capable of refined judgment, even if in practice only the “politer parts” of society actually rise to it. Kant’s use of the notion of a *sensus communis* (not “common sense” but the common sensory and intellectual powers of humanity) implied that at least some Africans and Native Americans, if well fed, would be capable of disinterested contemplation. Although it is perhaps an exaggeration to call this universalizing strain in writers from Shaftesbury to Schiller “aesthetic democracy,” it is true that social, racial, and gender prejudices often stood in tension with a professed belief in a common humanity and aesthetic experience (Dowling 1996).
that many architects were making creative use of the new materials and ordering prefabricated wood or iron pillars, panels, doors, windows, and ornamental work, the need for the traditional craft skills of the master mason and stone carver and the cabinetmaker and woodcarver declined even further. Thus, the building arts followed the arts of pottery, weaving, and glassblowing in a steadily diminishing need for the inventive and multitalented craftsman. As the ideal of the artist reached new spiritual heights in the course of the nineteenth century and the craftsman’s skills became increasingly superfluous, the gap between the image and status of the artist and the artisan became wider than ever.

CHAPTER 12

Silences

Triumph of the Aesthetic

In Émile Zola’s novel L’assommoir (1877), a working-class wedding party decides to celebrate by a visit to the Louvre, thinking the edifying majesty of the art museum accords well with the occasion. Only one of them has been in an art museum before and they are overwhelmed by the finely dressed guards, the sumptuous surroundings, the mirror finish of the parquet floors, the heavy gold frames. When they come on Ruben’s painting of a country festival (The Kermis), showing drunken, vomiting, urinating peasants, many lewdly grabbing each other, the women “utter little cries; then turn away blushing deeply.” The men stare and snicker, “looking closer for obscene details” [1877] 1965, 92; [1877] 1995, 78. Finally, the wedding party gets lost in the labyrinth of galleries, and they scurry from room to room, numbed by the endless rows of paintings, etchings, drawings, statues, and cases full of figurines. Zola’s working-class wedding party whirling through the Louvre strikes us as comic because they lack the rudiments of what we believe necessary to appreciating museum art—some knowledge of art history, some sense of aesthetic distance. They give way to their instinctive sensual or moral reactions and are captivated by eroticism or the riches of gold frames and mirror-finished floors. Yet despite their chatter and scurrying, they at least behave with a certain respect, no singing, shouting, or game playing of the kind that had to be forbidden seventy-five years before.

Learning Aesthetic Behavior

In America, where the great public museums only began to appear in the 1870s, there is evidence that it took more time to teach visitors both proper respect and the beginnings of an aesthetic response. By 1897, however, the director of New York’s Metropolitan Museum could proudly describe the success of vigilance, admonitions, and a few ejections: “You do not see any more persons in the picture galleries blowing their nose with their fingers; no more dogs brought in . . . no more spitting tobacco juice on the gallery floors . . . no more nurses taking children to some corner to defile the floors . . . no more whistling,
singing, or calling aloud” (Tomkins 1989, 84–85). But the issue soon became not just middle-class decorum but the proper aesthetic attitude in the “temple of Art,” as well. Even art education, always an aim of museums since the eighteenth century, was not enough. In the 1890s, many American art museums, such as those in Boston and Chicago, still exhibited plaster casts of ancient sculptures but finally put them in storage after younger curators and critics argued that only the finest “original” works belonged in the museum. The first aim of an art museum, the assistant director at Boston declared in 1903, is to “maintain a high standard of aesthetic taste” by choosing objects for their “aesthetic quality” and, thereby, afford its visitors “the pleasure derived from a contemplation of the perfect” (Whitehall 1970, 1:183, 201).

Similar behavioral norms were taught theater and concert audiences, although the lessons were aided by a gradual separation of the “legitimate” theaters and concert halls from venues for farce, melodrama, and popular music. In Europe Honoré Daumier caught the passionate reactions of lower-middle-class theater audiences in his “A Literary Discussion in the Second Balcony” (fig. 59). Lawrence Levine has recently traced the gradual separation of fine art theater from popular theater in America by examining the fortunes of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century. For the first two-thirds of the century, Shakespeare’s plays were not only the most frequently performed but also drew large and socially varied crowds, many of whom stamped their feet, whistled, shouted, and demanded instant encores. One reason Shakespeare appealed to such a broad audience was the wholesale alteration of his plays that had begun in the eighteenth century, leaving some versions of Richard III with one-third fewer lines and King Lear with a happy ending in which both Cordelia and Lear live on! Nineteenth-century promoters also interspersed the acts with other entertainments and usually followed the play with a farce to assure an enthusiastic and demonstrative response. Naturally, the upper classes who sat in the orchestra and boxes were not always happy with the clamorous inferiors in the balconies, especially when pelted with apple cores (Levine 1988).

Class tensions mixed with cultural differences throughout the century, sometimes to tragic effect, as in the Astor Place Riot of 1849. Twenty-two people were killed when the militia fired into a crowd attempting to storm the Astor Theater and break up a performance of Macbeth by the snobbish English actor William Charles Macready. Macready’s highly publicized insults to America’s noisy, plebeian audiences had ignited popular anger, whereas the same kind of gallery crowds gave standing ovations to Macready’s American rival, Edwin Forrest, whose stentorian delivery was enormously popular. Yet only a dozen years later, the editor of Harper’s derided Forrest’s “rant, roar, and rigmarole” as good only for wringing tears out of working-class girls but praised the elegant performances of Edwin Booth for eliciting “refined attention rather than eager interest” (Levine 1988, 59). By the second half of the century, separate theaters for “art” performances began to appear in most of the larger American cities. By the 1890s, the theater audience had divided, and Shakespeare was performed uncut in “legitimate” theaters before silent and respectful audiences. Even if the term “aesthetic” was not always used to distinguish the “refined attention” of the art theater from the “eager interest” of popular halls, a kind of
aesthetic behavior was being inculcated and those unwilling to adopt it either were expelled or went elsewhere.

A similar division occurred in music. As William Weber has shown, there was a veritable “concert explosion” in Europe from 1830 to 1848, although in this case led entirely by the upper classes, who were divided in their tastes. One group was especially involved in salon concerts, often organized by women and held in fine homes. They favored the relatively popular music transcribed from opera or the symphonic repertoire adapted for virtuosos such as Liszt. Here was an art world where women—who played the piano themselves and oversaw their children’s lessons—were allowed to take the lead (fig. 60). Another part of the upper classes prided themselves on their knowledge of the classical symphony tradition of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven and preferred concert hall performances faithful to the composer’s text. This group was dominated by men who tended to regard their kind of music as “serious” art and looked down on the salon concerts and popular soloists. Weber suggests that the gradual merger of these two upper-class groups under the dominance of the male-led classical tendency marked the emergence of the modern “serious” music system in Europe. As a result, a patriarchal upper class controlled the emerging concert institutions in a way that subordinated the role of women and excluded the lower social ranks both programmatically and economically (Weber 1975).1

At the same time that this little world of fine art music was drawing into itself, other concerts, aimed at a broader spectrum of the middle and lower classes, were developing out of the eighteenth-century choral societies and promenade concerts, the latter providing an attractive setting where people could drink, smoke, talk, and walk about. Although a few people of the lower ranks might save up to attend a “classical” concert and the upper classes might drop in on choral performances or promenades, the social and cultural divisions were becoming well marked as the century wore on. There were also new kinds of commercial musical institutions that flourished in the rapidly growing urban centers, such as the café concert in Paris (fig. 61). Although people commented on the socially mixed audiences who frequented the café concerts in the 1870s and 1880s, these establishments seem to have been predominantly lower-middle-class venues, where singers expressed an idealized version of the life of “the people” in a music that both fascinated and alarmed the cultural elite who also frequented the symphony and opera (Clark 1984). In America, the gradual segregation of higher and lower forms of instrumental music took slightly different forms. The omnipresent community “band” played not only marches and polkas but also excerpts from operas and symphonic selections from

Figure 60. Moritz von Schwind, An Evening at Baron Spaun’s (1868). Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, Vienna. Courtesy Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York. Franz Schubert is at the piano, tenor Johann Michael Vogl is singing.

Figure 61. Edgar Degas, Cabaret (1882); 9Ã-ÅÁ× 17 inches, pastel over monotype. Courtesy Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., William A. Clark Collection. (26.72.)
Haydn. As late as 1873, a Boston critic lamented the absence of a permanent symphony in his city to keep alive “acquaintance with the great unquestioned masterworks” (Levine 1988, 120). The symphony orchestras that were founded in city after city across America in the latter half of the nineteenth century were in fact dedicated to becoming just such “museums of musical works.”

If the promenade concert in Europe or popular band music in America mixed genres and allowed freer behavior in a relaxed setting, the concerts of the cultured classes were clearly Art rituals in which a special attitude and silent decorum was expected. Yet even the nineteenth-century upper-class audience had to be “trained in the art of listening” (Gay 1995, 19). In 1803, Goethe, who oversaw the court theater in Weimar, demanded that shouting or hissing stop and that audiences limit themselves to applause at the end of the performance.2 Complaints about talking and moving about during concerts continued throughout the century, but critics, symphony boards, and conductors kept after the audiences. The American conductor Theodore Thomas was famous for staring down talkers and even stopping the orchestra and raising his hands for silence. Here again, the campaign to quiet audiences was not simply about decorum but about the proper response to fine art. As the music critic Edward Baxter Perry put it, audiences must rise above “mere sensuous pleasure or superficial enjoyment, to a higher . . . spiritual aesthetic gratification” (Levine 1988, 134).

In the realm of literature, questions of public behavior did not arise in the same way as music, although the development of “legitimate” theaters in which Shakespeare’s plays were reverently treated as sacred texts offers one parallel. The literary equivalent of the legitimate theater, the concert hall, or the art museum eventually became the college or university literature course and literature anthology. What needed to be “silenced” in the reading of literary works of art was not physical sound or bodily restlessness but the intrusive noise of thrill or amusement or political and moral ideas. People had to learn to attend to the purely aesthetic qualities of the literary work and not simply consume it they way they did popular genres.

Although the ideas and institutions of art, artist, and aesthetic were largely established by the 1830s, it took the rest of the century to separate completely fine art and popular art institutions and to teach the upwardly mobile middle classes the appropriate aesthetic behaviors. What Jacques Attali has said of the evolution of music in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could be applied to all the fine arts: “When the concert hall performance replaced the popular festival and the private concert at court . . . the attitude toward music changed profoundly: in ritual it was one element in the totality of life; in the concerts of the nobility or popular festivals it was still part of a mode of sociality . . . in the concerts of the bourgeoisie . . . the silence greeting the musicians was what created music and gave it an autonomous existence” (Attali 1985, 46) (fig. 62).

The Rise of the Aesthetic and the Decline of Beauty

If it took a long effort to inculcate a behavior of silent and reverent attention, it also took a long time for the term “aesthetic” to be regularly used for it outside of Germany where it had originated. But more important than the term, was the issue of whether there was, in fact, a special “aesthetic” faculty and what its characteristics were. The general belief in a distinct aesthetic faculty seems to have been widely accepted by the 1850s and even gave rise to a psychological “science” of aesthetics, which has continued its fitful course into our own day. One branch of it was carried on in an empirical vein by Hermann Helmholtz's
We cannot leave the topic of the nature of aesthetic experience without noting one of the most striking differences between nineteenth- and twentieth-century discussions: the near disappearance of beauty as a central concept of aesthetics since the 1950s. The roots of beauty’s decline go back to the end of the eighteenth century and the emergence of the idea of the aesthetic itself. As we have seen, eighteenth-century theorists of taste not only were interested in beauty but developed concepts of the sublime, the picturesque, and the novel as well. Beauty, once the sole epithet for highest attainment in the arts, now had several rivals, and one of them, the sublime, was believed by many writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to be a deeper and more powerful experience. Various nineteenth-century artists and critics added still other values and experiences, such as the grotesque (Hugo), the strange (Baudelaire), the real (Flaubert), and the true (Zola), which they sometimes took to be more forceful than beauty. But there were also problems inherent in the concept of beauty itself. On the one hand, it was too closely associated with academicism and traditional criteria of ideal imitation, harmony, proportion, and unity. On the other hand, it was too mixed up with everyday notions of prettiness and praise—a beautiful horse, a beautiful shot, a beautiful investment. Although Schiller spoke of beauty along with fine art as humanity’s salvation in the Aesthetic Letters of 1795, a few years later he was writing to Goethe that “beauty” had become so problematic that it should perhaps be “dismissed from circulation” (Beardsley 1975, 228). In England, Richard Payne Knight lamented that “the word Beauty is . . . applied indiscriminately to almost anything that is pleasing” (1808, 9). Nevertheless, most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics and philosophers from Hegel to George Santayana continued to use “beauty” as the overarching term for the highest aesthetic value, and aesthetics itself was often defined simply as the theory of beauty. The history and prestige of “beauty” was such that, like “Art,” it remained the name for whatever writers found most precious and transcendental in the arts. Not until the full implications of modernism and the early twentieth-century anti-art movements had made themselves felt was “beauty” relegated to a minor role in critical and philosophical discourse on the arts.

The Problem of Art and Society

When historians of aesthetics or literary theory come to the nineteenth century, they often reserve a section of their works for the problem of “art and society.” This issue is typically described in terms of a battle between those who believed
in "art for art's sake" (Gautier, Baudelaire, Whistler, Wilde) and those who believed in the "social responsibility of art" (Courbet, Proudhon, Ruskin, Tolstoy). Some historians have found it necessary to explain why it was that a "theme that had not been given such serious attention between Plato and Schiller" should suddenly become so urgent (Beardsley 1975, 299). The reader who has followed my argument up to this point will have no difficulty understanding one reason why the art and society problem in this broad sense did not receive "serious attention" up to Schiller. It did not because it could not. No one between Plato and Schiller wrestled with the problem of Art and society in this generalized form because they had no concept of Art as a distinct realm or social subsystem whose relation to society needed to be conceptualized. Only after fine art was constructed as a set of canonical disciplines and specialized institutions that were then reified as an autonomous domain could one ask what function the realm of Art should play within the larger society.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, there was only occasional talk of "Art for Art's sake" (Gautier), whereas almost everyone still believed that serious works of art should embody a significant moral content, even if some people thought of artworks as having only an indirect moral effect. The full implications of the idea of art as an autonomous realm did not become apparent until near the end of the century. Even so, we can trace the development of a tendency to avoid direct engagement with political and moral issues. This retreat appeared in different countries at different times and was often related to the violent class conflicts of the period. Although there were always writers, painters, and composers who spoke to moral and political questions, the deeper problem was that the relative autonomy of the fine art institutions tended to neutralize social and political content by confining art works within the "world" of art.

The turn from social and political concerns seems to have occurred in the Germanies earlier than elsewhere. Although Schiller and Goethe never completely abandoned the hope that art might improve society, by the late 1790s, both had given up the eighteenth-century view of art as a means of public enlightenment. Schiller could even write in 1803 that Art should "totally shut itself off from the real world" (Berghahn 1988, 96). Many saw art as fundamentally alien to a society propelled by commerce and industry. Moreover, following the collapse of the Napoleonic empire, the various absolute monarchies of Central and Eastern Europe vigilantly exiled or imprisoned most social and political dissenters, including those who championed a politically engaged art, such as Heine. This made it easier for the idea of a completely autonomous art to gain early acceptance. The rest of society might be dominated by the police power and by middle-class materialism, but Art could be a refuge where the human spirit might roam freely (Schulte-Sasse 1988).

In France, in contrast, many romantic poets, painters, and composers remained politically engaged (whether as royalists or republicans) and saw art as a social instrument right up through the Revolution of 1848, when the poet Alphonse de Lamartine's role as head of the failed provisional government symbolized Art's failure in politics. The collapse of the idealism of 1848 and the political repression under Napoleon III blunted many artists' political involvement (with brilliant exceptions, such as Victor Hugo and Gustave Courbet) and led them to a preoccupation with issues within the world of art. Another reason for the decline of political concern was the concurrent growth of the art world itself. After 1848 there was a steady expansion of specialized art institutions, such as the dealer-critic-curator-collector complex for painting and similar support complexes for music and literature. Now success as a writer, composer, or painter meant recognition by one of these art, music, or literary worlds, which were increasingly apolitical as a locus of upper-middle-class leisure activity. Although the deep cleavages in French society (e.g., the Dreyfus Affair) could still draw artists and writers such as Zola into its conflicts as individuals, the worlds of art, music, and literature had taken on a life of their own.

In Britain, as in France, many of the early romantics expressed their social and political engagement through their work, and later, the Victorians, led by Carlyle, Ruskin, and George Eliot, never doubted the high moral and social purpose of Art in reforming and beautifying a crassly utilitarian and materialistic society. One can even find a strain of "aesthetic democracy" in people associated with the aestheticist movement like Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde (Dowling 1996). But once the modern discourse of fine art, artist, and aesthetic was firmly established in Britain around mid-century, the inherent tension between Art as a distinct institution and its role as moral or social educator began to be increasingly acknowledged. The subsequent emergence of a belief in the absolute autonomy of art in some circles went hand in hand with the rise in status of the artist and the growth and privatization of the various art worlds. Late in the century when aestheticists such as Wilde or formalist critics such as Roger Fry attacked Victorian moralism in art, they often argued that artworks should be seen strictly in terms of their relation to the art world.

To follow out the arguments between the proponents of Art for Art's sake and those who believed in the social responsibility of art would take us beyond our main subject and into the details of the history of aesthetics and art or literary theory. What is relevant to our theme is that both sides in these debates were often prisoners of the same regulative polarities of art. The declarations of
a Gautier, Wilde, or Bell that Art has nothing to do with morality, politics, or "worldly" life but exists only for itself are a sort of reverse image of the declarations of a Proudhon, Tolstoy, and some marxists that Art exists primarily to serve humanity, morality, or the revolution. The extreme expressions of both positions assumed that Art is in fact an independent realm that has an external relation to the rest of society. For the one side, Art became a spiritual world of its own into which the aesthetically sensitive might retreat from a sordid, materialistic society; for the other Art was seen as a powerful instrument of communication for changing that society. Few nineteenth-century writers attacked the problem at its root: the regulative polarities of the modern system of art. Eventually, artists and critics who shared John Ruskin's or George Eliot's belief in a more intimate connection between works of art and the social good would have to challenge the underlying polarities of the fine art system.

Overview

My alternative story of the great division that produced the modern system of the fine arts is largely complete. Obviously, there was no fixed point at which all the main elements of the system were generally accepted. Just as there were anticipations of modern ideals of the artistic vocation from the Renaissance on, so remnants of the old art/craft system have endured. But the period from roughly 1800 to 1830 seems to have been the moment of final consolidation and elevation. Certainly, by the mid-nineteenth century, the term "art" had not only come to designate a category of fine arts (poetry, painting, music, etc.) but also an autonomous realm of works and performances, values and institutions. Art could now be spoken of as a kind of metaphysical essence, whether conceived in the technical terms of idealist or vitalist philosophies or in the more general way that Comte or Tolstoy wrote of it. In either case a reified Art was now something one could live and die for and talk about endlessly, the art Marcel Proust later invoked with such pathos in Time Regained. Correspondingly, the ideal of the artist as creator was viewed as a kind of religious calling, sometimes raised to the status of prophet and priest but also allowing for the poses of dandy or bohemian alongside martyr and rebel. Finally, "works of art," as the fixed creations of inspired imagination, were to be reverently attended to aesthetically, "for themselves," a state of mind and behavior steadily inculcated in concert audiences and museum visitors. The shadow side of the nineteenth-century elevation of art was the further demotion of the crafts and popular arts, the reduction of many artisans to industrial operatives and an increased separation of the audiences for fine and
4. Artemisia's Allegory: Art in Transition

1. The 1694 dictionary of the Académie Française also gives alchemist as a primary meaning of "artist."

2. Although there was a theosophical and mystical tradition with a more positive view of the imagination, it played only a marginal role in seventeenth-century writing on the arts (Becq 1994a).

3. François Blondel, an architect writing in 1769, twice linked architecture, painting, sculpture to poetry, eloquence, theater, and ballet on the basis of harmony and pleasure but did not elaborate his remarks into a category (Tatarciukiewicz 1964).

4. David Summers believes that the late seventeenth-century interest in "taste" was really a continuation of the older idea of a "practical intellect" or sensus communis. Both Summers and Robert Klein make much of the use of gusto as the equivalent of judgment in some Renaissance writers who were still read in the seventeenth century (Klein 1979; Summers 1987).

5. Many writers struggled over whether please or instruct takes precedence. Dryden's 1668 defense of the "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" claims that "delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place" (1961, 1:121). But his 1679 essay dealing with "the grounds of criticism in tragedy" says, "to instruct delightfully is the general end of all poetry" (142). The 1671 "Preface to an Evening's Love" cuts the difference, making instruction tragedy's chief aim and pleasure the means, whereas in comedy, pleasure is the first aim and instruction the means (142–43).

5. Polite Arts for the Polite Classes

1. For J. Schlegel and Mendelssohn, see (Kristeller 1990, 213, 217). See also Robertson (1784 1791, 14–17). Marmontel actually uses the term "liberal-arts" yet gives roughly the same list as others do for "beaux-arts" (1787 1816, 177–79). In addition, see Lacombe (1752); Estève (1753, 9); Kames (1762, 6); and Kant (1787, 190–94). Of course, several of the above writers included more than one additional art in their fine art list: Bateaux included both oratory and dance, Kant included oratory and landscape gardening, and Robertson incorporated oratory, gardening, dance, and even history.

2. The word "canon" previously referred to the authoritative books of the Bible or to a "rule" (as in canon law), but its gradual extension in both senses to the secular realm occurs in the eighteenth century.

3. Pomian estimates that in France the number of collectors increased from around 350 in 1750 to at least five hundred between 1770 and 1790. This influx of new buyers was accompanied by a rapid increase in the number of auctions held each year (1987, 147–58).

4. This audience was part of what has been called the "public sphere" created by the spread of newspapers, coffeehouses, and reading clubs for the free exchange of ideas. The classic discussion of the public sphere is by Habermas (1962, 1969). An enormous scholarly literature on the meaning and usefulness of the concept has appeared since 1962; see Chartier (1988, 20–37).

6. The Artist, the Work, and the Market

1. Among the English dictionaries, Baily (1770), Ash (1775), and Webster (1807) all use the term "artist" to define "artisan." The terms "craftsman" and "handicraftsman" seem more specifically associated with mechanical arts, yet there is no suggestion that "artist," "artisan," or "artificer" were radically different in meaning from "craftsman." All of these terms are defined with notions like trade, manufacture, and workman. The 1726 dictionary of the Spanish Academia defines "artifice" (artificer) as a worker in the manual or mechanical arts but gives as examples "sculpture and architecture." Rather than encumber this note with the bibliographical detail on every dictionary consulted I suggest the reader look at the published bibliography of the Cordell collection. See Cunningham Memorial Library (1975).

2. Nathalie Heinich has suggested that three models of the painter's career overlapped in the eighteenth century: the older workshop model, the academy model, and the new market-driven reputation model (Heinich 1995).

3. References to Joseph Addison and the Spectator will be given by year and number throughout, rather than the usual author-date system, since there are innumerable editions and it might be difficult for the reader to locate the various editions I have used over the years. One edition, though, is Addison and Steele (1907).

4. Addison and Johnson are cited in the text above; for André, see Becq (1994a, 417); and see Kant (1987, 182).

5. As Mary Astell wrote in 1696, men "have endeavored to train us up altogether to Ease and Ignorance. ... About the Age of six or seven the sexes begin to be separated, and the boys are sent to the Grammar School and the Girls to Boarding Schools, and other Places, to learn Needlework, Dancing, Singing, Music, Drawing, Painting and other Accomplishments" (Pears 1888, 186).

6. Goehr's thesis has drawn the fire of some musicologists but has been supported by others (White 1997; Erawt 1998).

7. From Taste to the Aesthetic

1. As the stages were cleared, another change in behavior developed that was connected to later aesthetic theories: the majority of listeners no longer looked to the nobles and connoisseurs on stage or in the boxes for cues to the proper response but increasingly relied on personal judgment (Johnson 1995, 92).

2. The story of how the problem of taste in British theory led to Kant is the hinge of most English language histories of aesthetics. Among several recent attempts to rewrite the traditional story are De Bolla (1989), McCormick (1990), Barnouw (1993), Gadamier (1995), Becq (1994a), Bolts, and Paulson (1996).

3. In the early nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville, looking back nostalgically to the time before the Revolution, emphasized the quality of disinterestedness in the aristocratic ideal, something he found lacking in the ambitious and grasping middle class then in ascendency. See Shiner (1988).

4. The enormous outpouring of recent analyses of Kant's third Critique testify to its importance as a founding document for modern theories of art and the aesthetic. With formalist theories out of favor at the moment, recent interpreters are rediscovering a
moral and political dimension in the Critique, whereas others point out that the connection of the first half on aesthetics to the second half on teleology in nature has been neglected (Cohen and Guerry 1982; Derrida 1987; Caryl 1989; McCormick 1990; Lyotard 1991; Guerry 1997).

5. Terry Eagleton (1999) believes it is no accident that this exalted view of the aesthetic was formulated by writers living in small absolutist states and argues that Schiller's view of the political effects of the aesthetic seems to situate obedience to established authority in the very feelings of the political subject.

8. Hogarth, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft

1. The most important and balanced treatment of Rousseau's views on the arts is Robinson (1984). Michael O'Dea, studying Rousseau on music, agrees with Robinson that the tensions in Rousseau's attitude toward the fine arts were never resolved (1995). All serious students of Rousseau now have an extraordinary aid in Trousson and Eigeldinger (1996).

2. Where double citations are given, the first reference is to the French text, which I am translating; the second to a readily available English edition.

3. As Rousseau imagined them, these first gatherings for group song and dance soon led to envy and inequality in the form of quarrels over who was the best singer and dancer, and it was downhill from there. From now on, instead of the positive drive of self-preservation or self-love (amour de soi) characteristic of the isolated state of nature, a new motive for human action developed, pride or selfish-love (amour propre), a negative drive fueled by comparison. Rousseau's imagined transitional period of "nascent society" is idealized as a time when the seeds of comparison and amour propre were planted but had not yet come to produce their poisonous flowers.

4. Wollstonecraft not only touched on aesthetic issues in many of her well-known political writings, but she also wrote a novel and reviewed novels and poetry for the radical Analytical Review. For a brief discussion of her aesthetic ideas, see Jump (1994). The best overall treatment of her thought is Shapiro (1992).

5. The first chapter of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, for example, takes vigorous exception to the condemnation of the fine arts in Rousseau's First Discourse. Her discussions of poetry speak of genius in the conventional terms of enthusiasm and imagination and describe taste as spontaneous, showing refined feeling, and so on. See the essay "On Poetry" in the collected works (1989, vol. 7). She also writes in the Letters that those whose judgment is not "formed by the cultivation of the arts and sciences" lack "that delicacy of feeling and thinking . . . characterized by the word sentiment" (1989, 6:250–51). Both believes this passage is an exception to Wollstonecraft's usual "attributes of aesthetic capacities to everyone," but it does reflect a tension in her thinking (Boths 1995, 168).

9. Revolution: Music, Festival, Museum

1. Several years after the "kings" were chiseled off Notre Dame, the debris came into the hands of a lawyer who, on discovering he had purchased consecrated statuary, buried the heads in accord with canon law. In 1977, when the French government bought the lawyer's former house and opened a wall during remodeling, they found the buried remains; after almost two hundred years, the vigorously sculptured heads of the kings, a few pieces missing, finally entered a museum! (E. Kennedy 1989, 204–6). In addition to Kennedy's book on the culture of the Revolution, a number of works since the 1970s have revised the image of the arts in the Revolution. See Ehrard and Viallaneix (1977); Julien and Klein (1989); Julien and Mongredien (1991); and Boyd (1992).

2. A new musical society founded in 1792, the Lycee des Arts, made one of its aims to banish the barriers between the arts agreeable and the arts utile. Kant and mainstream aesthetics were looking for a way of transcending both in a higher kind of experience (Julien 1989, 72–73).

3. Actually, the provisions of the decree were contradictory: the first article called for removal and conservation, the second for melting down all bronze works, the third for "destruction without delay," and the fourth for the conservation of objects that might "interest the arts" (Pommier 1991, 101–2).

4. McClellan points out that Pope Pius VII apparently did not agree with Quatremere's notion that paintings should be seen in the setting for which they were intended since he interpreted several works the French were sending back to churches and made them part of the Vatican Museum of Painting, which opened in 1817 (1994, 200–201).

10. Art as Redemptive Revelation

1. Of course, a few older works of nonfiction such as Gibbon's Decline and Fall or Bossuet's sermons have reentered the literature curriculum to be studied for their style. Books on the topic "history of literature" written in English, French, and German during the first decades of the nineteenth century still included works on philosophy, natural science, and politics as well as poetry and epic (Gossman 1990, 32). For the process by which history ceased to be "literature" and became "science," see White (1973). There is still a great deal of research to be done in tracing the emergence of the modern idea of literature. See Becq (1994b, 293–301).


3. Jean-Marie Schaeffer places the break that established the modern idea of fine art between Kant and the romantics (1992, 16–24).

12. Silences: Triumph of the Aesthetic

1. As Weber (1975) shows, ticket prices were set at a level effectively excluding most of the lower social ranks, and innovations such as reserved seats further limited social range. As with most general trends, there were variations and exceptions; opera in Italy retained, and retains to this day, a broader audience than in northern Europe and America.

2. Peter Gay mentions a middle-class cultural society in Frankfurt that adopted the
moral and political dimension in the Critique, whereas others point out that the connection of the first half on aesthetics to the second half on teleology in nature has been neglected (Cohen and Guyer 1982; Derrida 1987; Caygill 1989; McCormick 1990; Lyotard 1991; Guyer 1997).

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2. Peter Gay mentions a middle-class cultural society in Frankfurt that adopted the
following guidelines in 1808: "During literary or musical performances everyone is asked to refrain from speaking. . . . Signs of disapproval are not to be expected. . . . Dogs are not tolerated" (1995, 18–19).

3. Most writers in the first half of the century continued to use the term "taste" despite the disadvantages Wordsworth noted in his preface to the Lyrical Ballads of 1802, e.g., that the word "taste" seems to reduce the experience of fine art to the same level as rope dancing or sherry. Coleridge still regretted in 1821 that there was not a "more familiar word than aesthetics for works of taste and criticism" (Williams 1976, 21). And the Encyclopedia of Architecture in 1842 could claim that "there has lately grown into use in the arts a silly pedantic term under the name of Aesthetics" (Steegman 1970, 18). In France, the term "aesthetic" played little role in Victor Cousin's influential lecture course Du vrai, du beau, du bien (the true, the beautiful and the good) of 1818, but in 1826 Théodore Jouffroy called his lecture series Cours d'esthétique (Jouffroy 1883). The Académie Française finally accepted the term in 1838, and Comte and Baudelaire both used it in the 1850s (Comte [1851] 1968; Baudelaire [1859] 1886).

14. Modernism, Anti-Art, and the Bauhaus

1. The roots of modernism go far back into the nineteenth century, varying from art to art and varying also according to which characteristics of modernism are emphasized. The bibliography on the definition and development of modernism is enormous. A good place to start is William Everdell's The First Moderns, which is also a delightful discussion of the beginnings of modernism between the 1880s and World War I (1997, 1–12, 363–64).

2. For years the perspective enunciated by Newhall dominated the history of photography to which he made signal contributions (1986, 1982), but other source books (Goldberg 1981; Phillips 1989) and essay collections (Bolton 1989; Solomon-Godeau 1991) have suggested a more complex story.

3. The art historian Geoffrey Scott, e.g., claimed that "optical effect and structural requirements" were distinct, and the Czech architect Pavel Janák gave primacy to artistic expression over both function and technology. The career of the talented Bruno Taut shows how hard it was to hold both sides together as he swung from an early dream that "architecture has no other purpose than to be beautiful" to his socialist agitation within the Worker's Council for Art after the war, only to return to a view that function and construction were subordinated to "the art of proportion" (Krut 1994, 567–74).

4. Adorno argued that the most difficult avant-garde art, such as that of Schoenberg or Kafka, did not simply encourage apolitical aesthetic contemplation and that the mass media by contrast were retrograde tools of a capitalist "culture industry" that turned workers into passive consumers. Others since have found the whole concept of the "aura" to be somewhat confused and questionable.

15. Beyond Art and Craft?

1. One of the popular myths of modernism is that Picasso "discovered" primitive art; the real story of how African, Oceanic, and Native American objects migrated from ethnography collections to art museums is far more complex and involves many factors, from eighteenth-century ideas of the unspoiled primitive through the nineteenth-century quest for the "origins" of Art and Gauguin's and Conrad's projection of sexual license and dark spirituality onto native peoples, to early twentieth-century expressionist and formalist theorists like Roger Fry who patronizingly praised the "complete plastic freedom" of "these nameless savages" ([1920] 1956, 100).

2. "Tribal" has many of the same problems as "primitive," but finding a satisfactory general term for the enormous variety of societies that have produced these works is difficult. I have adopted "small scale" as the least objectionable even though it is not a perfect sorter. See Anderson (1989) and Graburn (1976). In France, where the Louvre only got around to opening a gallery of "arts primitifs" in the spring of 2000, some people prefer the term "arts premiers."

3. Many of the same carving workshops that make reproductions (or "fakes," according to curators and dealers) also make pieces for ritual use and tend to view their profession "matter-of-fact as aiming to satisfy the requirements set down by patrons" (Kasfir 1992, 45). Among the best discussions of an actual reproduction workshop is Ross and Reichert (1985). On the complex symbolic interchange involved in "tourist art," see Jules-Rosette (1984); for the African art market, see Steiner (1994). For a defense of assimilation, see Danto (1994), Davies (2000), and Dutton (2000), and for a critique, see Shiner (1994).

4. I saw this statement on a visit in 1997. The museum's web site, as of July 2000, defines the museum mission as one of "pioneering a new approach to the interpretation of Native American arts and culture, one in which Native and non-Native people are active partners in research, scholarship, exhibitions and education" (http://www.miaclab.org).

5. Some of the same problems with the appropriation of tribal art occur in the eagerness to assimilate folk art into fine art. The folklorist John Michael Vlach, e.g., insists that folk quilts, pottery, and furniture should be seen "as the equal of fine art, not its wearing and imperfect echo" (1991). And Henry Glassie, although admitting that most folk pieces are judged by those who make and use them in terms of craft skill and function, says we should call them not craft but art since "art is such an exalted term among us" (1989, 50). Although I sympathize with Vlach's and Glassie's desire to raise the status of folk art, it is striking that neither of them questions a category of fine art that leads to these distortions; they just want to get folk art into it. The distortions are even worse in the appropriation of what is called "outsider" art, for which the deep psychic and religious struggles and visions of its makers are either ignored or exploited to enhance the interest of art audiences. See the articles by Ames, Cubbs, Lippar, and Metcalf in Art and Metcalf (1994).

6. It should be noted, in Serra's defense, that the hearings on Tilted Arc were run by a conservative bureaucracy, that many of the people who objected to Serra's piece were indeed ignorant of modern art, and that the plaza was hardly user friendly to begin with. Serra and his wife have published their own accounts with documents relating to the hearings (Weyergraf-Serra and Buskirk 1991). For a subtle political-aesthetic defense of Tilted Arc, see Crimp (1983, 150–98). One of the best discussions of the Serra/Lin comparison is by Michael Kelly (1996). A sensitive discussion of the Vietnam Veterans