

On the Anxiety Prior to Any Possible Judgment of Taste

Can displeasure be aesthetic? What kind of relevance does pleasure maintain for aesthetic experience? What makes a judgment of an object as ugly an aesthetic judgment? Is aesthetic pleasure such that it sets the limit of the aesthetic (thus foreclosing displeasure)? These questions have obviously come to occupy aestheticians in recent decades not only as part of the ongoing commentary on Kant's aesthetics but as part of the attempt to find a way of reconciling the interests of an aesthetic investigation with the changing, apparently antiaesthetic, face of contemporary art. Modernism, so it seems, has made it difficult to distinguish beauty from ugliness, form from formlessness, pleasure from displeasure, and satisfaction from repulsion, thus undermining the usefulness of these concepts for delineating the nature of aesthetic experience. Displeasure and the displeasing effects of the encounter with the disgusting, repulsive, and ugly, especially associated with modernism in art, have convinced some aestheticians of the irrelevance of pleasure to the basic aesthetic experience or the irrelevance of any notion of the aesthetic to one's experience of art.¹ At the same time it is difficult to think of an aesthetics within which these primarily aesthetic concepts do not play a central role.

The aim of this chapter is threefold: (1) to show that the *aesthetic* domain, as it emerges from Kant and from many post-Kantian aestheticians, is constituted by *both pleasure and displeasure*, and that displeasure, rather than calling for a different aesthetics, is equally fundamental as pleasure to one's experience with art; (2) to suggest viewing pleasure and displeasure not only as distinct facts about possible aesthetic experiences (the former attesting to the presence of a beautiful object, the latter to the presence of a nonbeautiful one) but rather that *displeasure fulfills a necessary intervening role in every aesthetic experience*; (3) to expose the constitutive role of *displeasure at the heart of Kant's aesthetics* and to support the present endeavor of developing the notion of displeasure as aesthetic by contemporary studies that revive interest in the forms of displeasure and in ugliness.²

Establishing the place of displeasure within the aesthetic domain appears to demand considerable argumentative effort, especially since it relies on a retroactive interpretation of Kant “under modernist eyes.” Psychoanalysis, on its part, regards pleasure and displeasure as fundamentally mingled, as they share the management of the “pleasure principle,” to use Freud’s term. The “pleasure principle” regulates mental processes so that displeasurable tension is avoided or discharged and pleasure is increased, but displeasure always remains part and parcel of the working of the pleasure mechanism, having its upper hand once tension increases anew. The pleasure principle is hence the fundamental navigator of psychic life, producing the dynamics of pleasure and displeasure. For psychoanalysis there is no simple lack or absence of pleasure: *everything is subjected to the pleasure principle* (a supposition that later in this chapter will be correlated with Kant’s mutually bound pair of pleasure and displeasure).³

Freud gradually develops in his work the notion of anxiety that rather than standing as a synonym for displeasure subsumes both displeasure and pleasure. Already in 1917, in a lecture on “anxiety,” Freud establishes the relation of anxiety to libido and describes the emergence of anxiety in hysteria, “where its unconscious correlate can equally be an impulse of similar character—anxiety, shame, embarrassment or, just as easily, a positive libidinal excitation.”⁴ In later years, Freud stresses the relation of anxiety to repression and refers to anxiety as a signal prior to the ego’s ability to withdraw from or otherwise avoid displeasurable excitations.⁵ Birth, for instance, which serves as a model for an anxiety state, is “of highly tense excitation, which is felt as unpleasure and which one is not able to master by discharging it.”⁶ Pleasure and displeasure both play an important part in the emergence of anxiety; anxiety is felt as unpleasure but in fact signals a moment of libidinal excitation.

Further on in this chapter, after describing the intriguing role of displeasure in aesthetics and reviewing its implications, I will suggest tying the aesthetic pair of pleasure–displeasure to the psychoanalytic concept of anxiety in its relation to the fundamental divide of the pleasure principle. This will lead to the claim that displeasure, for Kant, just as anxiety, for Freud, and later for Lacan, may appear as *prior, yet constitutive, of the very act of judgment* (of taste). In other words, it will be proposed in this chapter that the place of Kantian displeasure be reconsidered in terms of psychoanalytic anxiety, and that displeasure is regarded as fundamental rather than alien to aesthetic experience.

To establish the logic of the distinction of pleasure–displeasure, a relation left perplexingly open to interpretation by Kant, anxiety, as used by Freud and Lacan, will further present the possibility of *mingling pleasure and displeasure*. Anxiety signals something unpleasant that is also attractive and imbued with potential pleasure for the subject. Anxiety, therefore, has intricate relations with pleasure–displeasure; it both complies with the demands of pleasure and goes beyond the pleasure principle.⁷

Anxiety, in its psychoanalytic sense, is not tantamount to negative displeasure and resists the pleasure–displeasure divide. Yet for anxiety to hold more than heuristic value in articulating the nature of aesthetic experience, one obstacle has to be surmounted. If anxiety *transcends the distinction between pleasure and displeasure*, and hence *resists being correlated with definitely valued objects*, then how can it serve us in telling the ugly from the beautiful, that is, in actually making a judgment of taste? While the answer to this question permeates various parts of this book, it can be pointed out at the present stage that over and above some fundamental differences between the philosophical and the psychoanalytic ways of thinking about aesthetic experience anxiety cannot tell the difference between the ugly and the beautiful because it is prior to actual judgment. Anxiety is not a response that alternates with positive affects but rather is something that precedes the distinction of displeasure from pleasure. Anxiety will thus be established as prior to judgments that follow the dictates of the pleasure principle. Furthermore, the notion of anxiety does not contradict the possibility of aesthetic judgment, because for Kant too the judgment of taste does not reside in the positive characterization or knowledge of an object. Anxiety, just like aesthetic pleasure and displeasure in aesthetics, contributes nothing to the cognition of the object in reality, nor is it a sign that carries meaningful insights about that object, nor an effect with specific emotional content. Anxiety, just like pleasure and displeasure, is a signal marking the presence of a specific structure (a cognitive structure for Kant, a psychic structure for Freud and Lacan) that can be shown to constitute one's encounter with art. It is indeed the main purpose of this chapter to point to anxiety, precisely because it subsumes the divide between pleasure and displeasure yet acknowledges their distinct psychic value as related to aesthetic experience and as constitutive of the very foundations of one's encounter with art.

To further the argument regarding the place of displeasure in aesthetics, this chapter proceeds by first examining one problematic aspect of the *location of aesthetic pleasure* in Kant, which has to do with Kant's dilemma around the precedence or antecedence of pleasure to the mental state that leads to the judgment of something as beautiful. After that, further support will be found through examining the possibility of including negative judgments of taste (judgments that result in displeasure) within the aesthetic domain. The implications drawn from these interpretive difficulties will be later associated with the psychoanalytic concept of anxiety.

KANT AND AESTHETIC PLEASURE

Kant's aesthetics is guided by two fundamental tenets: aesthetic judgment does not provide cognition of the object concerned, and judgments of taste, although

subjective, have universal applicability. The first supposition points to the fact that judgments of beauty, although formulated as if referring to a property of the object itself, in fact characterize the cognitive state of the appreciator: “an aesthetic judgment is unique in kind and provides absolutely no cognition (not even a confused one) of the object; only a logical judgment does that. An aesthetic judgment instead refers the presentation, by which an object is given, solely to the subject; it brings to our notice no characteristic of the object, but only the purposive form in the way the presentational powers are determined in their engagement with the object.”⁸ For Kant, attributing beauty to an object is a way of validating the universality of the judgment, because when one says “this is beautiful” it is assumed that everybody ought to agree on this judgment (even if in actual fact such an agreement may not be actualized). In other words, the subjectivity of aesthetic judgments is achieved through the subject’s certainty that beauty is attributable to an object, while this attribution tells us something about the cognitive state of the subject (that of harmony between the faculties of cognition) rather than about the properties or essence of the object thus predicated. Since the purpose of aesthetic judgment does not lie in cognizing the object but in attaining a certain cognitive state that produces pleasure of an aesthetic kind, questions about the characteristics of the object that make it beautiful lie outside of aesthetic concerns. Thus in the third critique transcendentalism, which in the Kantian sense relates to what conditions our knowledge of objects, is here giving rise to no determined knowledge whatsoever. The free play of the cognitive faculties is undoubtedly transcendental, relating the enabling conditions for knowing aesthetic objects, “and yet in judgments of taste it hovers on its own,”⁹ unsupported by empirical rules or by determined concepts.

Judging something as beautiful transcends the private domain of personal opinion. The universal validity of judgments of taste means that when we say “this is beautiful” we demand consent to this judgment from other subjects. Being however devoid of objective cognitive value, this judgment cannot be proven or explained. No law can explain where beauty lies or can justify one’s way of looking at the object as beautiful. Hence, universal agreement regarding beauty does not rely on logical explanation or on empirical agreement among members of a given community.¹⁰ A judgment of taste is agreed upon not on the basis of a majority vote, nor is it just metaphorically universal (that is, an agreement referring to no more than an intensity of emotions regarding a certain object); agreement is a logical demand from judgments of taste. It is for this reason that aesthetic judgments predicate objects as beautiful in a way that exceeds matters of personal liking. Agreement has to do with the kind of satisfaction experienced by a subject who assumes, as part of the very logic of her or his statement of taste (“this is beautiful”), that whoever is exposed to the object given to a judgment of taste will experience the very same pleasurable state.

This cursory presentation of Kant's main contribution to the history of aesthetics, that is, the idea that a judgment of taste is not a way to convey knowledge about an object, and that this judgment yet refers to a pleasurable cognitive state of universal validity, transfers the full weight of aesthetic experience to the judging subject. The subject, to present an aesthetic judgment, has to tie his or her judging act and the cognitive state that led to it, to the pleasure felt as a result. Pleasure has to fulfill some conditions to be considered a pleasure in the beautiful. Establishing the link of pleasure to the judgment of the beautiful by showing that aesthetic pleasure must be the outcome of the judging act and cannot precede this act is a heavy burden on aesthetic theory. An additional difficulty is posed by the fact that this pleasure resulting from an aesthetic judgment also has to be somehow associated with the pleasure discussed elsewhere in Kant's *Critique*, as what posits the necessary condition that triggers a judgment of taste in the first place.

This, indeed, is one of many places where commentators on Kant's *Critique* are confronted with an immense interpretive difficulty, the kernel of which can be found in §9 of the text. "Now this merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object, or of the presentation by which it is given, precedes the pleasure in the object and is the basis of this pleasure, a pleasure in the harmony of the cognitive powers."¹¹ Beyond the various proposals made by commentators for unpacking this passage, it clearly refers to two separate moments of pleasure, one associated with the presentation given to the free play of the faculties, and the other to the result of the harmonizing of these faculties. Attending to this question of precedence may shed some light on the nature of the pleasure assumed by Kant. As passage §9 indicates, pleasure is what accompanies a given presentation restricted by no determinate concept, that is, given to the free play of the faculties. Following the reading of Rodolphe Gasché of the passage concerned, what is involved in a judgment of taste is a free play of presentational powers; that is, it is this cognitive state itself and not the resulting adjustment of the faculties in the cognition of the object that is accompanied by a feeling of pleasure. Yet cognition requires also a mutual harmony of the cognitive powers of imagination and understanding with one another. Thus there is the pleasure predicated (immediately) of a state of mind (i.e., the pleasure in what reveals itself in the presentation) and the pleasure in the very activation of cognitive powers where these faculties are in harmony. "The pleasure to be predicated follows the pleasure felt," concludes Gasché.¹²

"The pleasure predicated of the pleasurable state of mind must be distinct from it. Whereas the pleasure felt . . . is a subjective and empirical pleasure, the pleasure that follows the judgment properly speaking is that of the universal communicability of the state of mind in question." Gasché claims that the distinction between the pleasure that precedes judging and serves as its condition and the pleasure that follows the state of harmony is a distinction

crucial to one's understanding the nature of judgments of taste, their being concerned with the a priori rather than the empirical.¹³

Aesthetic pleasure is thus distinguished by Gasché from the feeling of pleasure. His interpretation suggests that in order to have aesthetic pleasure, pleasure should be tied to the state of mind we describe as the aesthetic experience of the beautiful, as the retrospective cause of its communicable nature. Other philosophical commentaries suggest various modes of relating these two aspects of the aesthetic experience. While Gasché proposes a distinction between pleasure and aesthetic pleasure, Paul Guyer approaches this suggested division of pleasure into feeling and mode of cognition by identifying two logically distinct acts of reflection. This move is necessitated by what Guyer perceives as Kant's description of the feeling of pleasure as both the product of judgment and the ground for the determination of judgment. The awareness of pleasure must logically precede the conscious conclusion that an object is beautiful, and yet the judgment of taste requires that everyone agree on a given pleasure, that the delight in the beautiful be explained by the harmony of the faculties produced by reflection on its object. Guyer, as a natural conclusion from this duality of pleasure, suggests the possibility of distinguishing between two sensations of pleasure: "the sensation of pleasure brought forth by empirical intuition and that produced by the harmony of imagination and understanding."¹⁴ Guyer's view, however, is that judgments of the agreeable or the beautiful do not differ in the kind of pleasure they elicit but in the context and cause of the feeling in its particular relation to representation. Feelings of pleasure are qualitatively identical, even though they are sometimes occasioned by the higher cognitive faculties and thus possess universal subjective validity. Pleasure cannot be of a different order when succeeding the act of judgment; it simply refers to another phase of the reflective act.

Henry Allison interprets Kant's intention by splitting the subjective conditions of cognition that Kant formulates into the free play of the faculties and their harmony. When judgments of taste are successful, this means that in the free play between imagination and understanding in the act of "mere reflection," a harmonious relation between the faculties was produced, thereby bringing about a pleasurable mental state. When, however, "the outcome of the free play is a state of *disharmony*, whereby the faculties hinder rather than help one another," a mental state of disinterested displeasure will be produced, hence a negative judgment of taste.¹⁵

The three commentators agree that *aesthetic pleasure is a consequent moment in the act of judgment*, even though a necessary moment, if the object is taken to have beauty. Pleasure, being always of the same nature, has yet to allow a distinction between the pleasure in the beautiful (or the sublime), pleasure in the agreeable or other kinds of pleasure that result from the play of the

faculties (a play that takes place also in cognitive judgments). Hence the kind of pleasure involved cannot be discerned on the basis of the subject's sensual experience. Moreover, the need to locate pleasure as retroactively attributable to the harmony of the faculties does not rely on the actual performance of the subject experiencing pleasure. A judgment of taste, as Gasché emphasizes, is a matter of transcendentalism rather than of empirical facts. The location of pleasure is hence the fundamental *condition* for sustaining a notion of *aesthetic* experience in the first place. Pleasures being always the same and the experiencing subject not being the last authority on the nature of the pleasure involved both suggest the need to establish the logical grounds for determining the nature of pleasure. Since for Kant aesthetic experience cannot be defined on the basis of experience itself, locating pleasure as a result of the cognitive state of harmony establishes the grounds for understanding the universal nature of the experience of aesthetic pleasure.

The dispute over the necessary causality between pleasure and a communicable mental state further indicates that the pleasure felt while facing the object judged as beautiful is a pleasure whose logical place within the structure of aesthetic experience has to be constituted or/and invented rather than found. Found pleasure is a pleasure identified as the one given to the senses and hence is a pleasure that carries little interest for the aesthetic concerns of philosophy. Yet if the pleasure felt is not the decisive test for aesthetic experience, and pleasure in the beautiful is the pleasure that *results* from the communicability of a mental state, then there is indeed no reason to exclude the possibility of a route leading from the free play among the faculties predicated of a presentation to either pleasure *or displeasure*. While the relations between pleasure, free play, and harmony are open to interpretation, it is clear that displeasure cannot be excluded from this play at the outset. Allison, for instance, accounts for this possibility of displeasure by indicating that not every object is beautiful, because when "the normal concerns of cognition are suspended," the degree of attunement of the faculties involved may vary." "(T)here is certainly room for differences in the degree of attunement, as well as for the experience of something that is positively unappealing or disinviting to the mind in the mere reflection."¹⁶ An object given to an act of aesthetic appraisal does not only suspend one's ordinary cognitive concerns with classification and explanation, but it also requires a high degree of attunement of the faculties. Lesser attunement will simply lead at the end of the free play to a sense of displeasure.¹⁷

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Allison's idea of "degrees of attunement," the point to be made here is that Allison's move is a typical one on the part of philosophers of art in their striving to reconstitute a place for displeasure within a Kantian model of aesthetic experience.

This lingering on the moot points among commentators of Kant aims to stress that displeasure cannot be excluded from aesthetic considerations,¹⁸ and that both pleasure and displeasure are taken to be possible consequences of the cognitive route that has to be completed so an aesthetic experience can occur. While commentators differ as to how they understand the phases of this cognitive route, it is obvious that it is this structure, along with the resulting pleasure or displeasure, that constitutes an *aesthetic domain*. The free play of cognitive faculties follows the same cognitive path, whether the faculties eventually harmonize or disharmonize.

While the idea of *pleasure as consequence* accounts for its universality, the idea of degrees of attunement accounts for the degree of determinateness of the object that the aesthetic judgment predicates. Neither pleasure nor displeasure results from attaining objective knowledge of the object of judgment. A judgment of taste does not yoke concepts of reason, for instance, to create a “fit” between the faculties of imagination and understanding and an object. Only in the normal experience of objects the mind does not linger beyond what is needed to fit the intuition of an object to a concept of understanding. In the context of aesthetic experience, “the powers of imagination and understanding that become attuned in a judgment of taste are still free.”¹⁹ While judgments of taste manifest the a priori transcendental condition of every cognition, “what keeps a judgment of taste from becoming a logical judgment is . . . the ‘without’ of ‘without interest,’ ‘without concept,’ ‘without purpose’ . . . etc.”²⁰ A judgment that concerns the beautiful “is not without an object,” to refer to an expression often used by Lacan;²¹ its object is judged as beautiful or not according to a certain degree of mutual animation of the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding. A judgment of taste is not without an object, because while the pleasure associated with this judgment is elicited by an object, the judgment does not end with a pleasure associated with a knowledgeable fit with the object. The pleasure in a judgment of taste is associated with the free play itself.²² Hence, no final correlation with an object can determine the difference between pleasure and displeasure.

This section has demonstrated that, first, either aesthetic pleasure or displeasure can result from the causal relation that each one holds with the cognitive route undergone by the judging subject; second, that displeasure need not be excluded from the aesthetic domain, and that the difference between a positive consequence (pleasure) and negative one (displeasure) can be a matter of the degree of accordance between the cognitive faculties that ultimately determine aesthetic experience; and, third, that the difference of pleasure/displeasure is not a matter of the fit of the cognitive faculties with an object. Both aesthetic pleasure and displeasure are in this sense “without an object.”

These points are both attributed and not attributed to Kant. On the one hand, I wish to point to the compatibility between a notion of aesthetic displeasure, as suggested earlier (as a possible *outcome* of the cognitive route

taken by the judging subject, in which the free play of the faculties *results* in displeasure), and the very foundations of Kantian thinking about judgments of taste. On the other hand, this reading of Kant, supported by the Freudian “beyond the pleasure principle” and necessitated by modernist changes in artistic practice and theory, cannot be associated with Kant and with the settling of moot points in his aesthetics, or with disagreements among Kantian scholars, unless an obvious caution is taken.

ARE NEGATIVE JUDGMENTS OF TASTE AESTHETIC?

Kant’s attitude toward the notion of ugliness (or even of aesthetic indifference) is perplexingly enigmatic. The possibility of negative judgments of taste is, however, mentioned by Kant in contexts sufficiently crucial to require and justify an investigation of its place within Kantian aesthetics. Furthermore, claims Henry Allison, negative judgments can make a determinant factor for the exegeses of Kant’s notorious §9, and it is on such grounds that Allison criticizes Hannah Ginsborg’s interpretation of the pleasure of taste as self-referential, that is, as literally lying in the “universal communicability of one’s pleasure.”²³ When universal communicability is taken to be in itself the source of pleasure, when no distance is allowed between these two transcendental conditions, there can be no place for an analogous universal communicability of one’s displeasure, and negative judgments of taste become irrelevant to aesthetics. Allison believes that such an exclusion is wrong.

Commentators’ approach to the problem of negative judgments of taste varies. I refer only to three examples that represent the range of arguments in favor of or against considering such judgments aesthetic. On the one hand, critics such as David Shier²⁴ construct a case according to which Kant finds nothing ugly in his critique, despite one of the first sentences in the *Critique* that gives equal weight to pleasure and displeasure. Kant finds nothing ugly because within Kant’s aesthetics every judgment of taste must be accompanied in the subject by a state of harmonious free play, a state that is always pleasurable. In this manner, the possibility of negative judgments does not constitute an option and is excluded.

An argument in the opposite direction is proposed both by Ruth Lorand and by Matthew Kieran. Lorand’s main argument is that the negation of beauty can take place within the aesthetic domain.²⁵

“(T)he very opposites of beauty do indeed give us a better grasp of the nature of beauty. The ugly, the meaningless, the kitsch, the boring, the insignificant, and the irrelevant, all are opposites of beauty which illumine it from several negative poles.”²⁶

Each one of these opposites, according to Lorand, causes displeasure by negating another aesthetic property. Lorand shows that not only do the

various opposites of the beautiful involve aesthetic judgments but they define the constitutive limit without which the judgment of the beautiful would lose its significance.

Along a different path of argumentation Kieran claims that “subject matter we would ordinarily find disgusting might afford pleasure if it is artistically manipulated.”²⁷ Kieran can recommend an aesthetic pleasure in the nonbeautiful, because this is grounded for him in a necessary distinction between aesthetic and artistic value. Divorcing aesthetic from artistic value explains why we value a work by Francis Bacon, and how artistic value can be attributed to what is aesthetically unpleasant and repulsive.

What can be surmised from this aesthetic dilemma regarding negative judgments of taste is that, philosophically speaking, judgments that account for displeasing experiences are felt to have a problematic yet necessary relation to positive judgments. Kant himself can allow us to reconsider the status of negative judgments in view of the distinction he makes in his essay “Negative Quantities” between logical and real oppositions. Kant distinguishes the logical values of propositions from their real values in qualities of objects. “Precisely because reality and negation *in objects* . . . are not themselves logical contradictions but rather real states which may be in physical opposition, the differences between them may admit of degrees.”²⁸

Negation can reflect in the reality of objects degrees of sensation and not mutually exclusive logical possibilities. This idea first allows us to settle the dilemma around displeasure and pleasure as involving real possibilities. A negative judgment is a real possibility and not a way to exclude what is negated, nor a way to mark the absence of pleasure in the judgment’s result. The idea of “real opposition” can be enlightening also because it indicates that we need the definition of the cognitive law of harmony or conflict to settle the relations between pleasure and displeasure, since while they make real possibilities in every aesthetic experience, they cannot hold at the same time. This is particularly clear in the case of the sublime, where a state of felt pain *leads* to a state of aesthetic pleasure. These states do not exclude each other but rather are experienced as equally real; both are explained in terms of a cognitive structure/dynamic of relations among the faculties. In experiencing objects of magnitude, displeasure and pleasure both play a role, constituting together what Kant refers to as the experience of the sublime; displeasure constitutes a real phase in the appreciation of the sublime. The notion of real opposition can indicate that displeasure cannot be taken as an abstract logical possibility, or as a way to point to the lack or absence of pleasure, but is, in itself, a *positive fact*. Note that the “official” role played by displeasure in experiences of the sublime is only a side issue here. To prove the necessary role that displeasure plays in Kantian aesthetics, the territory in which the question of displeasure should be approached is the territory of

the beautiful, where displeasure appears to pertain only to negative judgments of taste. It is my aim to show that displeasure in Kantian aesthetics pertains not only to judgments of the ugly or to experiences of the sublime but to the entire aesthetic project.²⁹

Allison's way of making room for displeasure, and for the experience of the unappealing object within the realm of taste, draws on the structural affinity between positive and negative judgments. Pleasure and displeasure are two positive facts within the aesthetic experience, depending on the law of cognition to distinguish them.

While Allison incorporates displeasure by showing that it too is the outcome of a mental state of free play (an outcome of a conflict among the faculties of cognition), another mode of incorporating displeasure into the domain of the aesthetic is proposed by Gasché. The latter, in reference to the sublime, claims that "the pain that it [the imagination] suffers in not being up to that task [of providing a fundamental aesthetic measure for the logical estimation of magnitude] when it is confronted with certain magnitude of nature is a pain that it can feel only because it obeys the laws of reason from the very start. In its failed quest for the fundamental aesthetic measure, the imagination already seeks to realize the law of reason."³⁰ Gasché implies here an important point that can serve us in advancing the claim that acts of judgment involve displeasure due to indeterminable ideas of reason that yet determine the purpose of the judgment beyond the object being judged. According to Gasché, the indispensable role of reason in any attempt of the imagination to come to terms with an object of an unexpected measure makes pain unavoidable. Gasché's ingenious reading of Kant demonstrates here something that, at face value, goes against the grain of Kant's argument, in suggesting why the law of reason in fact provides the general basis of all one's aesthetic judgments. The pain felt in the case of the sublime does not stem from the realization that imagination is inadequate to its task but from the realization of "the imagination's supersensible destination."³¹ Gasché aims in his book to show that the moral and the cognitive are intertwined in the pure judgments of the sublime and the beautiful alike owing to the role played by reason. In the previous quote he indicates *that pain is the displeasurable affect of the very oscillation between the aesthetic and the cognitive, that pain arises because*, given to the indeterminate purposiveness set by reason, the cognitive faculties sacrifice aesthetic comprehension of the sensible object. Gasché's analysis hence suggests that the aesthetic act is painful because it is intimately tied to its own limitation, and that the pain transcends the mere dimension of failure and is related to the presence of indeterminate ideas of reason in every such act. Although Gasché himself distinguishes the "restful state of the feeling of the beautiful" from the agitation of the mind caused by the effort imposed on the imagination when experiencing the sublime, the implied

affinity between the two is evident. I further add to his analysis that in the case of the beautiful, just as in the case of the sublime, the apprehension of the manifold in one intuition is either not instantaneous (in the case of the beautiful) or impossible to attain (in the case of the sublime). Thus pain resulting from the oscillation between the aesthetic and the cognitive appears to be unavoidable in both cases, and in both cases the pain incurred points at reason as the constitutive law directing the aesthetic act.

To clarify the point that Gasché demonstrates through the feeling of pain, we can refer to the way Kant solves the antinomy of taste where the logic of judgment also can be described as an oscillation between the aesthetic and the cognitive, similar to the situation producing pain. A judgment of taste, claims Kant, does deal with objects of sense, and yet “there can be no doubt that in a judgment of taste the presentation of the object . . . is referred more broadly, and this broader reference is our basis for extending such judgments as necessary for everyone. Hence this extension must be based on some concept or other; but this concept must be one that no intuition can determine . . . such a mere concept is reason’s pure concept of the supersensible underlying the object as an object of sense” (§57, p. 212). For Kant the conflicting demands posed by a judgment of taste are reconciled when we understand that the judgment applies to an object of presentation, while the universality of the judgment refers to an extended field where the law of reason, rather than of sensible forms, applies. The situation described by Kant is hence similar in its logic to the one described by Gasché as a situation producing pain.

The following points emerge from the preceding discussion:

1. The law of reason is present in judgments upon the beautiful and the sublime.
2. The involvement of reason in the aesthetic experience elicits pain.
3. It is not the nature of the object experienced that motivates the pain felt; while judgments of the beautiful achieve minimal objectification, judgments of the sublime “come into play only where the formlessness of the object thwarts even aesthetic objectification.”³² The cause of pain is not in the actual object of judgment.
4. The displeasurable pain involved in the sublime does not make this experience resistant to aesthetic considerations: the sublime is a strictly aesthetic experience.

One may conclude the following:

5. The pain inflicted in judgments of taste may be claimed to serve as a constitutive factor of every aesthetic experience. Pain refers to the absence of adjustment experienced, even if temporarily, in the aesthetic domain, yet it is not simply the inadequacy of the imagination that results in pain but the inadequacy of any faculty of the mind giving rise to an intellectual standard; pain is hence bound to pertain both to the experience of the sublime and to that of the beautiful.

Negative judgments result from the judging subject moving along a cognitive route similar to the one that leads to positive judgments. The fact that Kant is taciturn regarding this cognitive route along which negative judgments are produced may lead one to attribute to him the view that displeasure is necessarily mentioned within the third critique only because of the case of the sublime (itself appended in many ways to the case of the beautiful).³³ Yet if the primacy effect of mentioning displeasure in the opening remarks of the critique is taken literally, and if the place of reason in the judgment of the beautiful and the sublime alike is taken into consideration,³⁴ and given the fact that pleasure as the outcome of a universally communicable cognitive harmony is only retroactively associated with the judgment of taste, then it becomes clear that negative judgments must be structurally integrated into one's understanding of what aesthetic experience involves.

One can summarize this part by stressing that the function given to displeasure within the aesthetic domain attests to the fact that this domain is not characterized by the exclusion of displeasure but by the necessary presence of pleasure and displeasure alike as two positive outcomes of judgments of taste. Otherwise, the free play in which the cognitive powers are engaged to the point of harmony or disharmony could have taken but one direction (of pleasure), which is incompatible with the overall intent of the *Critique*. Displeasure must present a real possibility in aesthetic experiences of the beautiful and the sublime alike. Furthermore, when cognition judges freely, which is the law of aesthetic judgment, moments prior to consolidating a distinct (positive or negative) judgment are bound to be accompanied by pain.

Hence, aesthetic pleasure and displeasure result from the specific cognitive routes that serve as their causes, and these routes, before harmonizing or disharmonizing, involve moments of painful oscillations between the demand for a totality of the manifold, which is a demand of understanding and reason, and the demand for sensible exhibition, which is a demand of the imagination. So as a consequence of the reading proposed in these two sections, displeasure can be said to occupy two distinct functions in the judgment of taste. First, displeasure *accompanies the cognitive free play*, a phase in which it

is associated with the failure that lies in wait before the cognitive faculties enacted in the aesthetic judgment; the immanence of failure is due to the totalizing, yet indeterminable, horizon of reason in the aesthetic judgment. Second, displeasure also is *one optional outcome of a judgment of taste*: once the conflict between the cognitive powers (that are bound to be in tension) remains unresolved, the subject feels displeasure.

ANXIETY IS PRIOR TO ANY ACT OF JUDGMENT

Since psychoanalytic anxiety goes beyond the pleasure–displeasure divide, it cannot be flatly identified with the displeasure referred to by Kant or described by his commentators. Anxiety can yet suggest ways of further locating aesthetic conceptions of displeasure and of motivating the necessary presence attributed to it. The following discussion of psychoanalytic anxiety aims to clarify the place of the anxious subject prior to the resolution of this state in either of the aesthetic attitudes of pleasure *or* displeasure. Yet given the use made here of psychoanalytic anxiety, it should be made clear that while I argue that anxiety can shed light on the nature of aesthetic displeasure, the true relevance of anxiety to aesthetic experience can be revealed only from within aesthetics itself, that is, through a reading of Kant's aesthetics (as the cardinal text of modern aesthetics exposing the deep dilemmas of this discipline). It is in view of psychoanalytic anxiety that a crucial point at the heart of Kant's aesthetics can be exposed. Lacan himself, in his seminar on anxiety, although bringing a few examples from works of art, does not use anxiety to formulate the case of art necessarily. Yet in the following I will refer to his work as a way to illuminate the affects that art produces in the subject. Lacan's aesthetics is in this sense derivative and cannot be straightforwardly applied to the aesthetic dilemma. The fact that Lacan's thought on art does not constitute an aesthetic theory yet somewhat paradoxically points at its affinity rather than distance from Kant.³⁵ For Kant the aesthetic experience of the subject in his encounter with art is only derivative of the experience in the face of beautiful nature, and the aesthetic domain itself is but a derivative of the ways the transcendental subject comes to know nature and its laws.

As a preliminary manner of formulating the function of anxiety in aesthetic experience, I can note that aesthetic pleasure is a pleasure conditioned by its particular location within the entire aesthetic experience. Aesthetic pleasure is located as the affect of a universally communicable mental state. Until aesthetic experience is affirmed and elicits pleasure, the subject, in her or his encounter with a presentation (an image, for instance) prior to that consolidation, has to undergo a phase of anxiety. The anxiety located prior to judgment hence represents a preliminary moment in which the subject's

relation to the object of judgment has not yet been settled. The act of aesthetic judgment, rather than excluding the subject's desire, is understood to be an act of desire to encounter an object of satisfaction. Psychoanalysis will explain the anxiety evoked in the preliminary phase of this encounter in terms of the doubt elicited in the subject as to whether the object of desire will indeed be exhibited in the presentation. A positive answer settles the encounter in a beautiful object; a negative answer would maintain the fundamental inadjustment between the presentation and the subject's faculties attempting, unsuccessfully, to attune to the object. It is for this reason that the desire for the object is "felt as unpleasure," to use Freud's words. The pain that accompanies the encounter with the magnitude of the sublime similarly emerges from the fact that the imagination fails in totalizing the object desired in a manageable form. With the sublime, the failure is immanent, while with the beautiful, something of the subject's desire will ultimately be exhibited in the presentation, which is why displeasure is only temporarily experienced.

Thus through the reading of aesthetic pleasure-displeasure from a psychoanalytic perspective, the idea that displeasure is a necessary constituent of every encounter with a presentation judged freely can be pointed out. Kant's free play of cognitive faculties verges on displeasure, until that moment when the subject locates the possibility of pleasure as related to a mental state of harmonizing faculties (or when reason takes the place of imagination in locating an object, as in the case of the sublime), and to a presentation that he or she perceives as satisfactory. Displeasure is the signal of the free cognitive play that precedes its location in a definite structure (of harmony or conflict). It is only when pleasure becomes locatable, a condition that demands displeasure as its constitutive limit, that it can be defined as aesthetic. Note, however, that displeasure in this case is tantamount to psychoanalytic anxiety, since what is felt as displeasure in fact signals the state of the subject's desire, a desire to know how the object encountered is to be judged. The displeasure felt prior to judgment is a state of high excitation; the subject in search of an object of desire is gripped in an anxious moment subsuming pleasure and displeasure.

What are the parameters that define the moment of anxiety raised in the subject in front of an object (of beauty or sublimity)? I have mentioned that anxiety has a necessary link to desire, a relation realized in anxiety's necessary link to the specular image, the mirror reflection in front of which the subject authenticates her or his own ego through an Other. It is a fundamental psychoanalytic insight that to sustain the subject's desire, this desire has to be constituted by an Other. It is in the Other, the mother looking at her child, Nature looking at the scientist work, or the totem looking at the celebrating tribe, that the consistency of the subject, the subject's desire, is sustained. How are these relations between subject and Other established to

constitute the subject's desire? The infant reflected in the mirror sees itself as self-possessed and in control of its own being, while its self-sensation is that of a fragmented body (the human child being born in a state that is radically premature and dependent on its surrounding).³⁶ Confronted with this discrepancy, the child constitutes the function of the Other (at this stage identified with the person of a parent) as what is responsible for the unitary image. It is the Other that sees something in the child that enables this unification into a coherent self-image. The child thus attributes to the Other the ability to see in it a One; the child locates in the Other that something missing in the child itself, as it is to itself, yet complemented by the look of the Other. It is the thing lacking in the infant and attributed to the Other that constitutes the desire of the subject, and it is that thing that when at stake anxiety arises. The Other is the symbolic function holding the secret of the subject's unified being, a secret felt to be absent from the child itself.

Yet that something lacking in the subject and granted by the Other through the gaze (the mother in a way affirms with her look the gleeful satisfaction of the child with his or her own image) cannot be concretely assigned to the Other, since the subject knows not what she or he is for the Other, what the Other wants of her or him. The absent object of lack remains evanescent, impossible to grasp. The position of the Other remains hypothetical and can never be occupied by the subject. The child or the subject imagines the Other has in his or her possession something that the Other would rather keep to itself.

What is the status of this lacking object? Lacan says that the paradigmatic object of lack is the phallus. It is a lack that marks the castration of both male and female in regard to the possibility of absolute satisfaction. It is only the Other (the primordial father, the unknown couple copulating behind the wall) who has access to the enjoyment of which the subject himself or herself is deprived. This is the imaginary aspect of absence; the subject interprets the missing thing as being in the possession of an enjoying Other. What is lost to the subject is taken to be attributable to the enjoyment of the Other, that Other in whom nothing lacks, since it is at the expense of the subject who has been cut off from the possibility of total self-enjoyment that the Other can be satisfied.

To return to the subject's specular image in the mirror, the correlation between the subject and the image leaves out a remainder, a remainder that also could be described in terms of the discrepancy between the two; between the decomposed *selbst-Gefühl* of the subject and the consistency of the unified image. It is this remainder that marks the constitution of the subject's desire, in that it marks a moment of radical lack located in the Other and yet necessary for the self-consistency of the subject's image

I (Unified Image) – S (Decomposed Self) = OD (Object of Desire)

The element of lack is located or demanded from the Other, and as such it is fundamentally paradoxical. While this element is eternally missing from the subject's domain and signals the Other's privileged possibilities of grasp, this missing element in fact remains unrecorded, missing also from the domain of the Other. The object of lack remains outside of the subject (whose fundamental sensation is incompatible with the complete image) and outside of the domain of symbolization attributed to the Other (as it is the element excluded from the image), and yet it is constituted by both. It is an object that is imaginarily ungraspable; it has no representation in the mirror image, yet it can be substituted by perfectly graspable objects for the partial satisfaction of desire, substitutes that exhibit this object yet at the same time leave it beyond their grasp. The object concerned is incarnated in substitute images yet it itself is only reproduced as a remainder from the specular image, an object "whose status escapes from the status of the object derived from the specular image, escapes from the laws of the transcendental aesthetic, this object whose status is so difficult for us to articulate that it is through it that there have entered all the confusions of analytic theory, this object *a* whose constituting characteristics we have only begun to outline and which we bring here onto the agenda, this object *a* is the one which is at stake everywhere Freud speaks about object when anxiety is involved."³⁷

This object *a* is an object of demand, a demand directed at the Other as a demand for love: "What is in me that is more than my image?" This demand, which cannot but remain unsatisfied, is required so that desire is kept alive. In Seminar V Lacan formulates the relations between the demand of the subject and the desire of the Other in terms of the signifier *phallus*. The phallus marks the desire of the Other insofar as the Other is a real other, another human being. In relation to this signifier, the subject cannot fail to recognize, through the intermediary of this other, the fact that he or she also is marked by the signifier, namely, "that there is always something which remains beyond what can be satisfied through the intermediary of . . . the demand."³⁸ It is through the signifier of the demand, in other words, that the subject must encounter her or his desire. Object *a* is the unexhibited object of the demand for love that enables this encounter; as such, it is an object that cannot be captured in the image. It is an object that cannot be represented; an object of desire whose image remains invisible, yet its presence stimulates the subject's desire and attraction to the image before her or him. The meaning of this invisibility is that the object that causes the subject to desire must always loom in the visual field of the Other for the subject's desire to be sustained. Moreover, "The more man approaches, circumscribes, caresses what he believes to be

the object of his desire, the more in fact he is deviated, turned aside from it, precisely because of the fact that everything that he does on this path in order to get closer to it, always gives more body to what in the object of this desire represents the specular image."³⁹

Anxiety is connected both to the inability to locate the object of lack in the specular image and at the same time to the possibility of encountering the object of desire in the Other. This ambivalence of anxiety has its roots in Freud, who aims to disconnect anxiety from the economic factor. Freud claims that anxiety affects the pleasure–unpleasure agency, but it is not caused by repression. Thus as anxiety arises before a *possibility* of the dreaded situation setting in, a shift is marked in anxiety's connection to the dreaded object: "Anxiety has an unmistakable relation to *expectation*: it is anxiety about something. It has a quality of *indefiniteness and lack of object*."⁴⁰ Anxiety is hence the signal of the subject's dialectic relation to the object of lack, the object as visibly unlocatable in the image produced in the domain of the Other (the danger has not set in but is yet present as a possibility), and the object as imposing itself as real on the subject (as an object of lack that yet exhibits a surplus remainder in the domain of the Other). This dialectic points to the fact that the object of lack is real (it belongs to the realm of enjoyment), is imaginarily occluded by a concrete object or image (for instance, the phallus the mother lacks that constitutes her desire), and is symbolically invisible (not given to representation).

I have singled out three parameters by which anxiety should be approached: *desire* (for an object of lack), *Other* (as constituting desire), and *image* (as the domain that produces the object of desire as its effect). It is within the structure created by these three terms that the place of anxiety can be articulated. Lacan offers the example of Hamlet to explain why the oscillation between the lack as the effect or remainder of the specular image and the lack occluded by an imaginary object brings on anxiety. While obviously idiosyncratic, Lacan's interpretation helps clarify the point at issue: the place of anxiety in the overall structure of desire.

In the play, Hamlet chooses to trap the conscience of the king by staging a play within a play that aims to mime the king's crimes. Surprisingly enough, says Lacan, once the play is staged, it is Hamlet who is seized by a crisis of agitation rather than the king, who stays absolutely calm. Moreover, Lacan reminds us, critics have noticed that the attire of the sham king closely resembles that of Hamlet himself rather than that of the king in the play within a play whom the staging of the play aims to trap. This and other similarities between the murderous character in Hamlet's staged play and Hamlet's own person point to the fact that Hamlet causes *himself* to be represented on stage rather than the king he aims to trap: "It is himself, carrying out the crime in question, this character whose desire cannot be roused to accomplish

the will of the ghost, of the *fantôme* of his father, this character attempts to embody something; and what it is a matter of embodying passes by way of his image which is really specular here, his image not in the situation, the mode of carrying out his vengeance, but of assuming first of all the crime that must be avenged."⁴¹

Lacan's point in this analysis is that Hamlet produces through the play his own specular image in the hope that once the object of his desire will be located there, on stage, his desire will be constituted and he himself will be driven to action. In this play within a play, so it turns out, Hamlet indeed stages himself as passionate enough to pursue his desire, unlike the situation in the reality of the play itself, where he practically declines the decree of this ghost-father. But the specular image, constituted by the play within a play, fails to attain its purpose, Hamlet's desire remains blanked, and at the moment he has the option of killing the criminal, he holds back from striking him because the king is praying, and a death blow at that moment will send the king directly to heaven. Hamlet recoils, and the desire that should have been constituted by the object of lack in the play within a play has failed to appear.

The reversal of the specular image, made to mirror Hamlet rather than the king, is enacted again through Hamlet's melancholy over Ophelia's death. Hamlet identifies with Ophelia as part of his melancholic identification. It is not with her sorrow that he identifies (as the reader remembers Hamlet was alienated from this sorrow when she was still alive), nor is it her loss that he mourns. Rather, a melancholic Hamlet identifies with the sorrow he has left behind with her death. Following Freud, we know that melancholy is the state of mourning the other who stood, until her disappearance, as the object of lack for the subject.⁴² We become melancholic when we lose the object loved for occupying the place of the loss, for sustaining our own consistency around what we lack. Hamlet can relate to Ophelia as an object of his desire only when this object has just disappeared. He identifies with Ophelia as an object of melancholia; he does not mourn her departure as an object of desire. Desire goes beyond the image, although the object of desire, says Lacan, can be reintegrated on the stage by identification, "precisely in the measure that as object it has just disappeared. . . . This object of desire, this retroactive recognition, this object which was there, it is along this path that there is placed the return of Hamlet, that which is the high point of his destiny, of his function as Hamlet."⁴³

Hamlet takes a threefold position toward his desire; through the attempt to study the object of desire in the specular image of the play within a play, through the melancholic identification with the object just disappearing, and through the anxiety of the spectator. Hamlet, in other words, is the character whose function is *to refuse the encounter with the object of desire, a refusal that causes*

anxiety in the spectator. By producing specular images of himself, in which he refuses to see the missing object that would have placed for him the object of his desire, he leaves the object of lack occluded. In identifying with the object of melancholia, he again occludes the place of lack in the Other. Hamlet, throughout the play, does not solve the place of desire and leaves no place in which the object of desire (as an object of lack) can be located. In his crime, in his mourning and insanity, the Other remains complete, divulging no trace of the object causing the subject (Hamlet) to desire. Hamlet refuses to touch the place where the desire of the Other constitutes his own.

Thus while Hamlet is melancholic, the spectator watching the play is stricken by anxiety, because through the play within a play, the spectator comes across Hamlet's dilemma in front of the object of desire to which Hamlet keeps refusing. Hamlet, through his engagement in play-staging, through his playful speech, is engaged in a free play with what he refuses to locate, even as indeterminate and invisible: the object of his desire.

It is through this particular case of Hamlet that we can learn something about the universal, constitutive nature of anxiety. Anxiety is universal, precisely in the Kantian sense of the term; just like pleasure, it is not bound to be elicited by any performance, in every encounter with a given object. Anxiety is wholly dependent on the subject experiencing it, which makes its universality a product of a particular experience. Although anxiety is located in a structure that generally defines the subject's position vis-à-vis an object of desire, anxiety has an immanent place in aesthetic experience. The constitutive moment of anxiety, as necessitated by the aesthetic experience, is exemplified by *Hamlet* as it can be exemplified in a painting by Rembrandt or in a novel by Virginia Woolf. The experience of the beautiful, the sublime, or the tragic can be elicited only when an aesthetic anxiety is at play prior to judgment. Hamlet's case yet exemplifies a particular mode of eliciting anxiety, as here anxiety is prolonged, and the location of the object of desire is infinitely evaded. The curtain lifted provides no relief for anxiety, whereas in other works of art, anxiety is facilitated at some point. Granted that *anxiety is the signal of the possible loss of the object of desire*, as claimed in this chapter, anxiety makes a signal without which a judgment of taste cannot take place. Pleasure can be brought about only when the doubt accompanying the lifting of the curtain, the doubt whether the cognitive faculties will indeed harmonize, precedes it. Just like Descartes's *cogito*, that at a moment of utmost doubt gains a certainty of its being a subject of thought, so Kant's subject of aesthetic judgment, at a moment of utmost anxiety, earns the certainty of encountering an object of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) in the artistic image. The question of art, the question of whether art will relate to the subject's desire, cannot be settled unless anxiety enables its location vis-à-vis the subject's desire. Doubt is driven away only when the place of the