THE INTERESTS IN DISINTERESTEDNESS

KARL PHILIPP MORITZ AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE THEORY OF AESTHETIC AUTONOMY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY*

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Is it merely an accident of construction, a chance of composition that the whole Kantian theory of mimesis is set forth between these two remarks on salary[:]: the definition of free (or liberal: freie) art by opposition to mercenary art . . . [and the statement] that in the Fine-Arts the mind must occupy itself, excite and satisfy itself without having any end in view and independently of any salary[?]

In 1785, five years before the publication of Kant's Kritik der Urteilskraft, there appeared in the Berlinische Monatsschrift a short essay with the long-winded title "Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten." In this essay Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-93), a little-known figure in the history of aesthetics, gave the first unequivocal and systematic expression to a conception of the arts destined to play a major role in aesthetics and art criticism. Works of art, he argued in this and in his subsequent writings, are "self-sufficient totalities" produced simply to be contemplated "for their own sake"—that is, "disinterestedly," purely for the enjoyment of

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their internal attributes and relationships, independently of any external relationships or effects they might have.²

These propositions about the nature and function of art, together with the array of further propositions they entail or suggest about the proper methods of interpreting and evaluating works of art, have dominated discussion of the arts in the present century.³ And yet, familiar as the propositions set forth by Moritz are to us today, it is hard to imagine a more radical departure from the two millennia of theorizing about the arts that preceded his essay. For the arts up until this time had been perceived as intervening directly in human life—as imparting and empowering beliefs, as communicating truths (and of course also falsehoods) in a pleasing form—and their value had been measured instrumentally, in terms of their success (or failure) in serving these broad human purposes. Moritz, by contrast, presents us with the image of all these purposes being "rolled back" into the work of art itself, there to reside as the purely "internal purposiveness" of the parts with respect to the whole:

In contemplating the beautiful object . . . I roll the purpose back into the object itself: I regard it as something which is completed, not in me, but in itself, which therefore constitutes a whole in itself, and pleases me for its own sake. . . . Thus the beautiful object affords a higher and more disinterested pleasure than the merely useful object.⁴

Art, according to this new way of thinking, is a discrete realm of ultimate purpose. Its value is intrinsic.

² Moritz's most important writings on the arts are collected in Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik, ed. Hans Joachim Schirmpf (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1962), and in Volume II of the three-volume Werke, ed. Horst Günther (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1981). There can be little doubt that the "Versuch" came to Kant's attention, for Kant published regularly in the Berlinische Monatschrift. In 1784 this influential periodical had carried his "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht" and "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?"; and the number in which Moritz's "Versuch" appeared, that of March 1785, contained Kant's "Über die Vulkane im Monde."

³ They mark out, for example, the area of agreement among critical movements and schools as divergent in other respects as the phenomenology of Roman Ingarden; Anglo-American philosophical aesthetics as professed by Monroe Beardsley, Jerome Stolnitz, or Paul Ziff; linguistic criticism, from the formalism of Roman Jakobson to many applications of John Austin's theory of speech acts; the mythopoetic criticism of Northrop Frye; and, of course, the New Criticism of Warren, Brooks, and Wimsatt. The similarity in basic principles among these schools of criticism is argued in my "Speech-Act Theory and the Perpetuation of the Dogma of Literary Autonomy," Centrum, 6 (1978), 78-89. On Northrop Frye, see Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 18 ff.

⁴ Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik, p. 3; subsequent page references to the "Versuch" are to this edition. Unless otherwise noted, translations throughout this article are my own.
Through the mediation of Kant, in whose *Kritik der Urteilskraft* they come to fruition, these radical new ideas about the nature of art and about the attitude appropriate to it take hold and become, with astonishing rapidity, the reigning theory of the arts. How is this dramatic shift in the theory of art to be explained? In the attempt to account for it I shall look first at the theoretical context in which Moritz worked—that is, the occurrence in France of the earliest explicit attempt to provide a general theory of the fine arts, and the reception of this theory by Moritz's precursors in Germany. Second, I shall turn to Moritz's contribution to this project. Close reading of his essay of 1785 will suggest that profound changes in the social and economic situation of the arts during his lifetime prompted his departure from inherited tradition and gave rise to the modern theory of art and the aesthetic experience. Finally, I shall explore the nature of these changes in somewhat greater detail.

In an important sense Art is an invention of the eighteenth century. The various individual arts are as old as human civilization itself, and recorded speculation about them and their diverse interrelations dates back to classical antiquity. As Paul Oskar Kristeller has shown, however, it was not until the eighteenth century that they came to be thought of as a separate domain, distinguished by common characteristics from the crafts, the sciences, and other human activities. I quote from the conclusion of his essay "The Modern System of the Arts":

The grouping together of the visual arts with poetry and music into the system of the fine arts with which we are familiar did not exist in classical antiquity, in the Middle Ages or in the Renaissance. However, the ancients contributed to the modern system the comparison between poetry and painting, and the theory of imitation that established a kind of link between painting and sculpture, poetry and music. The Renaissance brought about the emancipation of the three major visual arts from the crafts, it multiplied the comparisons between the various arts, especially between painting and poetry, and it laid the ground for an amateur interest in the different arts that tended to bring them together from the point of view of the reader, spectator and listener rather than of the artist. The seventeenth century witnessed the emancipation of the natural sciences and thus prepared the way for a clearer separation between the arts and the
sciences. Only the early eighteenth century, especially in England and France, produced elaborate treatises written by and for amateurs in which the various fine arts were grouped together, compared with each other and combined in a systematic scheme based on common principles.\(^5\)

"Art" in its modern sense, as comprehending all and only the "fine arts," is the product of a gradual remapping of human activities.

An important milestone in this development was the Abbé Charles Batteux’s treatise "Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe." Distinguishing the "mechanical arts," which have as their objective the satisfaction of man’s needs, from the arts "whose end is pleasure," Batteux listed music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and the art of gesture or dance in the latter category and designated them "the fine arts." Since architecture and eloquence did not seem to him to fall neatly into either category, he established a third class which combined the objectives of utility and pleasure:

The arts of the first kind employ nature as they find it, solely for use and service. Those of the third kind bestow a certain polish upon it in order to suit it for use and for pleasure. The fine arts do not use [nature] at all, but instead only imitate it, each according to its own manner.\(^6\)

With the publication of Batteux’s treatise in 1746 the formation of the modern system of the fine arts is virtually complete.

Batteux brings the arts together under the venerable concept of imitation. His aim, he states, is to demonstrate "from the known qualities of the human mind" that the imitation of nature is the "common object" of the arts and that they differ from one another only "in the means they employ in the execution"—"colors, sounds, and gestures" in the case of painting, music, and dance, and "speech" in the case of poetry (p. 4). In the principle of imitation we have, on the one hand, the link, or kind of brotherly tie, by which all the arts . . . are united, tending to one common end and regulated by common principles; and on the other hand, the


\(^6\) Principe de la littérature, I (Göttingen and Leyden, 1764), 11-12; subsequent page references to Batteux’s treatise are to this edition.
particular differences by which they are separated and distinguished from each other. (p. 5)

For Batteux, as for most neoclassical critics, the imitation of nature necessarily involves idealization. To please a polite audience the artist must improve upon nature. Thus we are told that Molière, when he wanted to depict a misanthrope, "did not look around Paris for an original" to copy; instead, drawing on "all of the marks of a gloomy temper that he was able to observe among men," along with those his genius could supply, he "represented a unique character" (p. 31). Derived by abstraction from a class of particulars, this composite ideal is called "beautiful nature" (p. 32). Art, for Batteux, is the "imitation of nature, agreeable to taste; that is, the imitation of beautiful nature." This unifying principle established, he proceeds in the body of his treatise to extract from it the rules for the individual arts and their respective genres.

Batteux's ideas, expounded by d'Alembert in his famous "Discours préliminaire" for the Encyclopédie (1751), exerted enormous influence both in France and abroad. In Germany they fell on especially fertile soil. By the time the first of an impressive series of translations and adaptations of his treatise appeared there in 1751, native speculation had issued in a new branch of philosophy that shared—indeed, was defined by—the very interests that had inspired Batteux. This was the nascent "science of sensuous knowledge," which Alexander Baumgarten, its founder, denominted aesthetics. One of its chief goals was a general theory of the arts. Despite the corroboration Batteux's treatise obviously lent to their project, however, the German aestheticians did not receive him with unequivocal enthusiasm. A heated debate ensued, engendering refutations and defenses of his unifying principle until well into the seventies. But the vehemence of his opponents is deceptive. Indeed, a study of their writings would make an interesting chapter in the

8 On the reception of Batteux in Germany, see Manfred Schenker, Charles Batteux und seine Nachahmungstheorie in Deutschland (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1909), esp. pp. 61-66.
history of critical—or metacritical—mispription. For while they present their own, opposing views on the arts as absolutely new, they barely go beyond translating Batteux into their own idiom. It was, in short, in willful misreadings of Batteux that the forefathers of idealist aesthetics carved out their intellectual space.

One of the most gifted among them, and "the most vital single influence" on the intellectual development of the young Moritz, was Moses Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn attempted to sketch the broad outlines of a general theory of the arts in an essay entitled "Betrachtungen über die Quellen und die Verbindungen der schönen Künste und Wissenschaften," which appeared in 1757 in the Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste. This essay synthesized the two decades of vigorous philosophical speculation on the arts set in motion by Baumgarten. And thanks to Mendelssohn's gift for the vernacular (Baumgarten had written in crabbed Latin), his essay established the direction in which the theory of art would evolve in subsequent decades.

What Batteux had been content merely to allude to in passing—and then only in the most general terms as the "pleasure" of an audience—is at the center of Mendelssohn's concern. "What phenomena are accompanied by greater movement of the driving wheels of the human soul than the fine arts?" he asks at the beginning of "Betrachtungen."  

Poetry, eloquence, beauty in shapes and in sounds penetrate through the various senses to our souls and rule over all our dispositions. They can make us happy or depressed at will. They can stir our passions and then soothe them, and we willingly submit to the power of the artist who causes us to hope, to fear, to be angry, to be soothed, to laugh, and to shed tears. (p. 168)

For Mendelssohn the unity of the arts is grounded in the powerful effects they exert upon an audience—in the capacity they exhibit to move us. He believes that the central task of a general theory of the arts is to explain this fact of experience. Assuming that the explanation lies in some essential similarity among art objects (an assump-

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10 Mark Boulby, Karl Philipp Moritz: At the Fringe of Genius (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 74.
11 Gesammelte Schriften, I (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommann, 1972), 167; subsequent page references to "Betrachtungen" are to this edition.
tion he shares with Batteux), Mendelssohn asks: "What do the diverse objects of poetry, of painting, of eloquence and of dance, of music, of sculpture and architecture, what do all these objects of human contrivance have in common such that they can concur in [this] single purpose?" (p. 168).

Mendelssohn believes that one answer to this question may be dismissed without further ado: Batteux's proposition that "the common property is the imitation of nature" (p. 169). Now this is hardly a fair summary of the French writer's position, suppressing as it does his critical qualifier (Batteux, as we have seen, had been careful to explain that the arts imitate beautiful nature, not nature pure and simple), but it clears the way for Mendelssohn's alternative view. For, reduced to this "most sterile proposition," the French treatise is opened to his objection: "What if Batteux were asked why nature pleases us? And why does imitation please? Wouldn't he be as perplexed as that Indian sage at the well-known question: And what does the giant tortoise stand on?" (p. 169). Having thus "disposed" of the French critic, Mendelssohn proceeds to develop the ideas that Batteux's qualifier, beautiful, had been designed to convey. He thereby brings into the center of discussion a concept of great significance to the theoretical shift we are tracing.

Imitations of nature please us, Mendelssohn asserts, in so far as they possess a still more fundamental ingredient of pleasure: perfection. For nothing so pleases the human soul as perfection. This has been conclusively demonstrated by (Wolffian) psychology, Mendelssohn says (p. 169). And it may be taken as further established—this time by the investigations of Baumgarten—that art is sensuous (or concrete) knowledge. Thus, it may be concluded that "to please our souls" the arts must render perfection sensuous. Since this is their ultimate purpose, "we can presume the following principle to be certain: the essence of the fine arts and letters consists in the sensuous expression of perfection" (p. 170). This we call beauty, and it is what is really meant, Mendelssohn contends, by phrases like "the imitation of beautiful nature."

But could this be what Batteux meant by the phrase? For the standard to which he had held the arts is conspicuously absent from Mendelssohn's definition. Batteux had called for the perfection of nature, for an imitation of, and truth to, nature as it ideally is. But Mendelssohn's principle of perfection places no such constraints on the arts. It calls only for the creation of a beautiful object. "Any
perfection capable of being rendered concrete or sensuous," he says, "may produce an object of beauty":

This includes all perfections of outer form, that is, of lines and shapes; the harmony of diverse tones and colors; the relation among the parts of a whole; all the faculties of our souls; all the dexterities of our bodies; and even the perfections of our external circumstances, such as honor, comfort, and riches . . . if they can be rendered perfectly concrete. (p. 170)

In short, although it may, the work of art need not reflect nature. Its beauty and excellence are a function, not of its correspondence to some hitherto-existing reality, but rather of the purely internal relationships (of harmony, symmetry, and the like) established among its component parts.

This new conception of the work of art as a free-standing, harmonious, concrete whole is, to be sure, still entangled in Mendelssohn's "Betrachtungen" with elements of the imitation theory. When he descends from the heights of abstraction to suggest how the artist may actually implement the principle of perfection, he cites the procedure of the novelist Samuel Richardson. Since a model for such an ideal character as Sir Charles Grandison probably did not exist in nature, Richardson

undertook to form him as man ought to have been according to the provenient grace of God. He chose an ideal beauty as his model and sought in nature the traits that, taken together, constitute such a perfect character. He beautified nature. (p. 174)

Here and elsewhere when he comes to talk about the individual elements of a work, Mendelssohn reverts to a (Platonized) imitation theory. The drift of his argument, however, is toward art understood simply as the creation of a beautiful object. He summarizes this view: "The artist must raise himself above commonplace nature, and as the re-creation of beauty is his sole aim, he is always free to concentrate it in his works so that it will the more strongly move us" (p. 173). For nearly three decades this new direction in speculation about the nature of art would remain anchored in the instrumentalist framework so emphatically reaffirmed in Mendelssohn's requirement that the work of art move us. It is dislodged by his pupil, Karl Philipp Moritz,
whose own attempt at a general theory of the arts is directed expressly against such instrumentalism.

A number of features of Moritz's "Versuch" serve to situate the essay in the development I am tracing: the title itself, the fact that Moritz dedicated the essay to Mendelssohn, and the express assertion in the opening sentence that, in recent theory, the "principle of pleasure" has replaced the "principle of imitation" as the ultimate end or purpose of the fine arts (p. 3). With this succinct summary of the tradition he will sublate, Moritz asserts that the craftsman alone is constrained by considerations of instrumentality. Objects of mechanical art—Moritz uses a clock and a knife as examples—"have their purposes outside themselves in the person who derives comfort from their use; they are not complete in themselves; in and of themselves and without the potential or actual achievement of their external purposes they have no essential value" (p. 4). The artist, by contrast, is under no such constraints; for a work of fine art "does not have its purpose outside itself. It exists, not for the sake of the perfection of anything else, but rather for the sake of its own internal perfection" (p. 4). It follows that the effects of a work of art on an audience are irrelevant to its value. Now a function of purely internal relationships, the value of art is intrinsic. In short, although he adopts Mendelssohn's principle of perfection, Moritz abandons its rationale—the aim of affecting an audience. In this

12 The development that Moritz describes in his opening sentence was later summed up in one of the lectures on the fine arts given by August Wilhelm Schlegel at the beginning of the nineteenth century. "A few people finally noticed," he says, that the principle that art should imitate nature "was much too vague, and feared that if one were to give art this latitude it might lose itself in the irrelevant and offensive, and thus said: art should imitate beautiful nature. . . . This is just to refer us from Pontius to Pilate. For one either imitates nature as one finds it, in which case things may not turn out beautiful, or one makes it beautiful and we no longer have an imitation. Why don't they say right from the start: art should represent beauty, and leave nature out of it completely. . . ." Mendelssohn had done just that, as we have seen. In the same lecture Schlegel goes on to credit Moritz with having been the one to spell out the implications of this new concept of art, in terms of which the artist is to be understood not as unsuccessfully imitating real forms, but as successfully creating new ones (Kritische Schriften und Briefe, II: Die Kunstlehre, ed. Edgar Lohner [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963], 85, 91-92). Cf. Tzvetan Todorov's discussion of the "Misfortunes of Imitation" theory in Theories of the Symbol, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 111-28.

13 Moritz's elaboration of the principle of perfection is treated by Todorov, pp. 147-64. Relying too heavily on the lectures of Schlegel, Todorov obscures the fact that Moritz's dispute in the "Versuch" is not with neoclassical imitation theory—which, as we have seen, had already been superseded by the principle of perfection—but with pragmatic theory, that is, with the emphasis placed by his immediate precursors on the need of a work of art to achieve effects on an audience.
way he completes the gradual remapping of human activities of which "Art" in its modern sense is the product—that is, art understood as an activity which is *sui generis*, totally distinct from all other human activities. The artist's sole end or purpose in Moritz's model of art consists in the creation of a perfectly "coherent harmonious whole" (p. 8).

Although Moritz offers little in the way of argument for this portentous departure, the spirit of a powerful precedent pervades his exposition. This precedent is not to be found in the earlier criticism of the arts, but in the religion of Moritz's youth, which posited absolute *self-sufficiency*, or freedom from dependence upon anything external to Himself, as a necessary condition of the pure perfection of the Deity. When Moritz observes that "the beautiful object . . . exists, not for the sake of the perfection of anything else, but rather for the sake of its own internal perfection," he is simply transferring an essential property of the Deity to the work of art. Indeed, it is by recourse to this theological analogue that he defines all of the different components in his model of art: not only the nature of the work of art and of its connection to the world outside it, but also the nature of the processes by which it is produced by an artist and received by an audience.

Earlier I noted that Moritz describes the mode of reception appropriate to a work of art as unselfish or "disinterested pleasure" in the object "for its own sake." This is precisely the attitude deemed appropriate to the Deity in the quietist brand of German Pietism in which the young Moritz was indoctrinated by his father. In his

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14 Like the moral philosophers of the period, Moritz uses *uneigennützig* and *uninteressiert* interchangeably to designate the absence of selfish motives, or interests, denoted by the English term "disinterested." On the clash of these opposing attitudes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). The concept of "disinterested" appreciation had already been incorporated into the discussion of the arts by Shaftesbury in the essays collected in *Characteristics* (1711). See Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Significance of Lord Shaftesbury in Modern Aesthetic Theory," *PhO*, 11 (1961), 97-113, and "On the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness,"" *JAAc*, 20 (1961-62), 131-43. As M. H. Abrams has pointed out, however, Shaftesbury introduced the concept "only as ancillary to his ethical and religious philosophy." It was left to Shaftesbury's successors in Germany, Abrams continues, to specialize the concept in order "specifically to differentiate aesthetic experience from religious and moral, as well as practical experience" ("Kant and the Theology of Art," *NDEJ*, 13 [1981], 91). Although Moritz may be presumed to have had at least secondhand knowledge of Shaftesbury from Mendelssohn, it is not known whether he ever read the *Characteristics*. However, as I show below, his own religious background provided fertile enough soil for the germination of these same ideas.

15 In its origins in the late seventeenth century, as Boulby notes, "Pietism proper was
autobiographical novel *Anton Reiser*, the first volume of which appeared in the same year as the "Versuch," Moritz describes the quietist teachings in this way:

[They] . . . are concerned for the most part with that . . . total abandonment of the self and entry into a blissful state of nothingness, with that complete extermination of all so-called *self-ness* or *self-love*, and a totally disinterested love of God, in which not the merest spark of self-love may mingle, if it is to be pure; and out of this there arises in the end a perfect, blissful *tranquillity* which is the highest goal of all these strivings. (*Werke*, 1, 38)\(^6\)

This summary of the highest stage and ultimate goal of human piety and felicity is transported almost verbatim into Moritz’s theory of art, where it serves precisely to characterize what we now term the aesthetic attitude. The contemplation of a beautiful work of art, Moritz observes in the "Versuch," is accompanied by a "sweet astonishment," a "pleasant forgetfulness of ourselves":

As the beautiful object completely captivates our attention, it diverts our attention momentarily from ourselves, with the effect that we seem to lose ourselves in the beautiful object; and

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\(^6\) *Anton Reiser* documents Moritz’s emancipation from the quietist creed and simultaneous initiation into rationalist philosophy. It makes the following observation about these two incompatible habits of mind. Shortly after his discovery of Wolff and Gottsched (key disseminators of the ideas of Leibniz), the protagonist pays a visit to his family. We are told that by this time he had "collected so much material for mystical discussions with his father that they often talked on into the night. Reiser attempted to give a metaphysical explanation of all the mystical ideas his father had drawn from the writings of Madame Guyon—of ‘All and One,’ of ‘perfection in the One,’ and so on. It was easy for him because mysticism and metaphysics actually coincide, inasmuch as the former has often revealed *accidentally*, by means of the imagination, what in the latter is the work of reflective reason" (p. 281). If Leibnizian metaphysics seemed to confirm the quietist creed, it is because of their common Platonic heritage. On Moritz’s assimilation of this tradition, see Thomas P. Saine, *Die ästhetische Theodizee: Karl Philipp Moritz und die Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1971), the final two chapters of which treat Moritz’s writings on art.
precisely this loss, this forgetfulness of ourselves, is the highest stage of pure and disinterested pleasure which beauty grants us. (p. 5)

The mode of reception he describes here follows just as necessarily for Moritz from the nature of the work of art as does religious piety from the nature of the Deity. God is an end in himself, perfectly self-sufficient. To love him selfishly—as a source of private gains—would be to make of him a mere instrument or means of pleasure. An analogous relationship is established between the work of art and the “aesthetic” attitude. “Beauty in a work of art is not pure and unmixed for me,” Moritz says, “until I completely eliminate the special relation to myself and contemplate it as something brought forth entirely for its own sake, in order that it be something complete in itself” (p. 5). In its origins, the theory of the autonomy of art is clearly a displaced theology.\textsuperscript{17} How is this remarkable displacement to be accounted for?

To answer this question we need to turn to another aspect of Moritz’s essay. Having discussed the nature of the beautiful work of art and the mode of reception appropriate to it, Moritz turns in the final section of the essay to the artist. At issue is what the artist’s attitude ought to be toward his audience and toward his work. With the same show of logical rigor displayed in his earlier discussion, Moritz enjoins the artist to subordinate all pragmatic considerations to the perfection of his work. “The true artist,” he says, “will try to achieve the highest internal purposiveness or perfection in his work; if [the work] then meets with approval, he will be happy, but he has already achieved his actual purpose in completing the work” (p. 8). Moritz would have us believe that this concept of the artist’s enterprise is simply a logical extension of his definition of art. But the vehemence and detail with which he enforces his injunction suggest that more than logical coherence is at stake. The artist is warned:

If the anticipation of approval is your main consideration, and if your work is of value to you only as a means of achieving fame, then . . . you are working in a self-interested manner: the focus of the work will fall outside the work; you will not produce

\textsuperscript{17} For a more extensive exploration of the theory’s theological provenience, see Abrams, pp. 75-106.
it for its own sake, and hence will not produce a self-sufficient whole. You will be seeking a false glitter, which may dazzle the rabble momentarily, but will vanish like fog before the gaze of the philosopher. (pp. 7-8)

The venerable end of giving pleasure to an audience has taken on unsavory associations indeed: to please is here to curry favor with an audience, and this in turn seems to mean indulging its appetite for spectacle. Such disparaging remarks recur, creating an image of a contemporary audience anything but receptive to the arts—at least to the arts that concern Moritz. It is an audience sharply and most unevenly divided between the many and the few, between the "thousands who have no eye for the beautiful" and the "men of taste" who make it their chief occupation in life to love and serve art, Moritz says, much as the philanthropist loves and serves men: ardently, but without any hope of private gain. By contrast, the many—"the rabble," as he contemptuously terms them—seek only "diversion" and "pleasant sensations," with the consequence that the beautiful work of art is "passed by with indifference" and the theaters play to empty houses—a source of great anguish to the "noble" few.18

Such is the world Moritz depicts in his essay. His portrayal of a world with singularly little use for the beautiful work of art cannot but cast a certain doubt on the disinterestedness of his theoretical project. To see that this is so, one need only compare the way in which the two competing theories of art—Mendelssohn's instrumentalist theory and the new theory put forward by Moritz—would make sense of such widespread indifference to art. In terms of the earlier theory, art that fails to affect, and so to achieve approval by, an audience, is without merit. On the new theory of art's autonomy, however, such unfortunate facts of reception have no such unfortu-

18 These intrusions of contingency upon Moritz's argument are not taken into account by his commentators. Saine is sufficiently disturbed by them to caution us against taking Moritz "too literally" (p. 129). However, more often they are simply sublimated. See, for example, Todorov, pp. 148-64, and the fifth lecture in Peter Szondi, "Antike und Moderne in der Ästhetik der Goethezeit," Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), I, 82-98. Two notable exceptions are Jochen Schulte-Sasse in his penetrating analysis of reactions to the rise of popular literature in the later eighteenth century, Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1971), pp. 65-73; and Martin Fontius, "Produktivkraftentaltung und Autonomie der Kunst: Zur Ablösung ständischer Voraussetzungen in der Literaturtheorie," in Literatur im Epochenumbbruch, ed. Günther Klotz, Winfried Schröder, and Peter Weber (Berlin: Aufbau, 1977), pp. 489-520.
nate consequences. They are indicative, not of an imperfect work, but of the imperfect sensibility, or piety, of the audience; because for Moritz, as we have seen, the beautiful work of art does not exist in order to provide pleasure or amuse; it exists, like God, for its own sake—that is, for the sake of its own internal perfection. By suggesting to Moritz how the question of a work's value—indeed, of its very status as a work of art—might be shifted from considerations of reception to the purely internal consideration of the harmonious interaction of its parts, the quietist creed of his youth inspired a new theory of art in which, as it were, a virtue is made of necessity, and the relative ineffectuality of the beautiful work of art, instead of rendering its value problematic, can be construed as evidence of its very excellence.

The picture of "Art" that emerges from Moritz's "Versuch," then, is of a category designed to "resolve" a concrete artworld dilemma. A brief exploration of the situation of the arts in the later eighteenth century will help to shed further light on the nature of this dilemma.

The eighteenth century witnessed momentous changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of art. I shall focus here on the transformation of the book market, not only because it was by this that the philosophers and critics who fashioned the theory of art as autonomous were most affected, but because literature was the first among the arts to undergo the changes I intend to trace.

The rise of the middle classes in eighteenth-century Europe increased dramatically the demand for reading material. A variety of new institutions emerged to meet this growing demand: new literary forms like the novel, reviews and periodicals, circulating and lending libraries to facilitate distribution, and—the professional writer. The possibility of actually making a living by the pen is a product of this development—of the emergence, that is, of a sufficiently large and literate middle class to support writers through the purchase of their works. This is especially true of Germany where, in contrast to England and France, the patronage of authors had never been widespread.\(^{19}\) With few exceptions, such as the court at

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Weimar, the petty princes and provincial aristocracy in absolutist Germany took little interest in the arts, and practically none in vernacular literature. As J. G. F. Schulz complained in 1784, they were

more concerned with their soldiers or deer, hogs and horses. And if they do read anything in print, it has to be French or Italian. So they do not know our scholars and do not want to know them. Even less do they seek out and reward literary merit.20

However, German absolutism greatly retarded the formation of a middle class—and, hence, the very preconditions of an energetic world of arts and letters. The creation of these conditions was in large measure the work of a few hundred civic-minded literati—philosophers and poets from Leibniz to Lessing—who divided their time between “their work” and a variety of projects aimed at extending literacy in the broadest sense: the establishment of theaters, the founding of reading societies and periodicals, and so on. The product of one such enterprise is Mendelssohn’s “Betrachtungen.” The exceptional grace and lucidity with which the essay synthesizes two decades of obscure school-philosophical speculation on the arts reflect the objectives of the periodical for which it was commissioned, Friedrich Nicolai’s Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste, in the founding and operation of which Mendelssohn and, to a lesser degree, Lessing collaborated.21 First published in 1757 and modeled on Addison’s Spectator, the Bibliothek was designed to “foster liberal learning and good taste among the Germans” by making the subject matter of aesthetics accessible for the first time to educated laymen as well as to scholars.22

The pedagogical motive sounded here is reflected in the literary output of the German Aufklärer. However, it also plays a larger role

20 Firlifimini, ed. Ludwig Geiger (Berlin, 1885), pp. 73 f.
21 In anticipation of his responsibilities with the Bibliothek, Mendelssohn writes somewhat wistfully to Lessing (August 2, 1756) that it is going to mean “depriving the venerable matron [metaphysics] of some of my love in order to share it with the fine arts” (Gesammelte Schriften, IV [Stuttgart: Fr. Frommann, 1977], xxiii).
22 Ibid., p. xxxvii.
in their theorizing about the arts than is generally recognized. The creation of a literate middle class is a prime rationale for the first comprehensive German poetic, Johann Christoph Gottsched’s Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst (1730). This aim causes him and his “followers” in the generation of Lessing and Mendelssohn to place an extremely heavy emphasis on the pragmatic—that is, upon the effects of the arts, and especially of literature, on an audience. Questions about the nature of artistic imitation are invariably subordinated to the purpose of such imitation—to instruct an audience or, increasingly, to move an audience, as the theorists grasp that the distinctive power of literature, as a “sensuous mode of discourse,” lies in its ability to instruct the heart as opposed to the head. Mendelssohn’s departure from Batteux is an instance of this tendency. And it is in his exploration of the principles and techniques of subliminal instruction—later to be held suspect as manipulation—that Lessing’s deviation from neoclassical imitation theory may be seen to lie.23

The efforts of the Aufklärer to extend literacy and to create a climate in which a literature in the vernacular might begin to develop were remarkably successful. By the 1760s we begin to read of the spread of the reading habit—of the new “reading craze” or “reading mania.” In the following decades, a veritable “reading plague” is reported to be sweeping the German lands. It is said to have extended even into the lower classes and to have infected women especially. “In no other country has the reading hobby made such progress as in Germany,” the Weltbürger proclaims in 1791.

Formerly nobody engaged in reading except actual scholars or people studying to become scholars. The remainder of the nation was content with the Bible and a few devotional works. But now all this has changed. The sciences have not only ceased to be the property of a certain class; at least a superficial knowledge of them has become a necessity among all the educated classes. One now finds the works of good and bad writers in the dressing rooms of princes and under the work bench; and the nation’s gentility, so as not to appear coarse, decorate their rooms with books instead of tapestries. In the last century a soldier with a

book in his hand would have been occasion for the most biting sarcasm; in ours an officer who is not well-read would be contemptible. Our mothers dressed the children in the morning and went about their business; our daughters, however, spend the morning reading poems and magazines, and in the evening wander through the solitary valley with a novel in the hand. Indeed, the peasants are already reading the Noth- und Hülfs-Büchlein to each other in the village inn. . . .

In reality the new hobby cannot have been as widespread as the Weltbürger implies, for it is estimated that as late as 1800 only some 25 percent of the population at most was literate; but the ebullient tone is entirely justified, because this figure is nearly double what it had been only a generation before.

By the 1780s the demand for reading material had sufficiently increased to entice, if not to support, an astonishing number of would-be writers. Reporting a decade later on the “rapid progress” literature was making in Germany, the London bookseller James Lackington says with undisguised awe that there are “seven thousand living authors in that country,” a veritable “army of writers,” and “every body reads.” This questionable advantage of Germany over England is echoed in G. C. Lichtenberg’s observation that if England’s forte is “race horses” (“Rennpferde”), Germany’s is “race pens” (“Rennfedern”). Such observations are borne out by contemporary catalogues of German literary output. Because of the relative lack of vocational opportunity for the sons of the middle

24 Quoted in Wolfgang Martens, Die Botschaft der Tugend: Die Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen moralischen Wochenschriften (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1968), pp. 406-7. Rudolf Zacharias Becker’s Noth- und Hülfsbüchlein, an 800-page compendium of knowledge written expressly for the peasant, was one of the period’s greatest commercial successes. According to Bruford, thirty thousand copies were printed for the first edition in 1787—it took two years to print them—and by 1791 eleven more authorized and four unauthorized editions had been published (p. 280).
25 The figures are Rudolf Schenda’s in Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe, 1770-1910 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1970), p. 444. Schenda estimates literacy at around 15 percent of the population in 1770.
27 Quoted by Ward, p. 61.
28 Johann Georg Meusel, for example, in Das gelehrte Deutschland oder Lexikon der jetzt lebenden deutschen Schriftsteller, placed the number of writers in 1800 at around 10,650, up dramatically from some 3000 in 1771, 5200 in 1784, and 7000 in 1791 (quoted in Helmuth Kiesel and Paul Münch, Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert [München: C. H. Beck, 1977], p. 90). See also Ward (p. 88), who deduces from Meusel’s figures that in 1790 there would have been one writer to every 4000 of the German population.
classes in absolutist Germany, the number of would-be writers so proliferated that there developed a kind of literary proletariat, about whose obtrusive presence complaints were filed at the Leipzig book fairs. "One is overcome by nausea and disgust at these otherwise renowned scholars," one visitor complains in 1795. "They have manuscripts for every occasion and by the dozen." 29 The writers who flourished in this climate were those who were able and willing to cater to popular taste.

Although won over relatively slowly from a predominantly devotional literature, the middle-class reading public in Germany had developed, by the last quarter of the century, a voracious appetite for the entire spectrum of light entertainment. An advertisement in the Leipzig newspaper Reichsbote (June 20, 1805) gives an idea of this trend. "In all reputable lending libraries you will find the following highly entertaining works," it begins, and then lists

Celestine's Garters (3rd edn.); Corona. The Necromancer; The Ghost of my Girl, her Appearance and my Wedding Feast; The Chambers of Horror, a Ghost Story (Repository of Ghost Stories, vol. i); Kunigunde, or The Robbers' Cave in the Forest of Firs; Lisara, the Amazon from Abyssinia, a Romantic Portrait; Legends from the World of Ghosts and Magic (new edn.); The Suicide, a Tale of Terror and Wonder; Escapades in Sorcery, a Comic Tale; The Old Man of the Woods, or The Underground Dwelling; The Strange Adventures of an Englishman in America; Diverting Anecdotes and Side-splitting Cross-cuts by G. C. Cramer. 30

Literary entertainment was becoming an industry.

The significance of this trend, especially for the serious writer, is the subject of the "Vorspiel auf dem Theater" (1798) in Faust. A spirited altercation between a dramatic poet and a theater producer intent on a box-office success provides the occasion for Goethe to spell out what Moritz had earlier hinted at—namely, why the pragmatic aesthetic worked out by the generation of Mendelssohn, in which the excellence of a work is measured by its capacity to affect

29 Johann Georg Heinzmann, Appell an meine Nation über Aufklärung und Aufklärer (Bern, 1795), p. 421. Alarm over this proliferation of writers produced its own body of writing. See, for example, the discussions "Ursachen der jetzigen Vielschreiberey in Deutschland," in Journal von und für Deutschland, 6 (1789) and 7 (1790).
an audience, was felt to be incompatible with artistic integrity. The
message of the "Vorspiel" is that this aesthetic has been co-opted
into the service of purely escapist ends by a growing entertainment
industry. For shorn of its original moral-didactic intent, it is this
aesthetic of effects that is propounded by the theater producer. To
"move the masses" you have to choose the right tools, he exclaims to
the poet, so above all, "let there be enough live action!" Remember
for whom you are writing: the one comes here out of "boredom,"
the other "drowsy" from a huge dinner, "and worst of all, so many
come from reading magazines!" But his urgings are to no avail, for
it takes "stronger drink" to please the new reading public than
Goethe's poet is willing to supply. What the poet had expected to
stage was a "perfect whole." Turning Moritz's precept into practice,
he protests that the job of pandering to the public taste is beneath
his dignity as a "true artist" and tells the producer to find some other
"lackey."

The vast majority of writers succumbed to such commercial pres-
dures and churned out imitations and variations on proven popular
themes with unprecedented rapidity and lack of refinement.\[31\] Those who did not—the "true artists" of Goethe and Moritz—sold
poorly. Just how poorly is suggested by the following anecdote in a
letter written by Kleist to his fiancée (September 14, 1800). He is
describing a visit to a lending library in Würzburg.

Listen to what I found there and I shall need to say no more
about the tone of Würzburg.
"I should like to have a few good books."
The collection is at your disposal, sir.
"Perhaps something by Wieland."
I hardly think so.
"Or by Schiller, Goethe."
You would not be likely to find them here.
"Why is that? Are all these books out? Do people read so much
here?"
Not exactly.
"What sort of people do the most reading here then?"

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\[31\] See Ward, p. 56. The spin-offs he cites of the greatest commercial success of the last
decade of the century, Karoline von Wobeser's sentimental novel, Elisa, or Woman as she
ought to be (1795), give an idea of this trend: Elisa, not the Woman she ought to be; Louise, a
Woman as I would wish her to be; Elisa, the Girl from the Moon; Maria, or the Misfortune of being a
Woman; Family as it ought to be; Petticoat as it ought to be, a few Words in Private; Robert, or Man as
he ought to be; Robert, or Man as he ought not to be; etc. (pp. 137-38).
Lawyers, merchants, and married women.
"And the unmarried women?"
They are not permitted to apply for books.
"And students?"
We have orders not to give them any.
"But if so little is read, could you tell me then where in
heaven’s name the works of Wieland, Goethe, and Schiller have
got to?"
Begging your pardon, sir, but these books are not read here at
all.
"I see. You have not got them in the library?"
We are not allowed to.
"Then what sort of books have you got here along all these
walls?"
Romances of chivalry, those and nothing else. To the right
those with ghosts, to the left without ghosts, according to taste.
"Aha, I see!"32

In short, the public’s insatiable appetite for literature did not ex-
tend to the German poets. By and large too demanding for the
general reader, their works found an audience only among the
elite: government officials in the large towns, university-trained
professional men, doctors, lawyers, preachers, teachers, and, of
course, fellow poets. There developed in late eighteenth-century
Germany the high- and low-brow cultures which we take for
granted today.33

The beginning of this bifurcation of culture is discerned by the
keen eye of Friedrich Nicolai as early as 1773. “Our writers have
reference almost exclusively to themselves alone, or to the scholarly
estate,” he writes. He then goes on to predict with uncanny accuracy
just where this development was headed:

Since no scholar wants to write for the uneducated, and yet the
uneducated world has as much need to read as the educated, the
job of writing for them must ultimately fall to the authors of Insel
Felsenburgs, devotionals, and moral weeklies, whose abilities
coincide more closely with their chosen readership than do

32 Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. Helmut Sembdner, 2nd ed. (München: Carl Hanser,
33 On the emergence of two separate cultures in the perceptions of eighteenth-century
elites, see Harry C. Payne, “Elite versus Popular Mentality in the Eighteenth Century,”
SECC, 8 (1979), 5-32.
those of the great scholars, and who are therefore read a great deal more widely than the great geniuses, though they do not edify their readers one iota, indeed, contribute not insignificantly to the failure of the light of the true scholars to reach the uneducated.34

With the expansion of the book market to satisfy demands which the Aufklärer themselves had devoted so much of their time and energies to stimulate, these writers began to see the goal of their efforts recede, betrayed by the profit motive of a free market and by the laws of supply and demand. Nicolai’s prediction of the seventies is confirmed by later observers, among them Johann Adam Bergk. Writing in 1799, Bergk comments:

Reading is supposed to be an educational tool of independence, and most people use it like sleeping pills; it is supposed to make us free and mature, and how many does it serve merely as a way of passing time and as a way of remaining in a condition of eternal immaturity!35

Observations such as these increase in frequency and pathos beginning in the 1780s, as does the tendency, evident in Nicolai’s condemnation of elitist writers, to project and so rationalize their discontents with the literary market economy. However, not all of the Aufklärer share Nicolai’s populism; and instead of blaming themselves, they lash out at the hacks and at unscrupulous publishers and book dealers for thinking of nothing but their own selfish interests. “The need to read, which is becoming more and more generally felt, even in those classes of society where the state is wont to contribute so little in the field of education,” Schiller complains,

instead of being used by good writers for more noble purposes, is being misused by mediocre pen-pushers and avaricious publishers to peddle their poor merchandise without regard for the

cost in public taste and morality. . . . Mindless, tasteless, and pernicious novels, dramatized stories, so-called journals for the ladies, and the like are the treasures of our public libraries, and they are completely destroying the few healthy principles that our playwrights had left intact.\textsuperscript{36}

Increasingly, however, the \textit{Aufklärer} vent their frustrations on the reading public itself. Unable to reach the new broad-gauge audience on whose approval they depended for a livelihood, the \textit{Aufklärer} decry the public for wanting only to be “diverted,” “moved,” “stimulated.” Displaying a lack of fellow feeling without parallel in the English letters of the period, they condemn the unwitting public for its “addiction” to the “pleasant sensations” manufactured by the growing literature industry; and like the “true artist” of Goethe’s “Vorspiel,” they turn their backs on it.\textsuperscript{37} “Since one cannot hope to build and to plant,” Schiller remarks in one of the most extreme expressions of this impulse, “it is at least something to inundate and destroy. The only possible relationship to the public . . . is war.”\textsuperscript{38}

It is Moritz, however, who converts these discontents into a viable weapon of cultural politics. Like most of the writers of the period, he had a deep personal stake in the commercialization of literature. It was as a professional writer that he sought to escape his humble beginnings. In addition to the novels, \textit{Anton Reiser} and \textit{Andreas Hartknopf}, for which he is best known today, Moritz wrote travelogues\textsuperscript{39} and books and essays on topics ranging from history, philosophy, language, and aesthetics to psychology and mythology; he also edited a number of periodicals, including one for experimental psychology.\textsuperscript{40} His short career was enormously produc-

\textsuperscript{36} “Merkwürdige Rechtsfälle als ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Menschheit” (1792), \textit{Sämtliche Werke}, ed. Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert, V (München: Carl Hanser, 1959), 864. Cf. also “Ursachen der jetzigen Vielschreibererey in Deutschland” (n. 29, above).

\textsuperscript{37} Compare, for example, the stance of Wordsworth in the Preface to the second edition of \textit{Lyrical Ballads} (1800), poems designed to “counteract” the “craving for extraordinary incident” and “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” in which the popular literature of his day traded (\textit{Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth}, ed. Paul M. Zall [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966], p. 21).


\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde als ein Lesebuch für Gelehrte und Ungelehrte} (1783-93).
tive—it had to be in an age in which royalties were calculated by the page. And in this respect at least it was a success: his writings earned him a reputation in polite circles and even a measure of the recognition he craved from the best minds of the period—ranging from Goethe and Schiller to some of the younger generation of Romantics, such as Tieck, Wackenroder, and the brothers Humboldt (who visited Moritz’s lectures at the Royal Academy of the Arts to which he was appointed in 1789), Schelling, Jean Paul, and the brothers Schlegel. However, his efforts to win the esteem of the elite were continually frustrated by financial worries. The pressing need for money caused Moritz to take on three or four different projects at a time, with the consequence, as his brother writes to Jean Paul (August 22, 1795),

that he [n]ever completely finished a work until handing it over to the publisher. It was usually only on the basis of a rough plan sketched out in his mind that he determined the number of pages and negotiated the modest honorarium, whereby he naturally had to say that it was already finished, that it only needed fleshing out. And in a certain sense this was correct—that is, if by finished one means the existence of the work in his imagination and by fleshing it out, committing it to paper. And then he would not even begin to write until the compositor was already waiting for the manuscript, and even then did not write more than the latter needed at any given time.42

The end results of the different projects, completed in such extreme haste because of the urgently needed honoraria, frequently exhibit striking similarities to one another. Moritz was a shameless recycler of his ideas. “No one understood the art of invisible self-plagiarism better than Reiser [Moritz],” his friend Karl Friedrich Klischnig observes in his Erinnerungen. “With only a few small changes he inserted whole pages of his earlier works on language in the later ones, without this—as far as I know—coming to the attention of a reviewer.”43 But evidently it did not go entirely unnoticed by his publishers.

41 On Moritz’s influence, see Boulby, chaps. 5-6.
Moritz's fast and loose ways with publishers precipitated a kind of boycott of his writings at the book fair of 1788 and contributed to the failure of his volume Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen.\textsuperscript{44} This is a longer and more complex treatment of the ideas first presented in the "Versuch." Moritz wrote it while in Italy in 1786-88—instead of the travelogue for which his publisher, Johann Heinrich Campe, had advanced him the funds to make the trip—and he considered it his best work to date. "Everything I shall ever write on any subject is contained in the treatise on the formative imitation of the beautiful," he wrote Campe (July 5, 1788), "and after this treatise it will never be possible for me to write anything superficial again, not even if I try to make myself do so."\textsuperscript{45} But the public did not share Moritz's enthusiasm for the work. Because of the "strangeness of your fanciful philosophy, few people can follow you and even fewer want to follow you," Campe would later write him, "so I am going to have to pulp most of the edition" (Campe, p. 21). The public would have preferred a travelogue.

The anecdote is illuminating because it underscores the difficulties faced by German writers of the later eighteenth century when they tried to impose on the public what they felt to be their best writing. What distinguished Moritz's tribulations from those of other serious writers, however, is that the "fanciful philosophy" to which the public turned so deaf an ear came armed against just such an eventuality. For the chief goal of this philosophy was to sever the value of a work from its capacity to appeal to a public which wanted only to be diverted. In the "Versuch" Moritz had written:

\begin{quote}
If pleasure were not such a subordinate purpose, or better yet, only a natural consequence of works of fine art, why wouldn't the true artist try to distribute it as widely as possible instead of sacrificing the pleasant sensations of the many thousands who have no eye for the beautiful for the sake of the perfection of his work? — Should the artist say: but if my work is liked or affords pleasure, I have achieved my purpose; then my answer is: to the contrary! It is because you have achieved your purpose that your work is liked, or that your work is liked is perhaps a sign that you have
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44} Johann Heinrich Campe, Moritz: Ein abgenötigter trauriger Beitrag zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde (Braunschweig, 1789), pp. 6, 20. Cf. Saine, pp. 182-83.

\textsuperscript{45} Eybisch, p. 234. See also Campe, p. 20.
achieved your purpose in the work. But if the actual purpose of your work was the pleasure you wished to effect rather than the perfection of the work itself, then the approval of the one or the other [recipient] will for that very reason be suspect to me. (p. 7)

By shifting the measure of a work’s value from its pleasurable effects on an audience to such purely intrinsic considerations as “the perfection of the work itself,” Moritz arms his own and all “serious” writing against the eventuality of a hostile or indifferent reception.

We may now return to the question of how to explain the shift from the instrumentalist theory of art to the modern theory of art as an autonomous object which is to be contemplated disinterestedly. Close reading of essays like Moritz’s Versuch suggests that this shift is rooted in the far-reaching changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of reading material that marked the later eighteenth century. As literature became subject to the laws of a market economy, the instrumentalist theory, especially in the affective formulation given it by the generation of Mendelssohn, was found to justify the wrong works. That is, it was found to justify the products of the purveyors of strong effects, with whom more serious writers could not effectively compete. The theology of art fashioned by Moritz offered such writers both a convenient and a very powerful set of concepts with which to address the predicament in which they found themselves—concepts by which (serious, or “fine”) Art’s de facto loss of direct instrumentality could be recuperated as a (supreme) virtue. As Moritz himself says about this entirely new strategy in defense of art:

We do not need the beautiful object in order to be entertained as much as the beautiful object needs us to be recognized. We can easily exist without contemplating beautiful works of art, but they cannot exist as such without our contemplation. The more we can do without them, therefore, the more we contemplate them for their own sake so as to impart to them, as it were, for the first time, through our contemplation, their true, complete existence. (p. 4)

In the claim that the “true” work of art is the locus of intrinsic value—a perfectly self-sufficient totality which exists to be contemplated disinterestedly, for its own sake—Moritz makes a tri-
umph of defeat and "rescues" Art from determination by the market. Only after his death did the extent of his triumph become fully evident, for the theory of art that he formulated rapidly became the dominant theory of philosophers of art, and by the third decade of the nineteenth century it had succeeded in instilling in the German public a conception of a high culture, or Kultur, to which almost all, whatever they actually read in their spare time, paid verbal homage.

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