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The stringent experience of aesthetic negativity is at the same time the experience of the beautiful. With this conclusion Part I ended, thus reinforcing the thesis with which it began: that a "stereoscopic reading" (Wellmer) of Adorno provides a definition of aesthetic negativity that does not undermine but actually satisfies the basic conditions that the modern postulate of autonomy imposes on aesthetics. The suggested concept of aesthetic negativity turns out to be an explication rather than an undermining of aesthetic autonomy, since it enables one to reconstruct the evaluation of aesthetic objects (as beautiful) in contradistinction to all nonaesthetic modes of judgment. Instead of being heteronomous itself, the aesthetics of negativity actually uncovers the "latent heteronomy" of its opponent, hermeneutic aesthetics. At the same time, it admittedly cannot be overlooked that the recommended explanation limits the power of aesthetic negativity to the narrow province of aesthetic experience. If the direct experience (*Erlebnis*) of the beautiful can be defined as the self-evaluation of the stringency of the experience of aesthetic negativity, then, conversely, it follows that every stringent subversion of understanding assesses the object of the negated effort at understanding as beautiful. This however means that the negativity in aesthetic experience cannot be detached from that perspective on objects in which they are assessed as beautiful or ugly. This correlation between aesthetic negativity and beauty also entails that the processual negation of automatic understanding can only exist in the

aesthetic sphere. Processes of automatic understanding unrelated to aesthetic experience are left unaffected. Inasmuch as we judge its objects as true or false or good or bad, automatic understanding cannot be aesthetically negated. Thus if the concept of aesthetic negativity is explained as in Part I in such a way that it obeys the basic conditions of the modern postulate of aesthetic autonomy, its validity is then restricted to the distinctly aesthetic perspective on understanding or its objects; in other words, its validity is limited to an aesthetic sphere of value distinct from other spheres.

This consequence of the arguments advanced in Part I marks the point at which Derrida's deconstructive theory of the text, which up until this point had served to support the argument, parts ways with the aesthetics of negativity. The latter necessarily considers the experience of aesthetic negativity to be limited to a special aesthetic mode of experience or aesthetic type of discourse. Since it is identical with the judgment of objects in terms of the specifically aesthetic value of the beautiful, the aesthetically experienced negativity of understanding cannot compete with automatic enactments of understanding that involve other kinds of evaluation (such as of the true, the good, or the useful). Precisely in its unrestrained negativity, aesthetic experience becomes one mode of experience or discourse among or alongside others. Derrida's deconstructive theory of the text bears a twofold relationship to this concept of aesthetic experience: though it is in agreement with its structural descriptions of the logic of aesthetic experience, it criticizes the way it is functionally situated. According to the critique brought forth by deconstructive theory, the aesthetics of negativity betrays its own insights into the logic of negativity by remaining aesthetics. A rift emerges between the status of the *aesthetics* of negativity and its substantive theses as an aesthetics of *negativity*, a rift that deconstructive theory seeks to mend.

The protest that can be derived from Derrida's theory of the text against the complete restriction of aesthetic negativity to the actual enactment of its experience is in no way implausible. This objection gains its force from a tension that threatens to rip apart the aesthetics of negativity from within: On the one hand, aesthetic experience is a processual negation of any automatic understanding that seeks

to present itself to aesthetic experience as meaning formation in the aesthetic object. On the other hand, the scope and validity of this negation is restricted to the enactment of aesthetic experience. Derrida's objection is thus directed at a version of the aesthetics of negativity that seems to force on us the idea of both a total *and* a limited experience of negativity. This version puts forth a negativity vis-à-vis an automatic understanding that is carried out in all discourses, but restricts this negativity to arising from only one discourse; it presents a negation that, by negating the automatic realization of understanding, applies to the functioning of all discourses, but which is itself supposed to be conceived only as one discourse among others.

Derrida's concept of text starts from this discontent. For an approach that demands that we accept an experience of negativity that negates all nonaesthetic discourses *in* the experiencing of the aesthetic, but claims that this experience is completely irrelevant *for* these nonaesthetic discourses since the validity of this experience is limited to the actual enactment of aesthetic experience, seems problematic. But Derrida has expanded this criticism far beyond its primary contents into a general critique of all aesthetics as the subjugation ("making servile") of the potentialities of negativity. The limitation of the validity of aesthetically experienced negativity that the aesthetics of negativity seeks to implement appears to be the handicap that burdens all aesthetics *qua* aesthetics. According to this interpretation, the aesthetics of negativity is the most radical approach to aesthetics we can achieve, insofar as it brings to the fore the discourse-subverting logic of aesthetic experience; at the same time, as an aesthetic, it remains within the limits that have been inviolably drawn for this philosophical discipline. It too continues to fulfill the task that Derrida believes aesthetics was invented for—it neutralizes by recognizing:

It has been thought that Plato simply condemned play. And by the same token the art of *mimesis* which is only a type of play. But in all questions involving play and its "opposite," the "logic" will necessarily be baffling. Play and art are lost by Plato as he saves them. . . . Plato does speak very well of play. He speaks in praise of it. But he praises play 'in the best sense of the word,' if this can be said without eliminating play beneath the reassuring

silliness of such a precaution. The best sense of play is play that is supervised and contained within the safeguards of ethics and politics.<sup>1</sup>

The marginalization of aesthetic experience, especially of one whose negativity has already been recognized, is for Derrida nothing less than the complicity of traditional aesthetics with "metaphysics,"<sup>2</sup> that is, in Derrida's usage, with that approach to our discourses that reconstructs (and reenacts) their successful functioning. For this reason, Derrida designates the "recognition" of art in aesthetics as its subjugation ("making it servile") into one form of discourse among others, which robs it of its ability to disrupt other discourses. Using an expression from Bataille,<sup>3</sup> Derrida calls that concept of art "servile" that degrades it into a limited form of discourse among others in opposition to its "sovereign" contents. In contrast, art is "sovereign" because it overcomes the "desire for meaning" that defines our nonaesthetic discourses. To view art in its sovereignty is not to avoid and repress the "risk of being meaningless"<sup>4</sup> that it calls into view, but to accept and preserve it. It is servile to repress; it is sovereign to endure this danger, this risk. The restriction of the validity and scope of aesthetic negativity to the enactment of aesthetic experience results in Derrida's verdict that it renders art servile, because at the very moment that it recognizes art's negative potential it cheats it out of its sovereignty. The philosophical discipline of aesthetics and the approaches whose program it formulates rob art of its threatening status, not by banishing it, but by recognizing it as a particular discourse. In contrast, the sovereign enactment of aesthetic negativity is characterized by the fact that it develops the foundations of art as a threat to our meaning-producing discourses. The sovereign enactment of aesthetic experience breaks open the boundaries of its validity and asserts its validity for nonaesthetic discourses as well.

Derrida's reproach of the servility of a purely "aesthetic" approach to the processual negativity of art is grounded in the stabilizing effect that its limitation to the aesthetic realm has on automatic understanding and, in this way, on the functioning of our nonaesthetic discourses. Any purely aesthetic approach is not merely neutral but servile because it represents indirect confirmation of the successful

functioning of those nonaesthetic discourses for whose sake it limits the powers of aesthetic negativity. If it is true, as Derrida claims, that any approach to our nonaesthetic discourses that is oriented toward their successful functioning in the production and distribution of meaning has to assume the form of a metaphysical theory (see chapter 6), then the complicity of all aesthetics with metaphysics is manifested in the limitation of the validity of aesthetic experience. Derrida argues that any view of aesthetic negativity that distinguishes it from other modes of experience results from its metaphysical distortion.<sup>5</sup>

From his analysis of the servile form of aesthetic experience, Derrida conversely concludes that aesthetic experience will only become sovereign if it overcomes the restriction of the validity of the processual negation of all automatic understanding. The sovereign sense of the aesthetic subversion of all understanding implies going beyond the marginalized status of the aesthetic as merely one discourse among others. Art becomes sovereign if the experience of *its* negativity at the same time uncovers the hidden negativity *also* found not in art, but rather in functioning discourse.

[T]his sovereign speech is not *another* discourse, another chain unwound alongside significative discourse. There is only one discourse, it is significative, and here one cannot get around Hegel. The poetic or the ecstatic is that *in every discourse* which can open itself up to the absolute loss of its sense, to the (non-)base of the sacred, of nonmeaning, of unknowledge or of play, to the swoon from which it is reawakened by a throw of the dice.<sup>6</sup>

The redemption of the sovereign potential of art is in its overcoming of the servile form to which it was damned by an "aesthetic" reading that was subject to a "desire for meaning." Art becomes sovereign on a different, no longer aesthetic reading. This latter interpretation signifies an enactment of aesthetic negativity that detaches it from the occurrence of aesthetic experience and finds traces of it even in nonaesthetic discourses.

Derrida calls this kind of reading of the aesthetic "textual"; it transforms aesthetic signs into texts. It can only do this, though, by also transforming nonaesthetic discourses into texts. According to Derrida, reading the aesthetic sign as text always also means bringing



its processual negation vis-à-vis nonaesthetic discourses into force in such a way that their successful functioning is undermined in that they themselves become texts. The textual reading can never be restricted to one type of discourse; to view *one* discourse as text is to view *all* discourses as texts. On the sovereign reading of the aesthetic, a reading that is no longer aesthetic but textual in nature, aesthetic and nonaesthetic discourses become “genres” of a general text. This reading depotentializes the structural difference between discourse types to the relative difference between “literary genre[s]”<sup>7</sup> of one general text.

The explanation of Derrida’s concept of text in terms of the program of a transcendence of aesthetics that regains the sovereignty of art allows us to give an initial characterization of the relationship between the aesthetics of negativity and deconstruction: Both agree about the structural description of the process of aesthetic experience. Both describe it as the enactment of that negation in which efforts at understanding undermine themselves by depotentializing every aesthetic meaning back into the pure material of signifying selections: “‘Literature’ also indicates—practically—the beyond of everything: the ‘operation’ is the inscription that transforms the whole into a part requiring completion or supplementation. This type of supplementarity opens the ‘literary game’ in which, along with ‘literature,’ the figure of the author finally disappears.”<sup>8</sup> But the aesthetics of negativity and deconstruction stand in strict opposition to each other in their respective definitions of the validity of the aesthetic experience of negativity. The aesthetics of negativity limits the validity of the aesthetically experienced to its actual enactment, in which we view objects in the perspective of their specifically aesthetic value, in terms of the beautiful. The subversion of the patterns of nonaesthetic understanding can only be stringently enacted in an aesthetic discourse that is distinct from other discourses. In this context, aesthetic experience is only sovereign insofar as we consider it capable of transforming everything into text, of discovering in everything that negativity which—according to the aesthetics of negativity—is only experienceable within the bounds of aesthetic experience.<sup>9</sup>

The tension in the above model of the aesthetics of negativity represents the starting point of Derrida’s generalization of the aes-

thetic experience of negativity. This tension becomes apparent if the concept of aesthetic experience includes information about its purpose and function. What sense is an experience of the subversion of automatic understanding, on which all of our nonaesthetic discourses are based, supposed to have, if this experience at the same time confesses to having solely aesthetic validity? For in this way the experience is retracted into the closed realm of the aesthetic, and that which it negates internally is stabilized externally given the partial character of its validity. Derrida views this problem as a manifestation of the servile ethos of aesthetic theory and claims that there is no reason for restricting the validity of the subversion of all automatic understanding to the aesthetic enactment of this experience. Instead, the experience of negativity that seems to be restricted to the aesthetic realm can take on universal validity, separate from any dependency on the actual enactment of aesthetic experience. This occurs in the transformation of an aesthetic reading into a textual one. The key concepts in Derrida’s philosophy can be explained in terms of this effort to articulate and ground the nonaesthetic sense of negativity, initially considered to be experienced only aesthetically. These concepts conform to the project of providing a theoretical reconstruction of that which aesthetic experience has already shown how to do.<sup>10</sup> Derrida’s deconstructive terms, such as “différance” and “dissémination,” originate in this process of generalization, which Derrida then systematizes in the concept of textual reading: they are structures of aesthetic experience with generalized validity.

In the next chapter I will examine this program in greater depth. What interests me here is whether Derrida’s call to develop the sovereign contents of aesthetic negativity is based on an intuition that can be grounded independently of such far-reaching consequences. I have already pointed out that, given the preceding analyses of the aesthetics of negativity, one can hardly dismiss the suspicion of the irresolvable tensions they are subject to. For the idea of an aesthetic experience that negates everything internally only to stabilize it externally on the basis of its particularity seems absurd. And this is the insight that Derrida’s concept of aesthetic sovereignty plays upon. The suspicion of absurdity leads to the articulation of the demand not to limit the negativity of the aesthetic to its actual aesthetic enactment, but to grant it instead a relevance that points

beyond the confines of the aesthetic sphere to nonaesthetic discourses as well.

If one understands the call for aesthetic sovereignty as a call for nonaesthetic relevance, it gains a singular status among the positions discussed up to this point: it is not yet the far-reaching assertion of deconstruction, that the aesthetic negativity found in the process of textual reading has validity beyond the province of aesthetic experience. Nonetheless, it exceeds the limits of the approach to aesthetic negativity that seeks to seal this process off from everything outside it. The “neither-nor” of the sovereignty of the aesthetic conceived in terms of its nonaesthetic relevance can be more precisely explained in terms of the distinction between the “implications” and “consequences”<sup>11</sup> of aesthetic negativity: Derrida’s concept of the textual (and no longer aesthetic) reading understands the sovereignty demand of aesthetic negativity to imply a negation (or deconstruction) of nonaesthetic discourses as well. By contrast, the idea of aesthetic sovereignty in Adorno can be understood to mean that the aesthetic experience of negativity results in the aesthetic subversion of automatic understanding, an (aesthetic) approach that also applies to nonaesthetic discourses. In this sense, he or she enacts a sovereign aesthetic experience who gains a new picture of nonaesthetic discourses as a result of passing through this experience. Moreover, this new picture is not limited to the automatic understanding that nonaesthetic discourses provide as the material and starting point of aesthetic experience; it is also an alternative picture of nonaesthetic discourses that make no reference to aesthetic experience.

The sovereign enactment of aesthetic experience transforms the preaesthetic way of viewing nonaesthetic discourses into a postaesthetic one. Though this latter point of view stands in opposition to its preaesthetic predecessor, it is not implied in aesthetic experience, but is produced by it. For this reason, it does not rest on an improper extension of the range of validity of aesthetic experience, as does Derrida’s textual reading; instead, it is due solely to the circumstance that even aesthetic experience enacted within its particular realm of validity has consequences for one’s picture of nonaesthetic discourses. The contrasting conceptions of the sovereignty or relevance postulate of the experience of aesthetic negativity—the *implications*

it contains in Derrida and the *consequences* it produces in Adorno—thus also differ in the undermining or recognition of the autonomy of the aesthetic: Derrida “expands” aesthetically experienced and thus only particularly valid negativity to apply to the basic principle of nonaesthetic modes of experience or discourses as well. He conceives of aesthetic negativity as a general structure not bound by the autonomous logic of aesthetic experience and which, in its transformation of the aesthetic to a textual reading, subjects aesthetic experience—with the particular validity of its autonomy—to a heteronomous recasting:<sup>12</sup> it is supposed to provide insight into the negativity of all automatically enacted understanding, and, accordingly, of all discourses. In contrast, Adorno focuses on the consequences that aesthetic negativity has—even though and only because—it follows its own autonomous logic.

The next two chapters will explicate the way one has to conceive of the consequences for the image and self-understanding of our nonaesthetic discourses that can be ascribed to the sovereignly enacted aesthetic experience of negativity, even if the latter is not totalized in a heteronomous manner. In this chapter, I only wish to make a few points about the sovereign enactment of aesthetic experience. What does it mean to enact an aesthetic experience in a sovereign manner if it does not mean expanding its nonaesthetic consequences to implications? But, if it does mean the latter, how does it avoid cancelling out its implications entirely?

In the *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno designates that experience in which aesthetic negativity radically transforms the picture of nonaesthetic discourses the enigmatic character of art.<sup>13</sup> Art works become enigmatic when we neither reenact them purely immanently nor view them externally as one discourse among many, but instead, allow these two perspectives to clash with one another. In the experience of the enigmatic character of art the question arises of the meaning that something which has just been experienced aesthetically has for our nonaesthetic modes of experience and discourses. How can an experience come into being in which we examine the consequences of aesthetic negativity for nonaesthetic discourses, even though the sense and validity of the latter are based on the success of our automatic understanding of them? Adorno does not limit himself to



the readily available answer that this is merely the expression of the need for consistency and coherence among the diverse modes of experience.<sup>14</sup> He instead seeks to explain the question of the relationship as the consequence of the adequate enactment of the experience of aesthetic negativity: "The latter [the enigmatic character] poses a constant threat to the experience of art works, suddenly surfacing just at the point when a person thinks he has grasped a certain work completely. This keeps alive the seriousness of the works of art."<sup>15</sup>

Thus Adorno answers the question of the definition of the sovereign enactment of aesthetic experience that has nonaesthetic consequences by pointing to the "seriousness" of the aesthetic. The precise meaning of this formulation remains unexplained in Adorno. It can be provided, though, by construing the concept of "seriousness" in an aesthetic sense as a countermodel to that of aesthetic relief (or compensation). Adorno's thesis then reads: anyone who takes art seriously does not experience it for the sake of relief; the consequences of the aesthetic, seriously taken, are not relief or compensation. If one takes Adorno's demand to take the aesthetic seriously as a counterposition to the theory of aesthetic relief, this first of all changes the sense of the opposition between servile and sovereign art. Derrida equated this opposition with that between aesthetic immanence and textual totalization. The distinction between the sovereign and servile shape of aesthetic experience first makes sense, however, in terms of the description of the consequences that the enactment of aesthetic experience has precisely in view of the particularity of its validity. This is exactly the point at which Kant placed the concept of interest *in* disinterested pleasure rather than *against* such pleasure: "Abundant proof has been given above to show that the judgment of taste by which something is declared beautiful must have no interest as its determining ground. But it does not follow from this that *after* it has once been posited as a pure aesthetic judgment, an interest cannot then enter into combination with it."<sup>16</sup> The internal reconstruction of the logic of our aesthetic experience—attempted in Part I—can (and must) refrain from any determination of an interest in the consequences of aesthetic experience that possesses logical priority over this experience. This reconstruction can (and must) be supplemented, however, by an examination

of the consequences of aesthetic experience and of the interest directed toward them—to be undertaken later in Part II—without recasting these consequences in a heteronomous fashion.

Let us now turn to the contrast between the sovereignty postulate and a description of the effects of aesthetic experience as relief, release, or compensation. "Relief" and "compensation" are the terms that Arnold Gehlen and Odo Marquard respectively employ in opposition to Adorno's thesis that the experience of aesthetic negativity, immanently enacted in all its stringency, especially as an autonomous experience, results in the radical transformation of the image of nonaesthetic discourses and, in this way, in their destabilization. In contrast, the relief or compensation model argues that aesthetic experience actually has a stabilizing rather than a destabilizing effect on nonaesthetic discourses. Gehlen describes the relieving effect of a work of art that refrains from any inflated meaning in the following way:

This is precisely the way it succeeds in providing relief for consciousness. For, as Ernst Jünger says, the State weighs upon us like a mountain range; like atmospheric pressure, social pressure is so immense that it enters into our own condition. Society—a society in which democracy is connected with organization and practical dogmatism—no longer provides space for fantastic and extreme appetites, for generous acts of foolishness, artificial paradises, for the raptures of splendid isolation, and the carefreeness of sturdy natures. Accordingly, it is precisely in thoroughly bureaucratized societies that a desire arises for outsiders and nonconformists; the public loves it when this [type of life] is shown to be achievable. And only in art (and in literature) can degrees of freedom and acts of reflective alertness and of libertinism be called to mind that could not be accommodated in any way in public life; art becomes a space of fascination and desire, a place of permissiveness and for catching one's breath precisely because it no longer contains any "existential" appeals. It becomes the site for excursions in consciousness that have been banished everywhere else. It is impossible for art, just as it is for everyone, to intervene creatively, as one calls it, in the social; in this way it receives its peculiarly free-floating, postulatory character—which is the first impression one has upon entering an exhibition of new pictures. It too is the demonic, small, and assiduous dwarf for whom you have to keep a door open in every house.<sup>17</sup>

The relief or compensation model described in this way is the appropriate backdrop against which to explain the concept of aesthetic sovereignty because, in spite of its opposition to Adorno, it

shares a decisive premise with the aesthetics of negativity: it defines art as relief not because art is subordinate to heteronomous, nonaesthetic needs, but because of the marginalized status with which the aesthetic contented itself after coming to terms with the particular validity of its rationalized form. The only art that offers relief—as Gehlen, following Nietzsche and Weber, concludes—is a “private” or “intimate” art (Weber) that renounces an interventionary social role; the only art that is compensatory—as Marquard concludes in opposition to utopian or historico-philosophical overburdenings of the aesthetic—is an art that no longer claims to be a redemptive “total compensation,” but only an alleviating “partial compensation.”<sup>18</sup> In its very autonomy that emancipates it from nonaesthetic ends (and which also marginalizes it), though, art is structurally incompatible with nonaesthetic practices and discourses. Only that which suspends the validity of the phenomenon from which one seeks relief or compensation can truly provide relief or compensation. Just as the occurrence of aesthetic experience makes no claim to having any external validity for the nonaesthetic, it also does not assume the validity of the nonaesthetic within the aesthetic realm, but instead suspends it there. Even if neither Gehlen nor Marquard themselves analyze the immanent suspicion of the validity of the nonaesthetic in aesthetic experience,<sup>19</sup> they nonetheless recognize the structure of aesthetic experience in the way they formulate the question of the nonaesthetic consequences or functions of this experience.

By answering the following question, we can get a more precise idea of the opposition between Adorno’s concept of the seriousness of aesthetic negativity and the relief or compensation model of Gehlen and Marquard: On the basis of which premises are the nonaesthetic consequences of aesthetic experience described in one case as having stabilizing (alleviating or compensatory) effects on nonaesthetic discourses and as having destabilizing effects in the other? The answer I would like to propose and whose theses I will ground in the course of Part II is as follows: aesthetic experience has stabilizing consequences—is compensatory or alleviating—if it is conceived of having its particular place or realm; in contrast, if aesthetic experience is conceived as being *potentially ubiquitous*, it has destabilizing consequences—is subversive. In these terms, it is possi-

ble to reformulate the opposition between the sovereign and servile enactment of aesthetic experience: he or she who from the outset limits the enactment of the experience of aesthetic negativity to a particular place or realm and thus places it alongside nonaesthetic discourses (and practices) enacts it servilely; in contrast, he or she who enacts the experience of aesthetic negativity in any place or realm and thus releases its destabilizing consequences for nonaesthetic discourses (and practices) enacts it in a sovereign fashion.

Initially it seems impossible to decide between these two conceptions, for both are in the position to give good reasons for suspecting the other of subjecting aesthetic autonomy to a heteronomous recasting. For in opposing the sovereign enactment of aesthetic negativity to all forms of external limitation, do we not raise the status of aesthetic experience into the realm of cognition of the real truth about the nonaesthetic? And, on the other hand, in imposing external limitations on aesthetic experience, do we not subject it to nonaesthetic demands for stability? Grounds for these mutual suspicions can be found on both sides: if one reads Marquard’s explanations from the perspective of Adorno, it turns out that his external limitation of aesthetic experience depends on the latter’s subjection to pre-given, nonaesthetic needs and functions. Marquard speaks of the “replica status” of autonomous art, which explains such art in terms of preaesthetically perceivable “deficiencies”; it is the “redemption” of lost opportunities and its paradigm is leisure time or “vacation.”<sup>20</sup> Conversely, if Adorno’s concept of the seriousness of aesthetic negativity is read from the perspective of Gehlen, the freedom from external limitation found in the sovereign enactment of aesthetic experience still seems to depend on the exaggerated enhancement of the status of art into a medium of superior knowledge of the laws of nonaesthetic discourses.<sup>21</sup>

Even though there are grounds for the mutual accusations of heteronomy, each side misses the decisive point: neither description of the consequences of aesthetic experience, as stabilizing or as destabilizing, contradicts the autonomy of aesthetic experience. But if their opposition cannot be conceived as that between the autonomy and heteronomy of the aesthetic—as each side claims—then the question arises: what problem is really being discussed?



This problem comes into view if one takes up Gehlen's more precise explanation (instead of Marquard's rather vague one) of the condition for art's ability to provide relief from the nonaesthetic: the external limitation of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience can only provide such relief if it maintains the character of the "noneveryday or extraordinary" (Gehlen) in a twofold sense, by suspending the validity of the everyday from which it is supposed to provide relief while at the same time existing alongside this realm within a clearly marked-off sphere. This limitation of aesthetic experience alongside that whose validity it suspends and from which it offers relief follows for Gehlen from another condition that the aesthetic must meet to be at all experienceable and enactable, or more generally, useful, for subjects. For to be experienceable and not "unduly burdensome," the aesthetic, which is supposed to provide relief from the institutionally structured, "completely controlled world," must itself be institutionally formed or at least quasi-institutionally organized. For only then are "mental energies" opened for "truly personal, singular, and newly inventable dispositions," that is, only if they are based on an institutional "bedrock of internal and external habits": "energy reserves" are stored only in institutions, from which subjects need to draw if they are to avoid "uncertainty" and "loss of structure" (*Entformung*).<sup>22</sup> The external limitation of aesthetic experience that the relief thesis postulates in opposition to Adorno's sovereignty model is grounded, in Gehlen, on a reflection on the conditions of the possibility of subjective participation in the aesthetic. The "energies" of aesthetic experience are available to us only insofar as they are connected to institutions in their differentiated forms; for this reason, the enactment of aesthetic experience is—temporally and spatially—restricted, since it is structured in terms of participation in an institution.

To what extent is it true, however, that an institutional status of the aesthetic defines the condition of possibility for participating in its "energies"? Gehlen does not deny that it is possible to take part in the aesthetic in a noninstitutional sense; he only disputes the desirability of such an option, since such participation is not possible in any *sustainable sense*. In support of this thesis, Gehlen sketches a scenario of crises that would result if aesthetic "disinhibitions" were

developed and appropriated without an institutional basis.<sup>23</sup> Such consequences are part of the "chaos" and "boundless disorientation" which, in Gehlen's view, any subjectivity must fall prey to, if it cuts itself off from its institutional "energy reserves" and declares itself to be the sole vehicle of its enactment. In this way, Gehlen himself points to the condition under which the external limitation of aesthetic experience, which alone guarantees its alleviating impact, can be overcome and aesthetic experience can gain its sovereignty—namely, when participation in such an experience no longer occurs in institutions, but takes instead as its vehicle a subjectivity released from its institutional ties. This transposition of aesthetic experience from institutionally tied to liberated subjectivity is described by Gehlen in terms of the revolutionary break of the avant-garde: "Here it [art that considers itself revolutionary] replaces its entire system of reference, which very rarely occurs, and places art on a new basis: subjectivity (that is reflective or at least willing to reflect)."<sup>24</sup> What the institutional integration of aesthetic experience prevented is now possible for aesthetic subjectivity: experiences of aesthetic negativity that are not tied to specific times and places, but are unrestricted, that can be enacted in principle anytime and anywhere. According to Gehlen's depiction, aesthetic experience becomes potentially ubiquitous, if its possibility is no longer restricted to institutionally provided "energy reserves," but found rather in the individual competence of experiencing subjects.

Gehlen is not only simultaneously suspicious and clear-sighted in his description of the transposition of aesthetic experience: he also realizes that this sovereign, ubiquitous potential is implied by aesthetic experience insofar as it is conceived of as a rationalized, autonomous mode of experience. In its traditional form, the aesthetic only took on institutional shape under the pressure of nonaesthetic needs for permanence and stability. Accordingly, in its modern form, it can only assume institutional shape in the sense of an external and "secondary institutionalization of subjectivism":

Thus, for instance, in the fine arts of our times, the previous basic conditions of the entire branch of art have disappeared . . . instead a veritable storm of ideas and inventions have been sparked, which has been bubbling for decades; every idea is subjective and thus outside of its inventor from

purely coincidental and often striking attractiveness. And this entire dizzying world is held together and reinforced by a newly established institutional structure that did not exist fifty years ago; it is something like an intercontinental lodge that has set itself up between New York, Paris, and London, in which art dealers, *amateurs marchands*, museum directors, speculating collectors, exhibition entrepreneurs, art writers, publishers, and the like cooperate; it is an arousing milieu in which, literally, every human passion is given its chance.<sup>25</sup>

Thus even though (as Gehlen writes, “luckily”) a secondary institutionalization of the aesthetic takes place that integrates and neutralizes the completely unbridled and liberating art of the avant-garde, there always remains the irrefutable possibility for subjectivity to set itself up as the instantiation of aesthetic experience and, in liberating this experience from its institutional restrictions, lend it potential ubiquity: secondary institutionalization is unstable per se and remains external to aesthetic experience. Gehlen has this danger, inseparably connected to the autonomy of aesthetic experience, constantly in mind; for him it takes the shape of the “intellectual or enlightener” who has no need for institutionally fixed rules. Gehlen himself emphasized just how little effect the secondary institutionalization of the aesthetic has on the subjective release of the energies of aesthetic experience: for he turns to the very subject whose “disinhibitions” just destroyed the relief-granting institutions and burdens it with the task of preventing that destruction. Gehlen’s call for the subjective ideal of “asceticism” for “elites and ‘creative minorities’”<sup>26</sup>—which according to his own conception must completely overburden the subject because it now makes it responsible for its own relief—contains the admission that institutionalization in general and thus that of the aesthetic in particular cannot provide permanent security against the disinhibitions of the subject.

The disinhibition or potential ubiquity of the aesthetic, which Gehlen described in terms of an aesthetic experience instantiated in a subject, defines, as its potential or possibility, its own autonomous form. Of course, its consequences or effects can no longer provide relief from the everyday world. The modes of experience that have been freed from their institutional localizations and placed in the hands of the subject act to destabilize rather than stabilize nonaesthetic discourses (and practices). Adorno’s explanation of the sover-

eign enactment of the experience of aesthetic negativity as the “preservation of seriousness” as opposed to a provision of relief can be understood as an affirmation of an aesthetic experience no longer institutionally situated. In a debate with Gehlen, Adorno staunchly emphasized this standpoint of a freed and unsupported subjectivity. The postulate of aesthetic sovereignty is nothing but the aesthetic conclusion of Adorno’s call, which is generally directed against Gehlen, to free human “potentialities”<sup>27</sup> from their institutional constraints. Thus, that aesthetic experience can be termed sovereign which is enacted, not in the restricted participation in institutions, but in a potential ubiquity not limited by any prior contextual positioning. As of yet, we have no more than an assumption, rather than proof, that the experience of aesthetic negativity in this situation of potential ubiquity has destabilizing consequences for the nonaesthetic without becoming heteronomous. And this can be made plausible in terms of Gehlen’s description of the disinhibiting process of the aesthetic. It will be the task of subsequent chapters, however, to show the way in which these consequences should be conceived and how they are produced.

If we now return to the starting point of the discussion of the postulate of sovereignty with these results in mind, the decisive difference between Derrida’s deconstruction and Adorno’s aesthetics of negativity stands out more clearly. Derrida terms servile the experience of aesthetic negativity as particular in its validity and, in contrast, designates as sovereign the enactment of a process experienced as only aesthetic negativity, but which at the same time attributes nonaesthetic validity to this experience. Accordingly, the sovereign, aesthetic experience of negativity is always simultaneously a nonaesthetic cognition of negativity. In contrast, according to Adorno’s analysis, validity-particular aesthetic experience is neither servile nor sovereign, but underdetermined. It first becomes servile if alleviating effects are ascribed to it and first becomes sovereign, in contrast, if destabilizing consequences are attributed to it. The opposition between aesthetic sovereignty and servility—demonstrated in the discussion of Gehlen’s concept of relief—refers solely to a distinction between the restricted and the potentially ubiquitous enactment of aesthetic experience. The sovereign experience of aesthetic



negativity thus does not entail nonaesthetic cognition; instead, such cognition arises out of the consciousness of the unrestricted enactability of aesthetic negativity, producing destabilizing interpretations of nonaesthetic discourses that could make no claim to validity without the prior experience of aesthetic negativity.

For this reason, the decisive antagonism between deconstruction and the aesthetics of negativity is found in their relationship to the "risk" (Derrida) of aesthetic modernity. Aesthetic modernity takes on the risk of revealing contents of experience that negate automatic understanding, in the form of one special discourse among others. Derrida interprets this risk as a dispute between the servility and sovereignty of the negative contents. The only appropriate manner of dealing with the risk of aesthetic modernity thus lies in surmounting the attempted "banishment" of sovereign contents to which aesthetic negativity is subject in its validity-particular form, as art or poetry: "To avoid it, poetry must be 'accompanied by an affirmation of sovereignty. . . .'"<sup>28</sup> Adorno, on the other hand, preserves this tension as the uncircumventable signature of aesthetic modernity; for him, the continued existence of that negative potential—which Derrida wants to develop into sovereign independence—depends on sustaining this form of modernity. Those contents that Derrida believes he is able to remove in unmarred sovereignty from the necessarily ambiguous configuration of aesthetic modernity are inseparably tied to the particularity of the aesthetically raised validity claim (which Derrida deems servile). Aesthetic experience only unfolds its subversive potential in its radical particularity; this potential would vaporize in any effort to generalize it.

The conflicting views in Adorno and Derrida of a possible, sovereign enactment of aesthetic negativity clearly imply different constructions of the relationship between the experience of aesthetic negativity and that mode of viewing nonaesthetic discourses which arises out of the sovereign enactment of this experience. In Derrida's theory of the text they coincide: sovereign aesthetic experience is nothing but the nonaesthetically valid insight into the negativity of all discourses. In contrast, in Adorno's aesthetics of negativity, the grounding relationship between this experience and our discourses is premised on the tension between them: sovereign

aesthetic experience produces a postaesthetic subversion of our discourses. The simultaneity of aesthetic and nonaesthetic experience in Derrida contrasts with their constitutive sequentiality in Adorno.

The preceding line of argument has not yet explained the conception of a "postaesthetic" way of looking at things. What it has done is defended this idea on two different fronts. Its first line of defense was developed against the polemics of deconstruction. These polemics articulate—by means of their critique of aesthetics as a servile program—the proper motif of discontent with the unresolved tension to which the purely immanent definition of the process of aesthetic experience falls prey. This motif was taken up by reflecting on the significance of the consequences of the experience of aesthetic negativity, without forcing this significance, however, into Derridean extremes. In this way, the discussion also took up the reservations of a purely immanent viewpoint, which considers anything that goes beyond such a viewpoint to be necessarily heteronomous,<sup>29</sup> since it subjects aesthetic experience either to contingent effects from outside the realm of aesthetics or to nonaesthetic validity claims. Neither of these conditions applies to those consequences that are produced solely by means of the internally consistent enactment of the experience of aesthetic negativity, though: these consequences are not contingent to aesthetic experience, since they can only be effected by aesthetic experiences; but they are also not heteronomous recastings of the aesthetic by nonaesthetic validity claims, since their occurrence is premised on the autonomy of the aesthetic.

I will now take a detour in the elucidation of the postaesthetic way of looking at things by first looking briefly at the manner in which Derrida raises the status of aesthetic experience into a nonaesthetic cognition of negativity (chapter 6). The problems Derrida faces in the effort to ground his argument form the backdrop for suggesting an alternative view (chapter 7).