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XIVTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF AESTHETICS
XIVÈME CONGRÈS INTERNATIONAL D'ESTHÉTIQUE
XIV. INTERNATIONALER KONGRESS FÜR ÄSTHETIK

»Aesthetics as Philosophy«
«L'Esthétique comme philosophie»
»Ästhetik als Philosophie«

LJUBLJANA 1998

.

PROCEEDINGS
PART I



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Preface

If artists and writers are constantly inquiring into the role and place their work and they themselves have in the world and society, then aestheticians have recently been inquiring mostly into the nature, meaning and significance of aesthetics. The organizers of the XIVth International Congress for Aesthetics »Aesthetics as Philosophy« (Ljubljana, 1-5 September 1998) were of the opinion that a possible response to such an inquiry is for aesthetics to strengthen its links with philosophy as that all-encompassing reflection upon the human world which is exemplified by its perpetual critical stance towards reality and the meanings that are ascribed to it.

Aesthetics can be a reflection upon beauty, art and other natural and human phenomena. This reflection is predominantly theoretical, and only as such can it remain or become philosophical too. It is true though, that as have aporias such as the »right« balance between form and content in an artwork drifted into oblivion, so has a similar dilemma about the »right« balance between theory and practice. For aestheticians as philosophers, i.e. critical theoretical thinkers, such issues have become obsolete, for not only is our social reality becoming increasingly integrated, but so are social practices and the humanities, as that broader framework of aesthetics. The latter offers critical theoretical tools previously used only with difficulty because of disciplinary and other divisions.

This integration resembles the present globalization, an on-going process that was also clearly visible at this aesthetics congress. Globalization allows us not only to understand what aestheticians are doing on the other side of the globe (or perhaps in the university department across the street), but also to employ and use the results of their work as never before in history. What »they« are doing is ceasing to be limited to an object of academic curiosity and becoming something that »we« understand and use.

It is my pleasure to note that the theme »Aesthetics as Philosophy« has attracted to Ljubljana around 550 participants from 48 countries. Almost 200 of these have submitted their paper for publication in the XIV ICA Proceedings. The two volumes of Proceedings contain the invited papers (vol. 1) and a selection of the papers presented in the ten sections (vol. 2). The organizers of the XIVth International Congress for Aesthetics were very delighted to see that the congress generated so much interest and that aestheticians from so many different countries and cultures came

to Ljubljana to present their papers, take part in the discussions, and attend various artistic and cultural events that took place during the congress. Without them and their efforts this congress would not have been a success. I would therefore like to thank all the congress participants, as well as all the others who helped us hold this event.

Aleš Erjavec

July 1999

Aleš Erjavec
Aesthetics as Philosophy

1

In many respects philosophy is no different from other fields of knowledge, with perhaps one exception which, nonetheless, is of paramount importance. I have in mind the *critical nature* of philosophy or, rather, philosophical activity. No matter how we define philosophy and no matter from which cultural tradition we commence our attempts to determine what philosophy is, we are confronted with the fact that philosophy proper doesn't exist if it doesn't possess this self-reflective strain, i.e. of being not only a thought about the extant reality but also a critical thought about thinking as such.

After knowledge became thoroughly specialized in the 19th century and after Althusser's claims in the seventies that Marx discovered the continent of the science of history, the postmodern turn of the early eighties brought with it not only the end of the belief into the scientificity of philosophical discourse and into its epistemological support but also a thorough reconfiguration of the relationship between the natural and the human sciences, philosophy included. We could view philosophies such as Plato's, late Heidegger's, that of late Merleau-Ponty or the early Lyotard not only as efforts to reduce the difference between reflection and authenticity but – somehow paradoxically – also as philosophical attempts to preclude the loss of this critical edge not by retaining the distance required by critical reflection but instead by collapsing critique and individual or social practice. Philosophy which went the farthest in this direction was that of the young Karl Marx and his »critique of everything existing« with its continuation in the undertakings to materialize theory through historical practice, an effort resulting in a similar failure as attempts of Russian constructivism, Tatlin, and especially productivism, to materialize avant-garde art in utilitarian social practice. In both cases the result was the complete loss of the essence of the primary activity. The failure of such efforts reveals not only the impossibility of carrying out such a project and the need to start the philosophical critique of knowledge and itself as its segment every time anew, but that at the same time the need for the consciousness of the irreducibility of differences between various spheres and realms is required. The collapsing of various

spheres, the dedifferentiation, the desire to attain the undifferentiated self and the primordial unity, are all parts of the same impossible search for a transparency and a transformation without a residue.

One of the causes for such a desire is the very nature of theoretical knowledge, philosophy included. Philosophy is an activity springing up from the Greek preoccupation with vision, from the predominance of ocular-centrism,¹ to use Martin Jay's term, a preoccupation inherent to the Greek thought and revealed, for example, in its language which abounds with visual metaphors. Both features have given rise to the hypothesis that without such an abundance of visual metaphors and, generally speaking, dependence upon vision, theory itself would not come into being, for its emergence was essentially dependent upon vision and the inherent privilege this offers to static entities or immovable essences at the expense of the flux of changing phenomena.

That philosophy emerged within the ocularcentric universe of the ancient Greece signifies, therefore, that the significance assigned to static essences is at the core of philosophical activity, the millennial history of which could also be perceived as a continuous effort to bridge or overcome the gap between such static essences and what was perceived as a dynamic or dialectic flux of antagonisms of history, society, and the human psyche.

2

Although postmodernity and postmodernism have lost much of their previous purport I view these two notions as highly relevant for any contemporary discussion of philosophy and aesthetics. What I have in mind can be illustrated best by quoting two authors, the first being Wolfgang Iser and the other Zygmunt Bauman. In an influential article published in 1988 and titled »Modernity and Postmodernity«, Iser claimed that, »Postmodernity is traversed by the recognition that totality cannot arrive without establishing as an absolute a certain particularity which is then inevitably tied to a destruction of other particularities. [...] Postmodernity begins where totality ends.«²

¹ Cf. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993) and, especially, Martin Jay, »The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism«, *Force Fields* (New York: Routledge 1993), pp. 99-113.

² Wolfgang Iser, »Modernité et postmodernité«, *Les cahiers de Philosophie (Postmoderne. Les termes d'un usage)*, no. 6 (automne 1988), p. 33.

Another equally insightful observation was made at approximately the same time by Zygmunt Bauman. In his opinion, »What has happened in recent years could be articulated as the appearance of a vantage point which allows the view of modernity itself as an enclosed object, an essentially complete product, an episode of history, with an end as much as a beginning.«³ In Bauman's view, which I find very congenial, modernity is not something that has actually *ended* by the advent of postmodernity. Postmodernity is instead characterized exactly by the emergence of the consciousness of a possible closure of modernity itself, of the consciousness of the *possibility* of the end of modernity. Before, modernity was viewed as a project stretching into temporal infinity; now it possesses a beginning as well as a possible ending.

Both Welsch and Bauman – as well as a series of other thinkers – viewed in the eighties postmodernity as a positive notion, replete with possibilities offered by the emergence of particularities, the newly attained dignity of which arose from the ashes of the now obsolete notion of totality – a process today visibly on its way and at work already in Foucault's book *The Order of Things* from two decades earlier. Therein the notion of totality was already simultaneously deconstructed and replaced with the new order of discontinuities, with these being closely related to particularities that Welsch mentions.

It is safe to assume that the humanities in general and philosophy and aesthetics in particular fared no different than other fields of knowledge. In all a trend toward particularization developed in the last two decades. If the international congresses of aesthetics can serve as an indication of what those of us who turn our head when somebody calls behind us, »Hey you, aesthetician!«, and find ourselves interpellated into such a subject, do, we see that aestheticians over the world are mainly concerned with issues of art, culture and beauty (probably in this order). Two other facts are that with few exceptions the contemporary postmodern world and its communicational and informational plethora have made us not only to depend upon similar references and often work on related issues, but that the previous global division into what Richard Shusterman has called »philosophical empires«⁴ – but which could just as easily be called »aesthetic empires« – is increasingly becoming a past phenomenon. Globalization has

³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), p. 117.

⁴ Cf. Richard Shusterman, »Aesthetics Between Nationalism and Internationalism«, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51:2, Spring 1993, p. 161. Cf. also Aleš Erjavec, »Philosophy: National and International«, *Metaphilosophy*, 28:4, October 1997, pp. 329–345.

affected not only products of mass production and consumption such as the globally marketed material commodities, but also symbolic commodities called theories, authors and visions of the world (of *visions du monde* of which in the sixties Lucien Goldmann wrote about). In the words of Wolfgang Iser again, »Strictly speaking there is no longer anything absolutely foreign.«⁵

One of the frequent features associated with postmodernity is its purported break with the past. As I sketched above, by using Bauman's analysis, it would be more proper to claim that postmodernity is the end or the *Ausgang* of modernity, although not exemplified by the dedifferentiation,⁶ for this is to an excessive measure dependent upon the early fascination with the purportedly epochal break between modernity and postmodernity. This dedifferentiation of the previously autonomous spheres should not be equated with particularization; the first denotes a disintegration of fixed borders between realms, while the second signals the emergence of a situation which doesn't allow for a totalizing elimination of particularities, for there no longer exist a reductionist and exclusivist common denominator – or if it does, it exists only in the plural form, as well as in a transitory, and hence a relative one.

I find the notion of postmodernity as the present (and perhaps final) phase of modernity of relevance for it allows us to take into consideration what are at the same time global social and historical processes and events and simultaneously those restricted to the much narrower fields of philosophical and aesthetic inquiry.

Among the generally accepted features of postmodernity – this being true also of its philosophical critics – are a globalization of culture, the erosion of the distinction between high or elite art and mass culture, etc. What is less frequently noted is that aesthetics and philosophy too have ceased being pure academic endeavors and are increasingly becoming active ingredients of activities as varied as politics, design, and even forestry. We may well argue that some of these applications of aesthetics may be problematic, but we should nonetheless follow Wittgenstein's dictum that to know what a word means we should look how it is used.

These may be the margins of philosophy and aesthetics. Nonetheless, especially in the realm of what Wolfgang Iser has frequently criticized as the »aestheticization of everyday life« and its transmogrification into an ingredient of »experience«, hence changing the world into »a domain of

⁵ Wolfgang Iser, »Transculturality. The Changing Form of Cultures Today« (manuscript).

⁶ Cf. Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990), esp. pp. 11-15.

experience,⁷ aesthetics and theories linked to new forms of communication and technological means have helped establish these as radically different from those of the (mostly modernist) past. The so-called »new media« and the euphoria associated with such technical and technological advancements have offered a new field of research, but at the same time heightened expectations that a completely new realm of the aesthetic and the experienced was in the making. Even if this was not the case, it nonetheless helped broaden (in a certain or specialized field, but within the realm of the social nonetheless) the extant notion of aesthetics.

What occurred in aesthetics resembled developments in other realms or areas of knowledge: the notion of aesthetics commenced to encompass theoretical activities of Eastern cultures, the former sociology of culture, semiotics, psychoanalysis and even ecology. Such broadening or extension of the meaning of the word was a positive phenomenon, although it also instigated the current confusion and increased vagueness of the term. At an aesthetics conference one can find today papers on Plato, Schopenhauer's aesthetics, the aesthetics of the stratosphere, soap operas, on Playboy bunnies, Wittgenstein and dress codes in primitive or contemporary societies.

Despite the criticism aimed at interpretation of postmodernity as a period of dedifferentiation, to a certain extent such a diagnosis merits further discussion. It is true that aesthetics, for example, is a typical discipline of philosophy which came into existence as a consequence of the differentiation occurring within modernity and that current broadening of this notion is also a consequence of the changed circumstances in our organization of knowledge.

That this is possible is furthermore due to the undisputedly increased permeability of the aforementioned »philosophical empires«: a few decades ago certain works of philosophy or aesthetics would patently appear out of place within a different cultural or philosophical empire: these could have been the case not only with Indian works in a Polish environment, for example, but just as well with French works in a British environment or British in a German one and vice versa. Not that many classical works were not a part of the global culture, but they were there either as a part of the philosophical canon or as a marginal phenomenon. This is no longer so: today authors from various countries and cultures employ similar or same references and are treating theories not much differently from cuisine or, to give a more elevated example, literature or the fine arts.

Another reason for such a situation is that aesthetics is increasingly an activity which strives to be to an essential extent related to on-going human

⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 2.

practices. These are not necessarily artistic, but in most cases certainly are cultural ones. The sixties and seventies demolished the barrier between high and low in art. Special import possessed structuralism and related semiotics which effectively relegated to oblivion the notion of art as a paradigm of creativity and its most desired emanation. Art now became a slightly elevated realm within the global sphere of culture, with both these terms often being discarded as obsolete totalizing notions, to be replaced with concrete works and the signifying practices these offered and were the results of. This viewpoint was supplemented by another one, namely that it was (neo)avant-garde art which was acceptable for it avoided capitalist commodification.

When in the eighties and especially nineties aesthetics, art and artwork again commenced to gain theoretical interest, what then appeared as the object of aesthetic inquiry became so broad that it carried almost no definable distinctions. The notion of experience started to seep into the theoretic realm of aesthetics, while art became such an oblique entity that it could acquire almost any form, shape and temporal (and especially transient) status. In such a situation the institutional theory of art started to be globally proliferated. At the time of its formation in the sixties this theory validly mirrored the New York art scene and aptly described the way in which an artwork therein came into existence and the mechanisms by which it earned appreciation. The institutional theory furthermore signaled the demise of normative aesthetics, a process which was strengthened and gained global dimensions as it spread to other artworlds. As Bauman noticed, »the institutional theory of art (as an institutional theory of any other value domain) sounds the death knell to the philosophers' dream of control. What has been put in the place of the absolute principles that only they had access to and only they were able to operate, is this evasive, unwieldy, unpredictable entity of 'consensus'. [...] What is new is not the authority of consensus, but the fact that the kind of consensus which now seems to possess the reputation-bestowing authority is not the consensus of the philosophers.«⁸

Institutional theory of art detected and articulated a change which was in the sphere of art proper engendered mainly by Duchamp and his artistic subversions. It nonetheless, in spite of its lack of normative foundations, described possible artworlds which formed relatively self-contained spheres, peopled by the required inhabitants who together created the consensus mentioned by Bauman. With the advent of postmodernism a new situation developed: art and culture have become so democratized and so widespread that very often consensus is not even attempted. To the authors and their audiences suffices the act of making and then exhibiting or showing their

⁸ Bauman, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

artifacts. What is occurring is no longer a process, the executors of which desire to have their artifacts integrated into the extant culture and artworld and do this either by assimilating or tearing down the old norms (a process the Czech aesthetician Jan Mukařovský could in the thirties still describe as the predominant in art), but instead an act which requires no special affirmation from the broader society or its segments which are more artistically or aesthetically inclined. Instead, the act of making appears almost identical to the act of consumption. It is no longer important how the audience will respond to a work, i.e. if, and how, it will communicate with it; instead it is the creative *experience* which authentically represents the purportedly ontological dimension of such a work. We therefore speak of autopoetics which are incommensurable and not subjected to totalizing normative notions and frameworks. It is also for this reason that the border between art and nature is lowered or eradicated: if a work of art can be any human artifact, it can also be any natural artifact, for no spiritual dimension is required for its specific and distinct ontological status.

3

Institutional theory as a theoretical articulation of the then extant art offered an appropriate response to the artistic world of the neo-avant-gardes of the sixties and early seventies. As Bauman observed, it also revealed the fact that philosophers, among others, have lost their position as legislators and were transformed into interpreters. I wish to argue that under the present postmodern conditions, when frequently this same theory is not only proliferated further but broadened and applied indiscriminately, it may become again valid to ascribe to philosophers, aestheticians and others the role of legislators, although this legislature can of course no longer be based on transcendent or ideological foundations. I believe it is high time to do this, for the revolt against the fetish of art has for a long time now been a victim of its own success. The current omnipresent freedom suffocates art and causes it to become irrelevant, for it allows for any activity or object that a certain person wishes to designate as such, to be called art hence effectively denigrating its meaningful signification.

As Michel Foucault observed in 1983, one of the great roles of philosophy »could be characterized by saying that the task of philosophy is to describe the nature of the present, and of ‘ourselves in the present’.«⁹

⁹ Quoted in Michel Foucault, *Politics. Philosophy. Culture. Interviews and Other Writings: 1977 – 1984*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 36.

The same should be demanded of aesthetics if it is to be a philosophical aesthetics. I interpret aesthetics primarily as a philosophy of art. This it can be allowing and supporting at the same time the existence of other interpretations of aesthetics, such as Welsch's, for example, who argues for an aesthetics which »will do justice to *all* usages of the expression.«¹⁰ While I fully agree with his Wittgensteinian interpretation of the term and of its multifarious usages, it needs to be added that Welsch at the same time elevates aesthetics to a paramount position within philosophy, ascribing »aesthetic character« to cognition¹¹ and ascribing to ethics the role of »a subdiscipline of aesthetics«.¹² What appears problematic is not his broadening of the notion of the *aesthetic* onto various realms of human activity and nature, etc., but his designation of *aesthetics* as a philosophical activity aimed at a similarly broad domain. It is this collapsing of the *aesthetic* and of *aesthetics* that I find hard to accept. Aesthetics as philosophy of art (and perhaps culture) continues a long tradition, reaching back at least to Hegel. The artistic is not necessarily also the aesthetic, for although the two overlap they are not identical. If we limit aesthetics to the broad domain of the aesthetic we lose a conceptual set of tools which may enable us to analyze and evaluate the present-day artistic endeavors, in an attempt to regain the critical and hence necessarily also normative edge of aesthetic philosophical reflection. By opting for such an aesthetics directed towards art I am not propagating aesthetic, philosophical or artistic exclusivism and denigration of everything incompatible with whatever norms are imposed by such an aesthetics; I wish instead to re-establish art as a relatively distinct phenomenon requiring its relatively distinct theoretical reflection. This view is a corollary of a position which has recently been expressed also by Arthur Danto. In his opinion, »there is a kind of transhistorical essence in art, everywhere and always the same, but it only discloses itself through history.«¹³

It would seem that such a criterion proffers a similar relativism as is the one existing in the present »artglobe«. This is not so, for while it is true that the view just described allows for an infinite variety of artistic endeavors, it at the same time does not ascribe to all of them the name and hence the status of art. As stated before, there is no practical or theoretical need to do so, for the current practice in the infinite number of artworlds of the world is such that the »interesting« – of which Henri Lefebvre wrote already in the

¹⁰ Welsch, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹³ Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art. Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, Mass.: Princeton University Press 1997), p. 28; cf. also p. 95.

fifties – has replaced the »artistic«. It is high time to re-evaluate certain traditional values and regain and implement their meaning and function, but this time, retaining also the consciousness of their historical settings and the difference between them and those of the present. Hence a similar consciousness, as that pertaining to postmodern art, could be implemented in aesthetics (and perhaps elsewhere): the consciousness of contingency but at the same time of the need for certain rules and norms, both of which may be relative and transient, not dependent upon essentialist and transcendent foundations, but upon continuously and incessantly renewed similar or related conditions of possibility. The fear of any normativity imposed from above or behind is unwarranted, for it cannot be promoted and implemented under present conditions. This may, finally, be what Wolfgang Iser promulgates in his vision of the aesthetic, for his notion too aspires to a certain universality which is probably but a certain anthropological or human condition, based on the view that »all 'fundaments' display an aesthetic countenance together. Or, more precisely: non-fundamentalism means just this – that the supposed 'fundaments' are aesthetically constituted.«¹⁴

It now becomes clear why, according to Iser, aesthetics cannot be limited to art only: if it would have been, it would omit the broader spheres of the aesthetic and would, furthermore, include only those which are artistic but not necessarily aesthetic.¹⁵

4

I want to suggest a solution to the dilemma offered by Iser, i.e. of choosing between aesthetics as a philosophy of art and philosophy of *aisthesis*. My answer would be that we can have the pie and eat it, too. In other words, I opt for an aesthetics understood as a philosophy of art, but at the same time an aesthetics which can legitimately attain and carry other meanings which are in multifarious ways connected and related to this concept and term. I wish to offer two interrelated reasons for such a designation of aesthetics.

The first concerns the concept of transculturality as suggested by Iser

¹⁴ »Transculturality«.

¹⁵ It should be noted in passing though, that the aesthetic – as implied by Walter Benjamin, for example – may be a much more problematic notion than the artistic, for the autonomy and therefore the consciousness of the value of the artistic is related also to the tradition of the Enlightenment, while the notion of nature and the aesthetic as proffered by romanticism or Michel Foucault, for that matter, i.e. as the making of the perfect self, both carry with them numerous dilemmas known from history.

in the afore quoted essay. The author draws our attention to a curious fact related to the reasons for his introduction of this concept. He writes: »The diagnosis of transculturality refers to a transition, or to a phase in a process of transition. It is a temporary diagnosis. It takes the old conception of single cultures as its point of departure, and it argues that this conception – although still seeming self-evident to many people – is no longer descriptively adequate for most cultures today. Instead, the diagnosis of transculturality views a present and future states of cultures which is no longer monocultural but cross-cultural. The concept seeks to conceptually grasp this transition. [...] The process of transition obviously implies *two* moments: the ongoing existence of single cultures (or of an old understanding of culture's form) *and* the shift to a new, transcultural form of cultures. With respect to this double character of the transition, it is conceptually sound and even necessary to refer to single cultures of the old type *as well as* to point the way to transculturality.«¹⁶

Why couldn't we make a similar claim – with a slight twist, perhaps – concerning aesthetics? Aesthetics could then be interpreted as a broad notion – encompassing all phenomena to which the adjective »aesthetic« could be assigned – *and*, at the same time, retain or ascribe to aesthetics the meaning of philosophy of art. It would then be the tension between these (and other tentative) interpretations of aesthetics which would – and in fact do – together form aesthetics as such. It would be this *difference* which would be essential, a difference arising also from the historical situation in which it now comes into being, a situation exemplified by this enormous reconfiguration of traditional taxonomies. Aesthetics also is in a temporal transitional stage, allowing for reinterpretation and the investment of new meanings. It is currently an empty signifier akin to Fredric Jameson's »vanishing mediator«, offering an opening in the otherwise firm and homogenous membrane of discursive and symbolic reality. It currently denotes what it has been in the past and what it could denote in the future – if we decide to influence the course of events.

My second argument for such a line of reasoning is related to contemporary events and processes in art and culture. I claimed before that the present situation in art and culture is one of normative vacuity. I cannot offer here extensive arguments for such a statement, suffice it to say that in my view the purportedly »central« artistic events – ranging from the Documenta exhibitions in Kassel, through some of the Venice biennials of this decade, to the 1997 »U3« exhibition in Ljubljana curated by Peter Weibel – as well as certain philosophical critiques of such events, such as that of

¹⁶ Welsch, »Transculturality«.

Paul Crowther, for example, in his most recent book,¹⁷ all reveal the present intermediary nature of our global art and culture, akin to the notion of postmodernism and postmodernity as previously analyzed by Welsch and Bauman. Could we not claim that the present normative vacuity is in fact created by the transitional nature of this very art, where old forms are acquiring new contents and where in a new reality we are in search of new concepts? Could we not claim that the present apparent artistic uniformity, arising from the freedom to assign the title or label of art to any phenomenon whatsoever, offering the impression of a spent nature of the art events just mentioned, arises from the old modernist scheme or interpretation of avant-garde art which was aimed – according to Adorno and the Habermasian tradition which was then appropriated by the artistic, curatorial and theoretic elite of the last two and a half decades – at defending and promulgating avant-garde art because of its authenticity within the inauthentic capitalist world? Could it not be argued that the current cultural and artistic situation/s in the world arise, on the one hand, from their propensity to multiply infinitely (hence requiring and acquiring local character and »local« evaluations) and, on the other hand, from their continuous global and hence general or even uniform presence and existence? In short, from their transitory nature, the accrual of which exceeds that of the modernist past? That this is so attest not only the mentioned demise of concepts such as alienation and reification, but also requests for new cognitive mappings within which art would again acquire its place.

Within such a context it would of course be erroneous to require, as Welsch does, aesthetics to restrict and »link the concept of the aesthetic exclusively to the province of art and [to] want to fence it off completely from daily life and the living world *partout*, practicing [thus] aesthetic-theoretical provincialism.«¹⁸ Aesthetics – or, rather, aestheticians – should become involved in art, practicing aesthetics in relation to and in connection with art and culture and not exclusively isolate themselves within the towers of the academia, a practice often carried out in the past¹⁹ and implied in the statement just quoted from Welsch. Aesthetics as philosophy of art and also of culture should develop as a relatively distinct theoretic activity, although

¹⁷ Paul Crowther, *The Language of Twentieth-Century Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Welsch, »Aestheticization Processes: Phenomena, Distinctions and Prospects«, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 13:1, February 1996, p. 11.

¹⁹ Symptomatic for such a situation within aesthetics was the fact that only in the late eighties did aestheticians at the international congress of aesthetics find the concept of postmodernism, for example, at all relevant for their discussions.

still remaining a part of aesthetics, the whole of this forming the same big family, usually possessing the necessary family resemblances. Such a permeability of concepts has been in the humanities occurring for a few decades at least, ranging from history and art history to philosophy.

Which reasons should prompt aesthetics and aestheticians to acquire such an activist role within the realms of art and culture?

First among these, since it is the most obvious, is the present obsolescence of strict divisions among various social practices. Staying aloof in aesthetics or philosophy is today possible only if we completely and consciously retreat from our everyday life which is globalized as never before and influenced by global and local events and information to an equal if not greater extent.

The second reason is the evaluative vacuity of contemporary art scene and the preponderance of watered-down, simplified and nicely packaged philosophical and aesthetic theories by theorists who drop names, pick up artists and discard criteria, all in the name of combat against the obsolete danger of fetishization and autonomization of art. A reason for such a course of events was also the self-critical stance of philosophy, its decomposition into various theoretical currents, and the general adversity towards normativity.

The third reason is that art cannot be anything and everything. If it wants to be something, be this something contingent as other phenomena, us included, are, some semblance of criteria have to be articulated. A relatively recent attempt in this direction was that of the »re-enchantment of art«²⁰ or of Richard Shusterman in his *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992) for example, while the others that I am familiar with, are mostly continuations of the mentioned combat against the presumed danger of artistic fetishization and autonomization. The strength of such arguments rests on the weakness and absence of any aesthetic theory attempting to argumentatively offer different or opposed views – or even strengthen the one that I here criticize. A possible argument against this third reason could be that art requires no criteria and can actually be anything and everything. Such an argument is not hard to dispute: every term, applied too broadly, loses its significance. Even in anarchist aesthetics the concept opposed was not that of art, but of institutionalized art, of art locked in museums and galleries, of art as an object in contrast to art as an event. It is the current »anything goes« slogan which contributes to the current anaestheticization and which causes numerous contemporary works to remain expressive devices only, with no actual aesthetic or artistic value which both are directly dependent upon the

²⁰ Cf. for example Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson 1991).

social response of the audience, be it small or large. The resulting void, besides being filled by mass culture, is also being compensated by traditional or classical art which is an object of increased public interest.

The fourth and final reason, or even *causa finalis* maybe, is that art matters, or can matter. If we are to retain the notion of art for a specific and special realm of human activity which enables us to establish a specific form of human intersubjectivity and, at the same time, enhances our self-awareness, be it in a conscious or corporeal way, art can retain its tentative role in human society and in individuals. This role can also be played by other social acts and activities, but not equally well. It is – or *it could be* – up to aesthetics to develop these notions, concepts and normative frameworks, not as something to be imposed *upon* art – this is not only undesirable but impossible – but as something to be worked on together *with* art. It now becomes clear that any relevant aesthetics today must be linked to and involved with art.

In the present transient period, characterized by a transculturality, a plethora of reconceptualizations, with the search for new notions and mappings with which to grasp our present – with profound philosophical questions and challenges – a renewed place should be found for aesthetics too. I opt for an aesthetics which is strongly linked to philosophy, on the one hand, and to art, on the other. Other options are viable, valuable and valued. If, though, we ascribe to art an existential role exceeding that of quotidian aestheticization and of randomly feeding the Imaginary, aesthetics has to accept art as its relevant, if not necessarily privileged object. Should we decide to ascribe to art such a place, we should then also accept as one of the essential ones the interpretation of aesthetics as a philosophy of art and culture.

Arnold Berleant
Re-thinking Aesthetics

Re-considering Philosophy and Aesthetics

The theme of this congress, »Aesthetics as Philosophy,« offers a rich opportunity for reflection on the meanings and uses of both aesthetics and philosophy. With the challenge of contemporary developments in the arts and the recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of human cultures, many different interpretations will surely emerge in the days to follow. Moreover, the timing of this congress at the end of the millennium, while hardly a cosmic occurrence, still offers an unusual opportunity for profound reassessment of both aesthetics and philosophy. I shall only begin a process here that will surely continue in the days that follow.

Aesthetics is often thought of as one branch of philosophy, sometimes, indeed, a secondary branch of little significance for the broad reaches of philosophic thought. This is somewhat odd, since Kant, who is generally regarded as a founding figure in modern philosophy, took the aesthetic as his epistemological foundation and then developed a theory of the aesthetic as the systematic unifier of knowledge and morality. And at a gathering of aestheticians from all parts of the world, it requires little argument to dismiss the low repute of aesthetics and acknowledge its philosophical significance. Because of Kant's enormous historical importance, however, it may be more difficult to reconsider his dominant influence on the discipline of aesthetics. Yet that is precisely what I should like to propose here. For what could be more in keeping with both the critical tradition of philosophical thought and the openness of aesthetic perception than to re-think the foundations of our discipline.

In the spirit of »aesthetics as philosophy,« then, I propose a radical re-examination of the foundations of modern aesthetics. This kind of exploration is at the same time a profoundly philosophical act, for philosophical premises lie at the very foundation of modern aesthetics. Exploring these premises, indeed challenging them, can lead us to a new basis for aesthetics derived from *aesthetic* inquiry and not as an afterthought of a philosophical tradition whose origins were quite independent of the aesthetic domain. Conversely, re-thinking aesthetics may suggest new ways of doing philosophy.

The Radical Critique of Aesthetics

In recent years aesthetics has had something of a revival and is slowly emerging from its philosophical eclipse. At the same time, it has been the subject of serious criticism and fundamental reconsideration. Let me mention two very different examples.

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton develops a politico-social critique of aesthetics, placing it »at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony.«¹ Despite its protestations of autonomy, Eagleton sees the aesthetic in its historical complexity as a window into cultural and political changes. From this perspective, the very autonomy claimed for the aesthetic serves a larger political purpose as a model for bourgeois individualism, that is, of its own claims to autonomy. Thus the aesthetic is two-edged: It represents the political aspirations to self-determination of the middle class and provides an unconstrained locus for sensibility and imagination. At the same time, however, the aesthetic serves to internalize social power, rendering it, through its transformation into subjectivity, all the more effective a repressive force.² In a larger sense, then, aesthetic autonomy is specious, for the aesthetic is not autonomous at all but is harnessed to a larger, political, purpose. Perhaps this might be called, with apologies to Kant, purpose without purposiveness – a utilitarian goal masquerading under the guise of being self-contained.

Unlike Eagleton's subsumption of aesthetics under historical and political purposes, Wolfgang Iser centers his critique on the aesthetic, itself. He finds that the aesthetic not only pervades the whole of modern life but lies at the heart of philosophical thought. The aesthetic concerns not just art but human culture *en tout*, and it spreads out to inform the very fabric of meaning, truth, and reality. Thus contemporary aestheticization processes cover the surface of our world and reach beyond to shape social as well as material reality, affecting the form of individuals' existence, of social interaction, and the very shape of culture, itself.³ More provocative still is Iser's argument for epistemological aestheticization, in which »truth, knowledge, and reality have increasingly assumed aesthetic contours.«⁴ All this leads him to an »aesthetics beyond aesthetics,« which takes three principal directions: expanding aesthetic perception to the full range of *aisthesis*, enlarging the range of art to include both the multiplicity of its inner

¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 3.

² *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 23, 28.

³ Wolfgang Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics* (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 5-7.

⁴ *Undoing Aesthetics*, p. 23.

aspects and the many ways in which art pervades the whole of culture, and finally, extending aesthetics beyond art to society and the life-world.⁵

I find these critiques of aesthetics both important and convincing. They herald a new stage in philosophical development, one that recognizes the fundamental place of aesthetics in both the criticism and construction of contemporary culture and of our very grasp of reality. Yet for all their broad thrust, I believe that they do not go quite deep enough. Eagleton encloses aesthetics in its political and historical context, while Welsch expands the aesthetic into a powerful cultural force. Neither centers his critique on the aesthetic, itself.

Yet the aesthetic theory they work with stands square in the center of the very philosophic tradition they question. And until the defects in this tradition are exposed and replaced, any critique of aesthetics merely snaps at the heels of a sluggish though still powerful beast. The domain of aesthetics needs to be invaded by a Trojan horse, by a critique from within the theory. In the pluralistic spirit of postmodernism, then, I believe that still more can be said, and this from the standpoint not of culture or of history but of the aesthetic itself. There are artistic grounds for a critique of aesthetics, and there are philosophical grounds, as well. Above all, there are experiential grounds. None of these is independent of historical and cultural forces, but at the same time they cannot be reduced to these forces. The critique of aesthetics must take place on many levels and in many forms.

Difficulties in Traditional Aesthetics

Western aesthetics has been formed through two major influences – first classical Greek, and then Enlightenment thought, particularly as it was formulated by Kant. Of course, these are closely related. Yet new strands of thought emerging since the eighteenth century suggest sharply different ways of conceiving aesthetics. If I can characterize the dominant tradition in aesthetics as Kantian, what we need to explore are the possibilities of a non-Kantian aesthetics or, better yet, a post-Kantian aesthetics, and to consider the characteristics such a radically different aesthetics might display. I would like to take the occasion of this congress, and its provocative theme, to examine some of these possibilities and to suggest a new and different course that aesthetics might follow.

The beginnings of movement away from Kant can be traced back to

⁵ *Undoing Aesthetics*, pp. 95-99.

the middle of the last century. With his penetrating eye and directness of expression, Nietzsche recognized the fundamental difficulty with traditional aesthetics: »Kant had thought he was doing a honor to art when, among the predicates of beauty, he gave prominence to those which flatter the intellect, i.e., impersonality and universality.... Kant, like all philosophers, instead of viewing the esthetic issue from the side of the artist, envisaged art and beauty solely from the 'spectator's' point of view, and so, without himself realizing it, smuggled the 'spectator' into the concept of beauty.... [W]e have got from these philosophers of beauty definitions which, like Kant's famous definition of beauty, are marred by a complete lack of esthetic sensibility. 'That is beautiful,' Kant proclaims, 'which gives us disinterested pleasure.' Disinterested!«⁶

But it is not only the artist for whom disinterestedness is not appropriate. If the appreciator abandons the objectifying, analytic stance of the scholar or critic, the kind of personal participation that he or she engages in is closer to that of the artist than to the »philosopher of beauty« of whom Nietzsche spoke so disparagingly. I like to call this active appreciative participation »aesthetic engagement,« for it best characterizes the kind of powerful personal involvement that we have in our most fulfilled aesthetic experience. There are other reasons for wanting to discard the notion of disinterestedness. The attitude it enjoins leads to distancing the art object and to circumscribing it with clear boundaries that isolate it from the rest of the human world. In the eighteenth century when the fine arts were being identified, separated from the other arts, and given a distinctive status, an aesthetics that institutionalized this process and conferred a special prominence on those arts had its value. With widespread acceptance of the identity and importance of the arts, such a need no longer exists. To eternalize an idea whose significance is now largely historical both exaggerates its place and hinders aesthetic inquiry. And it misdirects and obstructs appreciative experience.⁷

Disinterestedness is not the only one of Kant's bequests that can be challenged. Eighteenth century aesthetics is very much a product of the thinking of the times. It places in full view both its reliance on faculty psychology and the essentializing and universalizing philosophy of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, it imposes a scientific model on aesthetic understanding, a model that proceeds by objectification, dissection, and analysis. Thus the conceptual structure that we have inherited from Kant

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, 6.

⁷ I have developed a constructive critique of disinterestedness in »Beyond Disinterestedness,« *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34/3 (July 1994).

identifies distinct and separate modalities of perception and conception, beginning with that famous distinction itself. To separate percept and concept produces a problem some aestheticians continue to grapple with: the place of knowledge in the perceptual experience of art. There are other problematic oppositions in the eighteenth century aesthetic, such as those between sense and reason, interest and disinterest, and illusion or imagination and reality. In the context of Enlightenment rationalism, these distinctions were illuminating and liberating. Today they provide a false clarity and a deceptive order, and they enthrall both understanding and experience. Serious questions can be raised about whether we can speak either of reason or of sense without the one including the other, questions supported both by psychological research and later philosophical developments. Similarly, the purity of disinterestedness is difficult to defend, especially as both the motivation and the consumption of art have been absorbed into the commodification of culture.⁸ And the theoretical force of existential phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and philosophical pragmatism have undermined claims to objectivity, the reduction of complex wholes to simple constituents, and the hegemony of scientific cognition.

We need different theoretical tools for capturing the special character of aesthetic appreciation, special even though it need not be unique or unconnected with other domains of human culture. Furthermore, what is especially striking about both the intellectual and technological developments of our own time is the extent to which the notion of reality has been enlarged and multiplied. Hermeneutics and deconstruction have provided grounds for coexistent interpretations, and these have generated a plurality of truths. From a different direction, philosophical pragmatism and related approaches, such as Buchler's principle of ontological parity, have laid the theoretical grounds for a metaphysics of multiple realities.⁹ The very objectivity of both history and science has been undermined by our recognition of the constitutive influence of social, cultural, and historical forces, and this has begun to be codified in the social sciences. Finally, contemporary industrial societies inhabit the virtual world of film, television,

⁸ I have developed a critique of Kantian aesthetics in »The Historicity of Aesthetics I,« *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring 1986), 101-111; »The Historicity of Aesthetics II,« *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Summer 1986), 195-203.

⁹ See, in particular, William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); and Justus Buchler, *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966). 2nd edition (State University of New York Press, 1990). I have carried aesthetic theory in a similar direction in *Art and Engagement*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

and cyberspace, »media-reality,« as Welsch calls it,¹⁰ a reality we have created that, ironically enough, strangely resembles the African Bushmen's belief in creation as a dream dreaming us.¹¹

One of the lessons of post-modernism, a lesson post-modernism did not invent, is that cultural traditions and social influences shape our perceptual experience so thoroughly that there is no such thing as pure perception, and that to discuss it, even as a theoretical category, is greatly misleading. But Kantian aesthetics is built upon the conceptual structure of eighteenth century psychology that considers reason, sense, imagination, and feeling as faculties of the mind. Formed in the interest of rationalizing and universalizing knowledge, these vastly simplify the complex contextual character of human experience. To take them separately and treat them as distinct and independent faculties or capacities creates divisions that we then are faced with reconciling. Think of the vast amount of attention devoted to defending imagination against reason, isolating unique aesthetic qualities, and reconciling expression with form.

The conclusion to which all this leads, whether or not it is comfortable or desirable, is inescapable. The idea of a rational universe, of an objective, systematic order, must be relegated to a display case in a museum of the history of ideas. Philosophy has constructed opposing forces that it is then faced with reconciling, a contrived process that is rarely successful. We need to re-think these ideas, not with the intent of clarifying them by sharpening their differences, but exactly the opposite – by showing their interpenetration, their continuity, and at times even their fusion, perhaps with the hope of achieving a kind of Spinozistic unity that sees them as aspects of a common substance.

A New Direction for Aesthetics

What is left of aesthetics if we turn away from the Kantian tradition? What would a new aesthetics, a post-Kantian aesthetic, look like? If we discard the categories of faculty psychology – sense, imagination, feeling, memory, reason, taste; if we forego the classical thrust of philosophy to universalize and dismiss the puzzles over emotion, expression, representation, and the like that arise from the fragmentation of the world of art into spectator, artist, and work of art; what then is left? If we literally re-think aesthetics, what kind of intellectual creation will emerge, what kind of creature will be born?

¹⁰ Welsch, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹¹ Lawrence van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977).

Let me take this occasion to suggest a program for the different sort of thinking that I believe must guide our inquiry in aesthetics in a new and different direction:

1. Relinquish the substantive categories we have inherited from eighteenth century psychology and replace them with adjectival and adverbial forms of such phenomena. 'Sensation' then becomes 'sensory,' 'perception' becomes 'perceptual,' 'cognition' 'cognitive,' etc.
2. Replace universalization with a pluralistic account and explore to what extent there are certain common phenomena that appear in different artistic and aesthetic cultures. From this we can learn what degrees of generality can be discerned and whether these are helpful and illuminating or, on the contrary, whether they obscure important differences that require recognition.
3. Related to this, give a primary place to varying cultural traditions in aesthetics, and to the ongoing histories of thought and of experience that they reflect. Not only do the different arts have their own histories; they are interrelated in different ways in different cultural traditions. Examining these will not only encourage a degree of humility in both the scholar and the appreciator; at the same time it will enrich our capacities for aesthetic perception and enlarge its range and content.
4. Resist the tendency of essentialist thinking to identify single forces and factors to illuminate the aesthetic process, such as emotion, expression, or meaning, and look instead for complexities, for characteristic groupings of influences, for interrelationships, for appropriate and varying contexts.
5. Consider aesthetics not as the special domain of a value sharply distinct from other kinds of values, including moral, practical, social, and political ones, but look for the special contribution aesthetic value can make to the normative complexity that pervades and is inseparable from every region of the human realm. Aesthetic value can be distinctive without being separate, uniquely valuable without being singular, important without being pure, and occupy a critical place in human culture without being isolated.
6. Develop the grounds for an aesthetic-based criticism, not only of the arts but of culture and knowledge, for these too have their aesthetic dimensions. Such criticism should be directed not only at their content but, even more important, toward their presuppositions.

Nowhere is criticism more needed, however, than of aesthetic theory itself. For philosophical influences on theory have come, not from an investigation of aesthetic sensibility, but largely from the ontological and

epistemological framework of the Western philosophical tradition that moves from classical sources, through its appropriation by Enlightenment thinkers, into the present. It is a tradition that has extolled contemplative reason and has been suspicious of the body and the full range of human sensibility. As a consequence, we are presented with an array of issues that have a philosophical rather than an aesthetic source. Among these we can cite such divisive oppositions as those between surface (as in aesthetic qualities) and substance, form and content, illusion and reality, spectator and work of art (that is, subject and object), and beauty and use (that is, intrinsic and instrumental values). These have assumed ontological status and misdirect aesthetic inquiry in a fragmentary and oppositional direction. All of these derive from the undue influence of this philosophical tradition on aesthetic theory, in particular from its cognitive model.

Aesthetic Engagement, an Aesthetics of Context and Continuity

My own view favors a pluralistic aesthetic that allows for the fullest range of creative making in all the human arts and in all their diverse cultural manifestations. We need not be so concerned with hierarchy, with invidious rankings, but rather with studying how these arts function in society and in experience – what needs they fulfill, what purposes they serve, what satisfactions they offer, and how they extend human capacities to perceive and understand. Such an aesthetic, moreover, extends beyond the arts to the world in which we live, to the natural environment, to the built environment, to community, to personal relations. These, neglected until recently, beg for scholarly and scientific attention so that they can add not only to the range of knowledge but so that they can clarify and enlarge regions of experience often unattended to and hidden.

Such an aesthetic sensibility, one that recognizes its integration in the life of human cultures, is an aesthetics of context and continuity. Not set apart in grand but lonely isolation, the aesthetic domain of experience infuses the many and varied activities in which we engage, from daily tasks to popular culture. It also retains its significance for those arts that focus on and distill the most intense and profound moments of experience, the so-called fine arts. But these, too, influence and enter into the wide range of human experience. We must surrender the myth of purity along with the myth of exclusivity.

I call this »aesthetic engagement,« for it not only recognizes and extends the connections of aesthetic experience but invites our total involvement as

active participants. Aesthetic engagement is more a descriptive theory than a prescriptive one: It reflects the activity of the artist, the performer, and the appreciator as these combine in aesthetic experience. And it is a theory that reflects the world we participate in, not the illusory splendor of a philosophical fantasy.

* * *

I realize that these are iconoclastic proposals and that they challenge many of the strongest supports and firmest convictions of modern aesthetics. But whether or not you agree with me, I hope you will take these proposals as an incentive to reconsider the axioms of aesthetics, and work to shape theory to the facts of art and experience. To begin this process, no opportunity is better than these days in Ljubljana. *Bonne chance!*¹²

¹² I have developed aspects of this critique in many places. These include: *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997); *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Springfield, Ill.: C. C. Thomas, 1970); in *Art and Engagement*; and in a number of recent papers.

Stefan Morawski
On Bitter-Juicy Philosophizing Via Aesthetics

For the late Iga Ciszewska who should be with us.

1

There is no compulsory, inner or outer, requirement to practice philosophizing aesthetics. True indeed that the roots of this discipline are philosophic and also in the middle of the XVIIIth century when it reached its sovereignty and name, the process took place within philosophy in the case of Baumgarten and Sulzer. However, even then Lessing's and Diderot's intellectual endeavours and achievements were of a different nature. And later, as is well-known, i.e. in the XIXth century, aesthetics underwent a long period of trying and testing its science-like potential. With changing forms and assumptions this trend endures till our day. Not to necessarily philosophize amounts, e.g. to practice art or literary criticism, ask about the values and their criteria with reference to psychological or sociological norms, accept or question what according to the ruling conventions, institutionally (art academies, museums, galleries, professional publications, etc.) is acknowledged as a standard aesthetic vocabulary, share the interest in the same prevailing themes and motifs, and analyze what the given seminal categories meant and mean now; all that we observe everywhere and note at the congress debates. In one word – one can easily and securely live and prosper without engaging aesthetics, treated as the equivalent of philosophy of art, in the philosophizing enquiries and meditations. To philosophize or not is a matter of conscious choice and option. But when we start with such a premise, we have to lay down what we understand by this peculiar activity. In the next section of my paper I shall undertake this task, distinguishing four-fold the philosophizing practice with regard to our domain. This will form the main body of my reflections. In the final section I shall consider the problem which seems to me fundamental, namely why today, at the present cultural juncture, philosophizing *via* aesthetics in a definite way should be recommendable and primary, as well as why it has to be bitter-juicy as the title of my essay foretells.

A

Of the four discerned kinds of philosophizing *via* aesthetics the first which is to be listed used to be the most frequent and continues to be such. It rests on the more or less adequate, direct relationship of given aesthetic ideas, consequential to a system of thought. In this sense we assign a certain thinker to the family of Kantism or phenomenology, hermeneutics or Marxism. This dependence on adopted presumptions and axioms was and is variously exercised. It can be revealed by mere extension of the concepts and solutions presented by one of the great minds, say Dewey or Heidegger, or Lukács. However, it may also be an interpretation of the philosophical fundamentals applied to the field of aesthetics, say of Husserl who himself in counterdistinction to Ingarden left this domain of problems almost untouched. Still another example could be practicing, for instance, a Wittgensteinian philosophy of art. Wittgenstein articulated some opinions on art and aesthetic experience, but no doubt, they invite the scholars who want to be the followers of his *Philosophical Investigations* to reconstruct, complete and develop them. This kind of philosophizing is notoriously less appreciated because it is admitted in general that it is mostly the repetition of the notions already sifted and digested. Unjustly so as there is no end of creative potentiality in enriching heritage by re-interpretation (if only it possesses vital significance).

B

Another version of philosophizing attitude and approach stems from examining the foundations and sense of aesthetics. It was already born in the beginnings of our century and instigated by the turning-point in humanities which was brought by Dilthey and later by Rickert. The question which has to be put concerned first the understanding instead of explanatory procedures as the proper means (method) to command the intricacies and secrets of the artistic realm. However, soon it appeared that even understanding may be fallacious. Bullough was forced to ponder whether any theoretical strategems are able to meet the peculiarities of the aesthetic phenomena. This crisis was never fully overcome but cunningly silenced, stating that the aesthetic theory and its subject-matter are never entirely compatible and such un-correspondence is to be assented to by all scholars, natural scientists included. The meta-aesthetic consciousness was awakened again several decades after the hinted-above discussion took place. It now took a radical shape on behalf of the doubts raised by the very subject of

study. Once the idea of art grew to be dubious, which commenced with the fifties, philosophy of art became suspect as well. Philosophizing touched upon the possible precariousness of aesthetics, its scholarly exhaustion or replacing its hitherto practice by meta-aesthetic reflection. The latter was to embrace revising the ambitions and the triumphs of aesthetics, uncovering the sources of its defeats, meditations on another discipline (theory of culture?) which could take over its dowry while facing the increasing, global predomination of mass culture, etc. Anyway, philosophizing engaged in this variety of checking one's own balance-sheets had to be engaged in thinking on the civilisational and cultural vicissitudes of our day. And so it happened.

C

After the period of anti- and/or (post-) aesthetics which, as expected, began to wane with the end of the 80s and was rapidly exchanged for so called post-modernism (trying in different fashions to reinstate the legitimacy and authority of aesthetic studies), interest in philosophizing meditations became rather poor. This occurred to be natural as the initiative to face directly the problem of mass culture predominating on the social scene belonged to the sociologists. They spurred research on consumerism and its mainstays. An instructive specimen of this type of reflection is presented by Mike Featherstone in *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991), who set forth the idea of the global aesthetization as the very symptom of the continuing transformation and the breakthrough in dealing with the artistic-aesthetic values. His reasoning ran as follows: When the main vehicle and propelling factor of social circulation grew to be consumption and with it advertising and marketing, all goods (chiefly the material) called for styling because they had to be quickly sold and thus leave room to newer samples. But not only the pursuit after the highest profit determined this kind of behaviour. Democracy brought more education, improved on the whole taste, and created a new class of managers (here the author draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural intermediaries). As the information and symbolic sphere advanced to the rank of one of the essential commodities, no wonder that the entire environment began to undergo the aesthetic-oriented change. Everything was to attract the senses by its prettiness, the streets as well as the interiors had to be beautified, and supermarkets and walls became the focus of artistically conceived entertainment. Featherstone writes about the carnivalisation of culture. What in medieval times was a Great Ritual Break, a Feast making one conscious of everyday grey realities, what much later the avant-garde, since Dada, treated as the Big Provocation to undermine the *status quo*, today we read, is a colloquial surrounding. The

more fragmentary, simultaneous and multi-faceted stimulations attack our mind and the more we get entangled in the network of ubiquitous media, the clearer we begin to understand that the life is shaped now by various spectacles and by hedonistic needs. We realize, furthermore, that within the domain of constant shows and omnivorous pleasures, the aesthetic ones build the topical body of our well-being. Once we agree that today mass culture and consumerism plus carnivalisation make the very sense of our existence, instead of philosophizing *via* aesthetics we should – Featherstone justly concludes and proves it splendidly by his scrutiny – rather concentrate on the theory of culture. It is the mainstay of fundamental questions and potential answers to them.

This phenomenon of global aesthetization met sharp counter-arguments. Jean Baudrillard, one among many, pointed to the effect of an-aesthetizing everything when any event or any object becomes beautified. The xero (zero) result of such manoeuvres was reaffirmed in another manner by Odo Marquard. And precisely this objection made the springboard of Wolfgang Iser, who campaigned against this superficial and trivial all-over aesthetics in defence of the philosophizing approach which should consider aesthetics most seriously as our epoch turns it into the chief organon (instrument) of philosophy. In two books: *Ästhetisches Denken* (1990) and *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* (1996) his argumentation is not so much addressed against the styling of our environment, our dresses, our behaviour, etc. (as he finds all these facts natural and somewhat, though flattening, prolonging the old notion of *homo aestheticus*), as towards enhancing a strong demarcation line between the shallow display of cosmeticized realities and deep aesthetics (*Tief-Ästhetik*) which reaches to the sources of our being. Iser maintains that from Nietzsche till Foucault and the Parisian School of deconstruction we experienced an epistemological watershed. Our Cartesian epistemology got shaken, Logos rules no more. Rationality was revealed in its many shades and aspects, blended with irrational elements. Art, true, remained the basic field of discovering the drawbacks of Reason, abstract thinking, schematic divisions, etc. but more important than the boldest avant-garde revelations was and is the direct contact through our senses, emotions and imagination with the world founded on *aisthesis*. This should be understood not in the Kantian (*Schein*) but in the Aristotelian fashion. This *aisthesis* uncovers the riddles of our cognition, the passages between different powers of mind, their co-mingling, the interplay of the known and the obscure (*der blinde Fleck*), the transversality of the discourse which is rarely linear, while being most often multi-faceted. Hence too, the *aisthesis* becomes the organon of philosophizing which is far

away from the Schellingian concept. There – art endowed with intellectual intuition had to speak out the truth of being; here – the paradoxes and paralogsms of our existence become unveiled thanks to taking into account the theory in its various forms and its constant dialogue with practice, sensibility with regard to the concrete, accidental, precarious, many-facial, episodic, as well as putting the metaphoric-narrative language on an equal footing with the analytico-synthetic discourse. Aesthetizing is grasped then fundamentally as philosophizing. There is no mere play with words and no perverse coquetry when Welsch introduces the term *Sinnwahrnehmung* in the function of his key-concept. Perception coalesces with penetrating the profound sediments of being; aesthetics embraces both.

D

The last kind I am keen to distinguish is the outcome of critical learning from the three hitherto outlined. It presumes that there is at hand no single system of thought on which aesthetic thinking could and should depend. It is inclined to preserve the post-aesthetic attitude in the context of permanent alertness, i.e. to resist the dogma-like pretences of knowing for certain that philosophy of art is eternal, very important and useful (as the wisest guide of art and its corollaries) as well as well-armed because of its equipment which it collected over the long ages. However, it bids farewell to post-aesthetics. All its seminal arguments were already told, and no one will today applaud the entire aesthetic heritage and apply amnesty to its obvious errors. In one word, to continue it without a break would be a loss of energy. As for Welsch's idea, it is of priceless value but raises objection because of the arbitrary interpretation of *aisthesis* which remains fuzzy and shifting of the entire weight of argumentation to aesthetics as the organon of philosophy. What Welsch indeed and rightly has in mind is actually the rehabilitation of mythos and the watchful control of what Logos seizes. Let us leave aside the question of the transversal reason which demands separate discussion. The very concept of another philosophizing is to be by all means confirmed, but why should it be reduced *via* the preponderance of mythos to *aisthesis* (and additionally replacing art) remains unclear. Anyhow, we are on the old territory of philosophy rearranging its household, resetting its axiology, dismissing its marshals, etc. That is why the return to philosophizing without restoring any extra-privileges upon aesthetics seems far more justified than almost identifying aesthetics and philosophy.

In this variety of philosophizing, among others, *via* aesthetics, the all-over aesthetization of the world and chiefly as Welsch has it, of post-modern epistemology becomes one of the salient issues. But this problem has to be

put in the critical light. *Aisthesis* is by its nature passive. Should not the cultural self-therapy concentrate on being creative in a special sense? This continues on with a much broader discussion of the flood of mass culture and the vulgarization of *homo aestheticus*. Philosophizing of this kind amounts to meditation upon where we are at the present-day point of culture and civilisation. It is a two-channelled meditation – thanks to and through the glasses of the most eloquent and best works of art and on the ground of the ubiquitous media with their vanity fair, with Madonnas, Jacksons, cyber-space, and all sorts of simulacra, which were described and commented on by Featherstone (but alas, without any distance). The meditation on our destiny, our axiological foundations, our challenge against the one-sided, trivial logocentrism, our re-assessing the sensual and carnal richness, and our ability to dissent in the struggle with so-called neo-tribalism (Maffesoli). All these questions could be put beyond the realm of art, beyond everyday multifaceted spectacles, and the aesthetic experiences, cheap or precious. That is one of the main pieces of evidence that the genuine philosophizing of our days cannot and should not be grasped as absolutized *aisthesis* on diverse levels. Nonetheless, for us because of the special vantage point this complicates matters first of all, because it entails asking incessantly: »What is aesthetics for?« instead of repeatedly drilling the theme »What is aesthetics?« Already at the XIIth International Congress for Aesthetics in Madrid (1992) in my plenary appearance, I laid stress on the proper hierarchy of the two approaches. I cited Marquard and followed him in this respect because while everything gets turned (from bottom to top and vice versa) and the feeling of crisis knocks on all minds, to dwell on definitions seems to be a miserable occupation.

3

It was most certainly evident to my listeners that while characterizing the fourth kind of philosophizing *via* aesthetics, I encapsulated in this characteristic my own viewpoint. The epitome of it consists in emphasizing the reflections on the human whither and thither at the cultural crossroads of our history, when we ponder on the present-day condition and sense of art as well as the aesthetic broadly rendered. In other words, philosophizing does not amount to looking after and building the world-view on *aisthesis*. It means replying by meditation (in whichever way and from different angles) to the present-day civilisational and cultural turn, not forgetting the generalities of our human condition (*en face* being, *Jemeinigkeit*, the other

self, history, transcendence). Philosophizing thus grasped, when it happens *via* aesthetics and art, has its advantages and privileges because both are the most sensitive instruments responding to the challenges of time. Noteworthy, the search after *aisthesis* and its passionate upgrading is the very sign of this extraordinary sensitivity to what occurs around and within us. The bitter-juicy combination of such endeavours still has to be elucidated. I name this species of reflection juicy because any investigatory examinational philosophizing with its dilemmas, paradoxes and aporetic knots makes us lucidly aware of who we are and what is our existential stake. I do not share the belief voiced nowadays more frequently that there occurs the twilight of philosophy burdened always with the task of universalizing and integrating the *Weltbild*. Philosophizing faces this burden but it realizes that it is too heavy for us and never satisfactorily embodied. It is yet a juicy thinking just on behalf of many world-views competing with each other and the impossibility of fixing my final solutions, yet at the same time on being of the irrevocable temptation not to give up the effort of totalizing the understanding of ourselves and the realities around. This reflection *via* art and aesthetics which arrestingly pluralizes the horizons of thought and being is moreover juicy because of the spasmodic consciousness of both the not-quite-certainty where we are heading (what type of labyrinth we are in?), and knowledge of where we are now at the historical and cultural turning-point. With this endowment partly lucid, partly muddled we are forced to choose, i.e. take the responsibility either for our dissent or conformity. I have always opted and continue to opt for resistance to the *status quo* especially when taking into consideration the cripplehood and trivialities of the contemporary civilisation plus culture. It is a juicy feeling to be able not to accept the allegedly fatal transformations which change our lives into all-over popular, dazzling and maddening super-spectacles. Beware, no doomsday is endorsed by me here although my hurrah-optimistic opponents state that I belong to the Don Quixotic family of nostalgic mourners (like Adorno, Steiner, Levinas, the famous Polish artists Czeslaw Milosz and Krzysztof Penderecki, etc.). Granted that I try not to adjust myself to the new post-modern axiology and lust from this deliberate non-adjustment, I draw the most juicy energy of being myself. *Hier steh ich und kann nicht anders!*

Why then the bitterness? Because my vision of *homo aestheticus* breaks again and again, because the counter-powers triumph over their victories and reiterate their gigantic pageantries, because the European cultural identity cherished since the medieval time is menaced, and because the osmotic processes between the best Far East lessons of how to revalue our values and our axiological stock proceed slowly and not rarely with defeats.

Summing up, bitterness because philosophizing in my vein (among others *via* aesthetics and art) is weakly efficient; all-permissive homogenizing consumerism gains more and more scores and most probably will still be the winner in the coming years. Bitterness because philosophizing (in all its dimensions and aspects) is not trusted enough, although, beyond any doubt, it co-moulds our way of being-in-the world. Bitterness because philosophizing *via* art and aesthetics which constitutes the most suitable intercultural and existential bridges, frequently stumbles on its way, falls and is often seen as a laughing stock. But the battle won't stop. We have to stand up again and follow our destiny of bitter-juicy philosophizing. *Spes contra spem*.

Carolyn Korsmeyer
Disgust

Introduction: art and emotional paradox

The classic tragic emotions, according to Aristotle, are pity and terror; but pity and terror share company with other emotional responses as well. When Sophocles describes the terrible plight of the abandoned Philoctetes, he emphasizes how no one can tolerate the polluting stench of his wounded foot and his unbearable, agonized cries. »His foot was festering, oozing pus/ From a foul wound,« explains Odysseus. »Even at festivals/ We hardly dared touch the wine or meat.«¹ Philoctetes' fellow soldiers bemoan his loneliness, but their senses are so revolted by his suppurating flesh that they cast him out of their company. His festering wound arouses the powerful aversive reaction of *disgust* – both in his companions in the story and on the part of the audience of the play.

Of all the emotions that art can inspire, disgust is the most difficult to reconcile with positive aesthetic response, especially when that response is cast in the standard terminology of aesthetic pleasure. Of the painful emotions, fear is the one that has chiefly occupied philosophy of art, and indeed it has always been acknowledged as an indispensable component of certain types of art such as tragedy. But disgust is a relative newcomer as a subject for sustained theoretical analysis, having been traditionally considered uniquely disqualified from the lists of aesthetically enjoyable emotions. As Kant emphatically states: »There is only one kind of ugliness that cannot be presented in conformity with nature without obliterating all aesthetic liking and hence artistic beauty: that ugliness which arouses *disgust*.«²

Kant was evidently wrong. In addition to the case of Philoctetes, there are numerous other examples from the history of art where the arousal of disgust is an important component of appreciative understanding. (Some of the paintings of Titian, Géricault, and Goya come to mind.) Moreover, contemporary culture seems positively obsessed with the presentation of the disgusting – in stories and novels, in the visual arts, and in the powerful

¹ Sophocles, *Electra, Antigone, Philoctetes*, trans. Kenneth McLeish (Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 109.

² *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987 [1790]) p. 180.

combination of narrative and visual effects that film and video avail. With the refinement of computerized special effects, audiences can now savor a corpse decomposing before their very eyes or human bodies invaded by rot or fungus, not to mention all manner of repulsive alien species. High or gallery culture features the same titillating shocks, such as Odd Nerdrum's depictions of evisceration, amputation, and excrement in unsettling classic pictorial style. Cindy Sherman's virtual trademark has become the disgusting, notable in this unappetising still life (*Figure 1*). It would strain credibility to claim all such examples as objects of artistic beauty, but their affective power and ascendance in art testify to the »aesthetic liking« they arouse, a phenomenon that demands explanation.

Perhaps it is the sheer number of works that arouse disgust and companion emotions such as horror, loathing, and dread, that has helped



*Figure 1: Cindy Sherman,
»Untitled #172« (1987)
Courtesy the artist and Metro
Pictures*

to propel the recent industry of studies on emotion in the arts and the familiar philosophical paradoxes they present. Disgust joins the venerable paradox of tragedy and the paradox of horror, variations on the general puzzle presented by the fact that seemingly well-balanced people seek out experiences in art that they would flee in reality: the painful, the terrifying, the disturbing, the perverse, and the repulsive.³ To add to the paradoxes of the painful or aversion emotions, we have the more general paradox of fiction, made acute with the now widely-accepted cognitivist theories of emotion, that is, theories that maintain beliefs to be constituents of emotions. If works of art describe worlds we recognize as not real (fictional), then they do not present us with facts in which to believe. How, then, do they succeed so effectively in arousing emotions, absent relevant beliefs?⁴ I shall direct these familiar questions to the emotion of disgust, adjusting the terms of debate to fit this powerful aversion. What kind of an emotion is disgust? And what about *aesthetic disgust*, by which I do not mean disapproval but rather *an emotion appropriately aroused by art that is indicative of aesthetic appreciation*.

At this point I should stipulate the scope of disgust that will be my focus, for »disgust« and kindred terms are used in a variety of contexts. I may report my disgust at the slime that has accumulated in a clogged drainpipe, and I may claim to be disgusted by the hypocritical behavior of a colleague. While the latter sort of mental or moral disgust can be an interesting constituent of aesthetic response, it is probably only a metaphorical extension of the kind of disgust that interests me here.⁵ I refer to the kind of emotion that typically follows encounters with sour milk, sewage, and slime; slugs,

³ Disgust in art is rarely encountered alone. Its close cousin is fear, which is why these two emotions are the major candidates for the emotions of horror. (See Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* [New York: Routledge, 1990] ch. 4.) But fear is also the painful emotion that is classically understood to underlie the powerful and transcendent aesthetic response that would seem to be the diametric opposite of disgust: the encounter with the *sublime*. These footnotes carry on suggestions regarding sublimity in comparison with disgust.

⁴ The different paradoxes of emotional arousal by art are comprehensively analyzed by Jerrold Levinson, »Emotion in Response to Art: A Survey of the Terrain,« in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also various other essays in this volume.

⁵ Those who write on the subject tend to include all such categories among the phenomena that disgust. William Ian Miller, for example, refers to moral revulsion as a reflective response that occupies a more complex place on a continuum that begins with physical revulsion and nausea. Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject begins with nauseating food and ends with hypocrisy. I doubt that visceral disgust represents the bottom point on a continuum ending with moral repugnance. Of course, an author might exploit disgusting physical features in the service of expressing a moral point about a character.

centipedes, maggots, and lice; infected sores, gangrened flesh, and decomposing corpses. These things prompt visceral disgust, which is closely tied to unpleasant involuntary responses, including the gag reflex, nausea and even vomiting. Even if we do not reach the latter stages of reaction, the physical recoil of disgust is palpable.⁶ This kind of revulsion is the hardest to account for in terms of attraction – indeed, it seems to represent the very bedrock of aversion. Yet at the same time that which disgusts sometimes exerts a peculiar allure, what Julia Kristeva calls »a vortex of summons and repulsion.«⁷ Indeed Plato used the fascination of disgust in one of his most powerful pictures of the warring factions of the soul when he described Leontius, who admonished his own eyes for desiring to look upon the corpses of executed criminals. The upsetting fascination of the disgusting has been recognized for a long time, and its puzzling nature is deepened when we consider what kind of emotion disgust is.

Theories of emotion

What one surmises about disgust is influenced by the direction from which one approaches emotions in general. In the course of this paper I shall chiefly employ insights from philosophical theories of emotion that dovetail with neurobiological and psychological research. Ideally, science, philosophy, and art theory should converge towards an enriched understanding of aesthetic disgust. However, we shall find that answers that satisfy some of our questions generate problems as we try to answer others, stirring us to further perplexity about what appears at first to be one of the simpler emotions. General theories of emotions usually regard them as complex mental events involving intentional objects, propositional grounding, dispositional and immediate causes, and affective states that have physiological, interpretive, and subjective components.⁸ The cognitivist theories of emotion now popular among philosophers hold that relevant

⁶ In English this can be characterized as the »yuck« response, which interestingly compares to startle, a reflex that is heavily exploited in theater and film. With startle, the typical reaction is a physical jump and a gasp, a quick intake of air. The disgust response is also a physical recoil, often with a notable gesture of repulsion as the body folds inward and turns away. But the verbal response is the opposite of startle: it is an expulsion of air, a »yyeech!« sound, expelling the presence of the disgusting object as though it were a bodily contaminant.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 1.

⁸ The analyses covered in this paper concern occurrent emotions.

beliefs or (a weaker version) non-asserted propositional thoughts are components of emotions.⁹ The propositional content of thoughts differentiate one emotion from another, for the raw »feelings« accompanying emotions are not determinate enough to distinguish their characters. Many emotions are incomplete without a grounding belief. Grief or embarrassment, for example, are incoherent in the absence of a belief that loss has been sustained or dignity compromised. Most philosophers of art adopt a cognitivist perspective, and it is this picture of emotion that exacerbates the paradox of fiction: For if emotions are dependent upon beliefs, and we do not hold (existential) beliefs about entities we acknowledge to be fictional, how can we account for the emotions we feel in response to art? This question has prompted a host of theories that attempt to soften the belief requirement for emotions or to qualify the emotions aroused by art such that they are not quite the same as those aroused by real situations.¹⁰ I shall not engage in these debates because I favor an analysis of disgust that bypasses them altogether. I take my cue from scientific and philosophical studies of disgust that analyze this emotion as a reactive response that does not depend upon the complex cognitive components that emotions such as pity, embarrassment, and guilt require. As we shall see, this approach to disgust solves some problems and exacerbates others.

According to neurologist Antonio Damasio emotions are triggered at two distinct sites of the brain. One site is the prefrontal region of the neocortex, which governs what Damasio calls »secondary« emotions.¹¹ Secondary emotions are reflective and cognitively sophisticated. They include empathy, moral approval and disapproval, and caring in general, whether about others or about events that affect one's own well-being. The other site of emotional stimulation is in a part of the brain that is considered old from an evolutionary standpoint: the region sometimes called the limbic system that contains the cingulate gyrus, the hypothalamus, and the amygdala. It is here that Damasio locates »primary emotions,« including disgust. While the secondary emotions require not only consciousness but self-consciousness,

⁹ Varieties of cognitivism are usefully reviewed in John Deigh, »Cognitivism in the theory of Emotions,« *Ethics* 104 (July, 1994).

¹⁰ For example, Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Harvard University Press, 1990); Peter Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Susan Feagin, *Reading with Feeling* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994) Part I. Patients who suffer impairments of the prefrontal cortex are dysfunctional in practical terms, quite unable to make decisions and to hold positions of even minimal responsibility, although they continue to perform well on tests designed to test reasoning and cognitive ability.

the primary emotions are more reactive and appear to be rather »hard-wired« in the brain. That is to say, they substantially involve the autonomic nervous system and are hence less voluntary, being harder or impossible to control with conscious effort.¹² Primary emotions appear to be pan-cultural, and they are correlated with standard physical reactions, including cringing, blinking, typical facial expressions, and measurable responses such as skin conductance of electrical charge. Disgust is among the emotions apparently controlled in the limbic centers. It is also on the list of what some psychologists consider »basic« emotions, joining anger, fear, surprise, joy, and sadness.¹³ They are considered more or less automatic and involuntary, though just how consciously manipulable they may be is a matter for debate.¹⁴ Damasio proposes that such emotions are innate responses that are »pre-organized.« For example, though one learns that certain foods are taboo according to social or religious tenets, thereafter those foods provoke disgust as a visceral reaction because the pre-organized response is easily trained and locked into place.

The division of emotions according to the physiology that grounds them is continued in some philosophical analyses. Paul Griffiths, in his widely-acclaimed book, *What Emotions Really Are*, is among those who argue that »emotion« is not a univocal label for the disparate phenomena to which it is applied. Disgust and the other limbic-centered responses are among the emotions that he prefers to label »affect programs,« which are roughly

¹² This is a part of the brain that we have in common with other animals, and scientific studies of these emotions sometimes deliberately pay little heed to conscious experience. Biologist Joseph LeDoux argues that fear is best explained without reference to consciousness at all, for not all species that fear are conscious in any full sense of the term. *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

¹³ Experiments show differentiated autonomic nervous system activity for six basic emotions: anger, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise, and disgust. See e.g. Paul Ekman, Robert W. Levenson, Wallace V. Friesen, »Autonomic Nervous System Activity Distinguishes Among Emotions,« *Science* 221 (September, 1983) 1208-1210; Levenson, Ekman, and Friesen, »Voluntary Facial Action Generates Emotion-Specific Autonomic Nervous System Activity,« *Psychophysiology* 27:4 (1990) 363-384. The number of basic emotions varies by theorist. The term may be used to mean a set of fundamental responses out of which more complex emotions are built; emotions shared by non-human animals; pan-cultural emotions displayed by all social groups. There are many who dispute the soundness of the idea of basic emotions at all. See *The Nature of Emotion*, ed. Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) pp. 5-47.

¹⁴ The startle reflex, a feature of several emotions, is completely uncontrollable. Jenefer Robinson analyzes the startle response in an argument against the cognitivist trend in philosophical studies of emotion. »Startle,« *Journal of Philosophy* XCII:2 (Feb., 1995) pp. 53-74.

equivalent to Damasio's primary emotions.¹⁵ Affect programs are patterns of automated and coordinated response that are »biased learning mechanisms« sensitive to objects with significance for the organism's well-being. In the case of disgust, we are evolutionarily programmed for quick response to things that are foul: dangerous or noxious to contact or ingest. Such emotions are subject to a degree of learning, but they set patterns of rapid response that become immune to override from higher-level cognitive systems such as conscious beliefs. An important feature of affect programs is that they do not require assent to beliefs to make sense of their occurrence. For example, while grief is only plausible on the premise that one believes that one has suffered a loss, disgust is »modular« and »informationally encapsulated.«¹⁶ This means that the response occurs quickly and automatically without input from other cognitive systems.

There are features of this approach to disgust that require modification. In particular, Griffiths refers to affect programs as »...phylogenetically ancient, informationally encapsulated, reflexlike responses which seem to be insensitive to culture.«¹⁷ But disgust, whether aesthetic or natural, is clearly not insensitive to culture, no matter how visceral its character. Despite this shortcoming, which I shall address in the next section, in many respects affect program analysis is particularly apt for an emotion such as disgust, including aesthetic disgust. The reactive, involuntary character of disgust is accommodated, as well as its recalcitrance in the presence of contrary belief.¹⁸ (For example, one may believe that a slug is quite benign and yet recoil at

¹⁵ Paul E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are* (University of Chicago Press, 1997) ch. 4. Unlike Damasio, Griffiths does not speculate that higher-level cognitive emotions are dependent on affect program emotions. The two systems may operate independently. (See pp. 103-106.)

¹⁶ Griffiths offers this picture of the affect program emotions: »These emotions consist of complex, coordinated, and automated responses.... There is a flow of perceptual information to the mechanisms controlling these responses which is separate from the flow of information from perception to the higher cognitive processes responsible for intentional action. This element of modularity is required to account for the lack of fit between emotional responses and conscious evaluations of the significance of stimuli. In some cases higher cognitive processes may be able to trigger emotional responses directly, but in other cases the associations which lead to the response must be separate from the evaluations made by higher cognition.« Griffiths, op. cit. p. 93. Griffiths adopts the terms »modular« and »informationally encapsulated« from Jerry Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983). The term »affect program« comes from Paul Ekman's research.

¹⁷ Griffiths, op. cit. p. 16. In fact, Griffiths allows for modification of affect programs.

¹⁸ William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) asserts that in order to find something disgusting, we must believe it is in a category that warrants disgust. While many instances of disgust require cognitive activity such

its touch. Or – slightly closer to art – one may be embarrassingly unable to pick up a tarantula that one knows is made of rubber.)¹⁹ Affect program analysis makes it both more difficult and easier to resolve paradoxes generated by arousal of emotions by art. In fact, we can introduce some »limbic puzzles« into the paradox of disgust. What happens when responses supposedly so primitive and hard-wired come to be features of the highly acculturated and theorized products we call art? Many of the limbic-based emotions are aversion reactions probably designed through evolution to protect an organism from immediate threat. This is why they are modular – so that the organism can respond quickly before slower cognitive deliberation can make its assessment. But how and why do they become – in humans – a focus for attraction? The paradox of aversion is heightened by the analysis of disgust as an affect program. However, the paradox of fiction is solved.

The standard formulation of the paradox of fiction focuses on the problem of belief. How can a reader feel grief on behalf of Anna Karenina, for example, if he or she does not believe that any real woman has been harmed?²⁰ Whether or not this is a sensible problem for propositional emotions or merely an academic conundrum, with affect programs we can invoke the fact that responses are encapsulated and thus independent of other cognitive systems, including beliefs.²¹ There is no paradox because there is no inconsistency of belief such that one responds with an emotion that requires a belief or propositional attitude that one does not hold.²²

More importantly, this analysis of disgust permits us to answer the question of whether emotions aroused in response to art are *genuine* emotions of their type. Although art arouses experiences that certainly feel like emotions, if we do not hold the beliefs that constitute the emotions we

as recognition, I think this may be accomplished through the training of the affect program and need not require belief in the sense of assent to a proposition.

¹⁹ Psychologist Paul Rozin has experimentally demonstrated the inability of subjects to eat foods they like that have been molded in the shape of feces. (See discussion in Miller, *ibid.*)

²⁰ See Colin Radford, »How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?« *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 69, suppl. vol., (1975).

²¹ Note that psychologists who study emotive response often use pictures or descriptions of emotion-arousing scenes to test their subjects, and they do not consider the scientific validity of their findings to be compromised by these »fictional« situations.

²² Nor do we have to resort to any of the alternative proposals for the cognitive content of emotions, such as simulation theory or the so called thought theory, which holds the emotive response to art to be responses to non-asserted thoughts rather than beliefs. Of course, there is a sacrifice involved in accepting this solution to the paradox of fiction, since it jettisons the cognitive constituent of emotions that provides the strongest grounds for establishing their rationality.

apparently feel, perhaps we need to modify our understanding of this element of aesthetic response.²³ Many conclude that although the emotive responses art arouses may be powerful and meaningful, they are not the same as emotions aroused in real life. But aesthetic disgust is an unambiguously and completely real case of the emotion, and its target object is the work of art. It is *this image* of food and vomit that arouses aesthetic disgust (Figure 2), and aesthetic disgust is real disgust that is occasioned as a part of the appreciative response to this work of art.²⁴ I suspect that the same argument could be made on behalf of other emotions such as some varieties of fear, and it certainly can be made for surprise. Other important aesthetic emotions, including the venerable pity, require a different analysis.²⁵

However, this is not to say that the disgust aroused by pictures and



Figure 2: Cindy Sherman, »Untitled #175« (1987)
Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures

²³ Philosophers have suggested various modifiers to append to artistic emotions: fictional emotions, quasi-emotions, simulated emotions, and so forth. These modifiers are intended to account for the fact that our emotive responses to fiction are just that – to fiction; to an entity that presents a world we acknowledge not to be real.

²⁴ The imitation-reality distinction is further confounded by the work of Damien Hirst, famous for pickled animals, and Gunther von Hagens, who reportedly preserves human bodies and exhibits them as sculpture.

²⁵ See Alex Neill, »Fiction and the Emotions,« in Neill and Ridley, *Arguing About Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995). Jerrold Levinson suggests that »Darwinian« emotions, that

narratives occasions exactly the *same experience* as the disgust that would be aroused if one came upon the scenes in reality that are pictured in visual art or described in fictions. There is a difference, and in the case of disgust that difference is best explained by reference to the *senses* that are assailed by the disgusting object.²⁶ Philosophy is so biased in favor of the distal senses of sight and hearing that the other sense experiences that trigger emotions are often neglected. Works of visual art and narrative typically appeal to the imagination via the so-called higher or intellectual senses of vision and hearing. While visual scenes may disgust, the primary senses of disgust are the »bodily« senses of touch and smell and taste. The sensory conduits for disgust are limited in art, and the more basic sensations that occasion disgust are absent (though sometimes the visual display is sufficiently vivid that we can kinaesthetically smell or feel the object as well).²⁷ If with our technical resources we had developed not just movies but the »feelies« that Aldous Huxley describes in *Brave New World*, our aesthetic disgust might be pushed to such extremes that Kant would be correct: this species of reaction cannot be converted to a positive aesthetic response. (Leontius rushed over to *look* at the corpses, not to *smell* them.) But as things stand, the most powerful avenues for the disgust affect program are bypassed, and the emotion is triggered by senses that can tolerate the experience and even dwell upon it.²⁸ This observation provides us with one hint of how aesthetic disgust might become an experience to enjoy – or at least to savor. Sometimes we might

is, those necessary for survival of the organism, are the ones that may be directly stimulated by art (*The Pleasures of Aesthetics* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996] Ch. 15.) While this is consistent with the position I adopt, I do not think that the appeal to evolution can be sustained; if Damasio is correct, higher-level cognitive emotions are just as necessary to survival of the species as limbic-based emotions.

²⁶ »What the idiom of disgust demands is reference to the senses. It is about what it feels like to touch, see, taste, smell, even on occasion hear, certain things. Disgust cannot dispense with direct reference to the sensory processing of its elicitors.« (Miller, p. 36.)

²⁷ Edmund Burke observed that primary sensations easily merge into metaphorical sensations, such that, for example, the taste of sweetness transfers to a sweet shape or sound or expression. If this is correct, then the transfer of disgust from smell and taste – where it would likely occasion gagging or retching – to vision, renders the response less visceral than the primitive aversion reaction that occurs when the more direct sense is stimulated. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J.T. Boulton (University of Notre Dame Press, 1968 [1757]) Part 4, Sects. XX-XXI, pp. 151-152.

²⁸ The question of the senses involved in the arousal of disgust is generally interesting for aesthetic theory, since it is the eyes and ears that are traditionally considered »aesthetic senses.« Most scientific researchers on disgust assume that taste is the basic sense for this aversion response, and subjects from rats to humans display disgust reaction to

dwell on the disgusting simply because we *can*. Although it is an involuntary response, it takes place over a sufficient span of time that we are permitted to dwell upon our own reactions – unlike the sudden and momentary startle reflex, which is a stock component of horror movies. At least when disgust is aroused via the eyes and not the nose, we have an opportunity to focus on and even relish a limbic response for its own sake, taking a look at the machinery, as it were. It is rather like watching your own heart beat. I don't know if savoring an aversion counts as pleasure. Indeed, the issue of pleasure in disgust has now grown even more puzzling.

So far we have answered two of the standard questions about emotive responses to art. Affect program analysis has helped us avoid the paradox of fiction, and we have demonstrated that aesthetic disgust is a genuine case of disgust. Now, as we turn to the issue of aesthetic attraction to this aversive response, we discover that in formulating these solutions, we have effectively cut off one of the time-honored ways to answer the paradox of aversion. The classic answer to this question was first supplied by Aristotle and has many modern variations: we are by nature imitative creatures who take pleasure in learning. The mimetic forms of art permit us to learn about painful and important matters without suffering the consequences of encountering them in reality. But I have just argued that in the case of disgust there is no distinction between imitation and reality, for the atypical sensory conduit for arousal only makes disgust tolerable and contemplable; it doesn't diminish its genuineness nor screen us from its target object. So I cannot now revert to the imitation-reality distinction to account for the enjoyment of aesthetic disgust. How much of a theoretical sacrifice have I made?

The imitation-reality divide has shielded human nature from unworthy enjoyment of nasty emotions by means of the assumption that certain emotions are by definition painful and must therefore be enjoyable *only* when their objects are fictional. However, such a distinction between venues of enjoyment does not survive scrutiny, as Edmund Burke observed long ago. He speculated that a theater would quickly empty of its audience were they to learn that a public execution was being held nearby. All would readily abandon art and hurry to the scaffold to gaze at the condemned prisoner in his final agonies.²⁹ Burke thus anticipates what is now a fairly widespread

foods that once made them sick. William Ian Miller makes an alternative case for touch and smell as the primary senses of disgust. He also considers disgust a peculiarly human trait that develops between the ages of two and six. The questions of which sense is basic and of whether disgust is a human development or a response we share with other animals are important, though they exceed my attention here.

²⁹ Edmund Burke, Part I, sect. XV, p. 47. See also John Morreall, »Enjoying Negative Emotions in Ficiton,« *Philosophy and Literature* 9, 95-103.

willingness to acknowledge that there is a real interest in witnessing painful emotions themselves, not just their artistic rendering. Indeed, if we can do so safely, we even want to experience them first-hand. However, if disgust is an emotion that is best understood as an affect program designed for protection, then it is doubly difficult to account for the appeal of the experience. Can the very reaction that nature seems to have evolved to be experienced as acute aversion be a source of pleasure?³⁰ Or is its aesthetic power better understood in other terms?

Objects of disgust: Aversion and Attraction

There are three related questions that can be posed regarding the source and nature of the aesthetic power of disgust: (1) What objects trigger the experience? (2) What about the disgusting object is profound or valuable enough to convert aversion to attraction? And (3) When aesthetic disgust is aroused, does either the object or the experience itself become valued, savored, or pleasurable? Or is disgust a negative experience which gains its value by being a component of a larger positive experience? These turn out to be remarkably difficult issues to settle, partly because it is not clear what kinds of questions they are. At first they seem to request an empirical answer, but as I shall argue, this is a fruitless task. Exploring these questions also reveals a shortcoming of affect program analysis that requires repair if we are to understand disgust.

Let us start with the question of the trigger, the target object of disgust. There is a notable convergence among those who have written about disgust when it comes to compiling a catalogue of disgusting things. The typical elicitors for disgust are objects that are *foul*. They stink and nauseate; they are slithery, gooey, sticky, and oozing. In addition to these sensory properties, disgusting things fester and decay; they generate low or monstrous forms of life; they pollute and contaminate. Excrement, maggots, slugs, vermin, and

³⁰ The issue of aesthetic pleasure blends with the question of the components of emotions in general, for one can make a plausible case that all emotions contain an element of pleasure or pain. Spinoza, to cite a famous example, analyzed emotions as compounds of desire, pleasure, and pain. See also Patricia Greenspan, *Emotions and Reason* (London: Routledge, 1988).

Spinoza introduces disgust in an interestingly ambiguous context when he refers to the pain a man feels when he imagines an unfaithful lover: »...being compelled to associate the image of the object of his love with the sexual parts of his rival, he feels disgust for her.« (*Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley, [Indianapolis: Hackett] p. 125 [Part III, Prop. 35, Scholium].)

things that have not too recently died – all these figure on typical lists of disgusting items compiled by theorists of vastly different stripes: anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers; empiricists, psychoanalysts, existentialists.³¹ But, as David Pole observes, despite this agreement about its objects and its sensory roots, »Disgust is no ultimate datum of experience, like the sweet taste of sugar...; it is a complex phenomenon requiring to be made intelligible.«³²

In his recent book, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller proffers several general features of objects that arouse disgust: They are organic; they enter consciousness chiefly through the senses of touch and smell; and they have to do with life – its generation and its end. He summarizes the most basic and characteristic object of disgust as »life soup«:

What disgusts, startlingly, is the capacity for life, and not just because life implies its correlative death and decay: for it is decay that seems to engender life. Images of decay imperceptibly slide into images of fertility and out again. Death thus horrifies and disgusts not just because it smells revoltingly bad, but because it is not an end to the process of living but part of a cycle of eternal recurrence. The having lived and the living unite to make up the organic world of generative rot – rank, smelling, and upsetting to the touch. The gooey mud, the scummy pond are life soup, fecundity itself: slimy, slippery, wiggling, teeming animal life generating spontaneously from putrefying vegetation.³³

Miller's description is consistent with the idea of disgust as an affect program, because the decay and stench of the disgusting is often a signal of the noxious, poisonous, and dangerous, those objects we are well-advised to avoid before our slower cognitive efforts to investigate them get us into trouble. At the same time, the objects that arouse disgust obviously exceed that which is actually dangerous; they are charged with larger, culturally scripted meaning that affect programs alone would be strained to accommodate. As Miller observes:

Here we have the most embodied and visceral of emotions, and yet

³¹ Many theorists who speculate about the disgusting invoke the support of anthropologist Mary Douglas, whose insights into the categories of the clean and the unclean are richly transferrable to food taboos, religious practices, myth, and art. Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva uses Douglas to substantiate her theory of abjection; philosopher Noël Carroll, who rejects psychoanalytic explanations, invokes Douglas in his own Aristotelian account of the pleasures of horror. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (London: Routledge, 1991 [1966].)

³² David Pole, »Disgust and Other Forms of Aversion,« in *Aesthetics, Form, and Emotion*, ed. George Roberts (London: Duckworth, 1983) p. 229.

³³ Miller, op.cit. pp. 40-41.

even when it is operating in and around the body, its orifices and excreta, a world of meaning explodes, coloring, vivifying, and contaminating political, social, and moral meanings. Disgust for all its visceralness turns out to be one of our more aggressive culture-creating passions.³⁴

Life soup, in virtue of being *life* soup, comes freighted with meanings that insert themselves into what are supposed to be more or less involuntary responses to general qualities, such as that which is foul. But despite its reflex-like character, disgust – especially aesthetic disgust – requires that we attend to its *objects* and their many varieties with great care for nuance and the relation of the emotion aroused to other objects and emotions. For as Spinoza observed, »The explication of the nature of every ... emotion must necessarily include an expression of the nature of the object by which we are affected.«³⁵ Emotions, even affect programs, are partially and importantly constituted by their objects. Depending upon the degree to which context is included in »object,« allowing the intentional object partially to shape or constitute an emotion permits a wide latitude for variation among experiences that ride under the same name. I endorse this pluralism, for the appeal, attraction, pleasure, meaning, or value of disgust aroused by art cannot be addressed the same way for all instances. Just as a careful approach to emotions advises that one assess them case by case, so a judicious study of disgust advises us to look at particular cases of that emotion. Aesthetic disgust can be a component of tragedy, as we saw in the case of Philoctetes; it can be a feature of response to comedy, as the gross burlesques of Rabelais demonstrate. It is a presiding response to science fiction and horror. And it can be foregrounded (as in the work of Cindy Sherman) in such a way that the disgusting is an object of aesthetic attention in itself. In all of these artistic venues disgust is part of an appreciative reaction. But the character of the emotion varies. In some instances, disgust is entirely aversion – a deep and unambiguous pain; with others, disgust exerts an appeal and attraction that invites understanding as a pleasure; and with others, there is an oscillation and ambiguity to the experience that is hard to stabilize.

Much debate over the pleasure in disgust has focused on science fiction and horror, partly because it is a common response both to strange or rival forms of life and to agents of decay, features of the »life soup« Miller describes. Because this type of narrative makes little pretense of representing the world as it is, it also affords obvious examples of how disgust is deliberately and sometimes extravagantly employed to propel narrative with

³⁴ Ibid. p. xii.

³⁵ *Ethics*, op. cit. Part III, Prop. 56, p. 138. Spinoza is referring to passive emotions, which include disgust, though his comment obtains for all emotions.

»culture-creating« zeal. Precisely because of their roots in the generation of life, disgusting objects are invested with meaning that complicates and increases their fascination. Just one theme can illustrate how the natural and the cultural are manifest in the disgusting: reproduction – examples of which abound in popular film and television. The science fiction horror movie *Alien*, now with three sequels, features a female monster whose sole purpose appears to be to propagate, which it accomplishes by invading host bodies, including those of humans.³⁶ She is a relentless engine of life, predation, and death, and she is brutally disgusting. Or consider the many reproducing monstrosities featured in the popular television series *The X-Files*, including an explosively phallic fungus which erupts from the necks of its hosts to spray invasive spores into anyone unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity; or a predatory human fluke worm, pale and bulbous like a huge, toothed maggot, that invades the livers of its hosts to perpetuate its kind. This latter creature is supposed to be a mutation resulting from the Chernobyl disaster, perhaps a parasitic version of the nobler Godzilla, also generated from nuclear fallout. Environmental catastrophe, political disputes, sexual politics, history – all are manifest in the spectacle of the disgusting. Doubtless the possibilities recently opened up for technological interventions in the reproductive process drive the current obsession with reproducing monsters (including the most recent incarnation of Godzilla) and with invasions of human bodies to aid their generation. They are the contemporary equivalent of ancient myths of demon lovers who seduce and corrupt, and in the realm of the disgusting they are shadowed by all the muck and slime that oozes primordial life. The visceral, aversive character of disgust is deployed in fictional objects which, in addition to their entertainment value, achieve potent meaning and awful allure. But what exactly is their attraction?

One possible explanation of the appeal of the disgusting sees it as the purchase price of the discovery that eventuates from the unpleasant experience. This approach has its roots in Aristotle's idea of the pleasure of learning, and it is the one that Noël Carroll advocates in his explanation of the paradox of horror. Carroll believes the painful horror emotions of fear and disgust acquaint us with that which is monstrous, alien, and impure. Horror, like tragedy, stimulates curiosity, the satisfaction of which in the course of a narrative is a pleasure. The aversive quality of disgust is not transformed to pleasure. Rather, it is the pain one must endure for the sake

³⁶ Barbara Creed argues that such monsters represent the »archaic mother,« a parthenogenic reproductive machine that is psychologically primitive to the pre-Oedipal mother recognized by psychoanalytic theory. *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

of discovery at the far side of the horrid moment.³⁷ When one first views »Firewalker,« the episode of *The X-Files* in which the parasitic fungus bursts from the neck of its host, the eruption is preceded by scenes of choking and gagging in which the ripening parasite visibly pulses in the swollen neck. It is tempting to close one's eyes, but one is also intensely curious to find out what is going on. Perhaps aesthetic disgust in this example is a pain that is necessary to experience in order to earn the pleasure of discovery at the end of the story. On the other hand, isn't there a desire to look, like Leontius, on the parasite itself, indicating its attraction? If so, is this attraction to something perversely *pleasurable*?

When I first began thinking about aesthetic disgust, the paradox of pleasure seemed to me to be the most interesting puzzle to solve. However, as I explore the subject further, the questions generated by this issue appear to be badly formulated. There are two alternatives typically posed: either disgust is an experience in which aversion and pleasure mingle, or it retains its painful character but gains aesthetic value in virtue of its role in a larger experience. How in fact is such a dispute to be understood? This sounds at first like an empirical question, as though if we were to examine our own reactions very attentively, we might discern whether aversion and attraction occur in sequence or simultaneously, separately or blended. But can this be determined? Some writers on horror classify their experience of the disgusting as partly pleasurable; others do not.³⁸ These are (presumably honest) subjective reports, and there is no vantage from which to adjudicate the dispute. Introspection is not a finely tuned instrument, and if the question of pleasure is construed empirically there is no way to settle the issue. Alternatively, one may suspect that the question affords only a stipulative answer dependent upon prior theoretical commitments. If this is the case, then one who adheres to the idea that disgust is an evolved aversive response might insist upon its intrinsically negative quality, whereas someone who subscribes to Freud's theory that disgust is a reaction-formation obscuring sexual desire would insist upon its combined aversion and attraction. (Perhaps the old oxymoron »negative pleasure« had its roots in the obscurity of this issue.)

We can elaborate the difficulty of resolving the ambiguities of attraction

³⁷ Carroll, op.cit., chapter 4. Compare Kant's critique of Burke: fear cannot be a component of sublime pleasure, because once the fear is overcome it brings relief and the desire never to experience *that* again. Kant jettisons all fear from the encounter with the sublime, whereas Burke retains it in the notion of sublime delight, which always teeters on the brink of terror and sustains both a positive and negative affective valence.

³⁸ See the exchange among Carroll, Alex Neill, and Susan Feagin in *Philosophical Studies* 65 (1992) pp. 53-90.

and aversion in objects of disgust by noticing how a similar theme occurs in fairy tales – the enchanted frog who in amphibian form must be embraced by the maiden before resuming his royal countenance, or the loathsome Laidly Worm who must be kissed by the returning adventurer Childe Wynde, whose touch of the revolting monster (which is more of a dragon than a worm) restores the form of his beloved sister. These examples tantalize with the balance of pleasure and pain they indicate – for the worm is a hideous and fearsome creature, but the enchanted girl trapped within is an object of love. In these tales it is somewhat easier to separate elements of attraction and aversion, for they are externalized and personified as frog and prince, worm and sister. However, frog and prince are only extensionally identical. If they were entirely the same, one would get no credit for kissing a frog and would not merit the standard reward of living happily ever after. The story trades on the duality of – and possibly oscillation between – love and aversion, disgust and affection. Moreover, this comparison points out a further ambiguity in the pleasure question: If there is pleasure in aesthetic disgust, is it pleasure in the *object* that arouses disgust, or an enjoyment of the *feeling* itself? Given that intentional objects are constituents of emotions, this is an even more difficult distinction to draw than that between frogs and princes. But it directs our attention to the right place: to the various contexts and objects that occasion and constitute disgust. Whether there is one »mental event« here (a combination of pleasure and pain) or two (separate pleasures and pains co-existing), is impossible to determine with exactitude and probably differs from occurrence to occurrence. What is clear is that something about aesthetic disgust invites one to repeat the experience, not to flee from it as a simple aversion. It may be grimly pleasurable, it may be awful but valuable for its meaning and consequence. Or both. Much depends on the particular object of aesthetic disgust.

Some art works without narrative seem rather compellingly to require the savorability of aesthetic disgust. (I leave open whether the savor constitutes a pleasure.) Cindy Sherman's photographs, all called »Untitled,« only hint at the sketchiest of narrative contexts. Disgust here cannot be alleviated by the satisfaction of curiosity.³⁹ In fact, curiosity is aroused but thwarted, left in stasis, a permanent unsettled disturbance. The pictures elicit a somewhat inchoate anxiety about the borders of human and non-human, and about personal identity (heightened by the fact that nearly every picture is of Sherman herself). When art enters such territory, it prods at one's sense of self and prompts acute attention to the emotions aroused and what they might disclose about oneself. Sherman's pictures, with their air of the

³⁹ Although Carroll suggests that his solution is appropriate for non-narrative arts as well.

uncanny, the familiar, and the strange, seem to tug at memory and recognition as if to pull to the surface something deeply buried. They invite an inward-directed account of their power that probes deep into the recesses of the mind, suggesting a psychology of disgust that invokes regions of the unconscious where deeper elicitors of this emotion lie in wait.

Julia Kristeva regards disgust as an emotion that recognizes the threat of slimy, oozy, life-generating and death-dealing decay, which is not only an offense to the senses but also a threat to identity. Things that disgust represent the overtaking of form by formlessness, of distinction by undifferentiation. They call to mind the tenuousness of our own identity, under siege from the first moments of its formation.⁴⁰ The attraction-aversion duality of disgust in Kristeva's analysis is underwritten by her psychoanalytic framework and her theory of abjection: Each developing consciousness forms its own identity through distinguishing itself from other things. The most primitive stage of the process of self-differentiation, in Kristeva's view, requires separation from the fusion state of pre-natal oneness with the internal matrix of the mother's body. The maternal body lurks beneath consciousness as invitation to regain this state of oneness, and so abjection attracts. But at the same time this invitation is a horrific threat to the formed self that would lose identity were it to succumb to the lure of the abject.

The centrality of the maternal in Kristeva's theory provides a way to understand the eerie attention to gender and the female body of these photographs (*Figure 3*), a prominent feature of Sherman's work that is also found in many other works of the gallery and theater.⁴¹ Indeed, the appropriateness of the concept of abjection for a good deal of contemporary art invites the suspicion that emotions have cultural form and moment, and that we might be playing out an obsession with this particular species of disgust more or less globally in art and entertainment. The confluence of preoccupations with femaleness and the grotesque body affords another way

⁴⁰ To draw what I hope is not too farfetched a comparison: In a way Kristeva's theory partakes of similar virtues and problems as does the solution Kant posed to the pleasure of the sublime. Kant also directed our attention inward away from the raging seas and starry heavens we thought we were enjoying; the proper object of sublimity is our own minds and our awareness of the supersensible dimension of reason that gives rise to the autonomous moral will. The unsympathetic might find Kant's sublime a bit self-congratulatory.

⁴¹ See Laura Mulvey, »Cosmetics and Abjection: Cindy Sherman 1977-87,« in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Indiana University Press, 1996). Barbara Creed, op. cit., makes interesting use of Kristeva in her film analysis. See also Claire Kahane, »Freud's Sublimation: Disgust, Desire and the Female Body,« *American Imago* 49:4 (Winter, 1992) 411-426. See also the Lacanian analysis of disgust of Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) esp. pp. 76-79; 132-136.

to discern disgust as a culture-creating passion. A response that appears hard-wired and natural emerges in art at a particular time in history with a prevalence and intensity that far exceeds deliberate manipulation of the theory employed on its account.

However, all the independent interest of disgust itself, the grisly titillation of horror and science fiction, the difficult epiphanies that ensue, the intellectual recreation, and the occasional sheer fun of disgust, should not obscure the fact that the function of aesthetic disgust is often – perhaps most often – fraught with grave moral significance. Disgust alienates; it may both prompt and block sympathy; it evokes scorn and contempt as well as pity, and it certainly provokes fear, for the ills to which the flesh is prey are handed out at random. This is another way that the disgusting object represents a threat, for it presents the discomfort that we ourselves may become disgusting,



*Figure 3: Cindy Sherman,
»Untitled #160« (1986)
Courtesy the artist and
Metro Pictures.*

at least for that interlude before one becomes nothing at all. Befitting its modular character, disgust is very difficult to interrupt, and it can be deployed in art – and in life as well – both to evoke compassion and to ostracize. Aesthetic disgust in contexts that are tragic or otherwise difficult is rarely ambiguous in its affective valence, for appreciative understanding requires arousal of these emotions in their purely painful forms. Many scenes of Steven Spielberg's movie *Schindler's List*, for example, evoke difficult emotions, including disgust, in the course of appreciating its complex narrative. One unforgettable shot shows a child in the concentration camp at Plaszow hiding from the military detail which is rounding up inmates and shipping them to Auschwitz. He has desperately sought a hiding place by crawling down one of the barracks toilets. We see him awash in a pond of human excrement, which has splashed across his nose and mouth. The scene is difficult to endure, and the disgust evoked is one of an indispensable sequence of aesthetic emotions aroused by this film. This disgust matches its painful character as aversive response, and because this is a child, an utter innocent, disgust summons attendant emotions of pity, anger on his behalf, and dreadful hope that he will not be discovered. But it might have had a different effect, for when one becomes disgusting to others, it can take supererogatory effort to overcome the aversion and muster compassion. We may think again of Philoctetes, who although a hero had the misfortune to tread on forbidden ground, suffered his unhealable wound, and became an object so disgusting that no one would come near him. Disgust is a powerful and treacherous emotion. Sensitive to danger, it becomes itself a dangerous affective state, causing us to reject and degrade objects that we find disgusting.

Though for the sake of simplicity I have tried to focus my discussion on disgust as a response to art, sometimes I have slid into consideration of this emotion as it is experienced in real circumstances. Some such slippage is inevitable; aesthetic emotions have moral salience both in and out of art. As we have seen, the border between imitation and reality, art and life, is thin and permeable at many sensitive points. Especially with an emotion such as disgust, the boundary can drop away altogether. Disgust incorporates its objects so deeply into consciousness that they become components of visceral, bodily aversion, thereby dramatizing the potency with which such emotions attach us to the world.

Martin Jay
*Drifting into Dangerous Waters:
The Separation of Aesthetic Experience from
the Work of Art*

Modernization, runs a familiar story, is typified by the increasing differentiation of value spheres, each with its own immanent logic and relative autonomy. Initially expressed in philosophical terms by Kant, whose three critiques neatly divide the mental world into cognitive, ethical and aesthetic realms, the process was given sociological grounding in the writings of Max Weber, who explored the institutional underpinnings of the differentiation based on specialization of function and the creation of separate cultures of expertise. In his more recent defense of the project of modernity, Jürgen Habermas has soberly appraised the benefits and costs of the splits among the spheres as well as between them and an allegedly prior lifeworld of unreflective practices out of which the spheres emerged. In the tradition broadly circumscribed by these three names, the differentiation of value spheres is by and large acknowledged as a progressive or at least irreversible process, which has allowed the clarification of theoretical issues and the increased efficiency that often accompanies a division of labor. While what Habermas has called the troubling »colonization« of one realm by another may be problematic, the solution has been the restoration of a balance rather than an overcoming of the distinctions themselves.

Against such a reading, a formidable array of critics has bemoaned the loss of the allegedly integrated world that preceded the split into distinct and incommensurable value spheres. Mobilizing the now familiar rhetoric of dissociation of sensibility, alienation or diremption, these critics yearn to dedifferentiate, or at least render more permeable the boundaries between the spheres. They have sought ways to restore a condition of reconciliation or harmony that they believe once existed or at least posit it as a normative goal for a future in which the putative wounds of modern life would be healed. What has become transcendent and abstract, they hope to restore to immanent concreteness, and perhaps in so doing reenchant a world from which meaning seems to have fled or retreated into isolated enclaves. Even those critics normally placed in the postmodernist camp, who dismiss such a quest as little more than nostalgia for an imaginary prelapsarian bliss that never obtained and never will, are no less hostile to the alleged autonomy

and self-sufficiency of the three value spheres, whose boundaries and limits they eagerly transgress or rather claim are always already self-transgressed.

In what follows, I do not want to add another round to this now familiar debate, which has taken many different forms and at times spilled out over the walls of the academy to inspire fervent movements of cultural, religious and political renewal. Instead, I want to hone in on one corner of it, in which a differentiation within a differentiation has taken place. That is, I want to examine the consequences within the aesthetic sphere of the distinction between works or objects of art and what has come to be called »aesthetic experience.« I will have to ask your indulgence for not attempting a serious analysis of what might count as an object or work of art, itself a distinction that cannot be entirely ignored. I simply don't have the time to rehearse the debates generated by Nelson Goodman's path-breaking *Languages of Art* with its opposition of »autographic« and »allographic« works, the former understood as singular, material objects, like paintings, with claims to authenticity based on their production history, the latter as ideal objects, like musical compositions or works of literature, with the ability to generate an infinity of valid instantiations.¹ Nor will I be able to consider the further refinement between immanent and transcendent works recently introduced by Gérard Genette, the former implying identity between the work and its material instantiation (or, if allographic, instantiations), the latter suggesting the ways in which works can exceed those instantiations and produce plural aesthetic effects.² I will simply take as given the heuristic usefulness of the distinction between art object, however it may be defined, and the experience it generates. In so doing, I hope to provide some insight into the dangers involved when either the differentiations of modernity become too firmly reified or conversely when the desire to overcome them results in a problematic confusion or conflation of categories, leading to that drift into dangerous waters suggested by my title.

Although an awareness of the specificity of a variant of experience that might be called aesthetic has been discerned as far back as Pythagoras, it was perhaps not until the 19th century that the center of gravity in aesthetic discourse decisively shifted from the idea of beauty assumed to reside in objects in the world to the experiences of the humans who responded to them. The shift was evidenced, *inter alia*, by the ascendancy of psychological accounts of that experience in the scientific work of Gustav Fechner and others

¹ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, 1968).

² Gérard Genette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Ithaca, 1997).

in the 1860's and the general cult of experience in the so-called »philosophies of life« later in the century, in which intensity of experience (in the sense of vital *Erlebnis*, rather than cognitive or dialectical *Erfahrung*) was the highest value.³ The ground, however, was already laid in the 18th century with the development of a distinct branch of philosophical discourse focusing on »art,« a generic category under which all of the separate Muses were subsumed.⁴ That discourse, it is often noted, emerged at a time when objects that had previously been revered as sacred and played a role in religious worship or were appreciated as emblems of social or political power were redescribed and newly legitimated as works possessing purely artistic value. As Hegel was among the first to point out in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, the cadavers of dead cults could be revived through redescription as living works of art. No longer expected to imitate an ideal world, illustrate a mythic story, or recreate a historical event, they could be justified in self-referential terms privileging form over content or function. The recontextualization of such objects in the heterotopic, atemporal space of the public museum, the classical example being the transformation of the palace of the Louvre during the French Revolution into a repository of the nation's cultural patrimony, accompanied and abetted the new discourse, which also emerged in the wake of an accelerated market for objects of beauty by private collectors outside of the aristocracy or church. Concomitant with the change was the new distinction between a fine artist and merely skilled artisan, neatly symbolized by the decision to exclude engravers from the newly created Royal Academy of the Arts in London in 1768.

These aspects of the story have been widely remarked. What is perhaps less frequently realized is that at virtually the same moment that freshly redefined artworks were being freed from their entanglement in religious, political or utilitarian contexts, allowed to circulate in a new network of value, at once cultural and economic, and housed in secular temples of culture open to the people, they were paradoxically losing their integrity as self-sufficient entities in the world, definable in intrinsic terms as objective exemplars of universal beauty. In the vocabulary made familiar by Walter Benjamin, this loss meant the progressive dissipation of the cultic aura that

³ See the discussion in Władysław Tatarkiewicz, »Aesthetic Experience: The Early History of the Concept,« *Dialectics and Humanism*, 1 (1973); and »Aesthetic Experience: the Last Stages in the History of a Concept,« *Dialectics and Humanism*, 1 (1974). The importance of the »philosophy of life« is argued in Richard Shusterman, »The End of Aesthetic Experience,« *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55, 1 (1997), p. 29.

⁴ For a recent discussion of the problematic implications of that generic subsumption, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, Ca., 1996).

surrounded such entities, an aura predicated on the presence of a unique object that was distant and distinct from the beholder. Although it is undeniable that some of the numinous atmosphere clinging to sacred objects was transferred to certain fetishized works of elite art, whose cultural capital was accordingly high, the philosophical legitimation of that transfer tacitly abandoned the claim that such objects possessed an aesthetic version of the religious notion of »real presence,« an incarnation of ultimate value that was prior to the beholder's response to it. In a context of increased openness to cultural difference, which mirrored the uneven, but widening toleration of religious pluralism and appreciation of geographical diversity, absolute and universal hierarchies of beauty were harder to maintain. The classical standards of a Boileau, confidently grounded in an objectivist belief in the order of nature, were challenged by the »sentimentalism« of a Dubos, who focused instead on the feelings of those who responded to specific works.⁵ Increasingly, in fact, 18th-century aesthetic theory shifted attention to the experience of that beholder or the community of beholders. As David Hume famously put it in his essay »Of the Standard of Taste,« »beauty is no quality in the things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.«⁶

The Greek *aisthesis*, the origin of the Latin word *Aesthetica* used by Alexander Baumgarten for his two-volume work of 1750 and 1758, implied gratifying corporeal perception, the subjective sensual response to objects rather than objects themselves. One of its antithetical terms was *noesis*, which signified pure conceptual thought separated from the senses. Another was *poiesis*, the active making of objects artistic or otherwise. Some of that activism may have been retained in the ancillary notion of taste, with its connotation

⁵ For a still useful account of the transition, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Boston, 1955), chapter 7.

⁶ David Hume, »Of the Standard of Taste,« in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 230. Later in the essay, Hume does retreat from the anarchic implications of this statement and asserts the likelihood that »the principles of taste [are] nearly, if not entirely the same in all men,« (p. 241), but adds that few are educated to realize what they are. Here in a nutshell, we have the perennial problem of reconciling Hume's skeptical side with his naturalist one. For a good short account of his thoughts on aesthetics, see Peter Jones, »Hume's Literary and Aesthetic Theory,« in David Fate Norton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* (Cambridge, 1992). He underscores the importance of social context and conventions in Hume's account of judgment. For a defense of his position against Kant's, see George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1996).

of tactile intervention in the world,⁷ which implied experience as experimentation. But even here the emphasis was on the emotional, even irrational reception of art epitomized by the »je ne sais quoi« attitude of ineffability that became emblematic of the retreat from conceptualization and production. As John Dewey was later to note with chagrin, the very concept of the »aesthetic,« when set apart from the overlapping, but not equivalent term »artistic,« tends to render experience as »appreciative, perceiving and enjoying,«⁸ rather than productive or creative. Although the discourse concerning aesthetic judgment that culminated in Kant's third *Critique* went beyond the passive and conventionalist subjectivism of taste represented by Hume and sought more universal criteria, it too focused on the response rather than the object *per se*. Kant did, to be sure, provide an account of the genius who created without criteria – a productive correlate of the beholder, who, as we will see, judges without them as well – the main emphasis of his aesthetics was on reception.⁹

This is not the place to trace the complex ways in which the concept of aesthetic experience was developed by such Enlightenment theorists as Baumgarten, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Kames and Kant, or to untangle the web of meanings surrounding the crucial term »taste,« but a few central points need to be made.¹⁰ First, whether the ground of aesthetic experience was assumed to be an innate capacity, an unmediated, non-rule-bound sense of what was beautiful comparable to an inbred moral sentiment, as it was for the neo-Platonist Shaftesbury, or understood instead to derive from purely empirical encounters with the world, as the more skeptical Hume believed, it was irreducible to a mere recording of what was intrinsically there in objects deemed artistic or beautiful. The same conclusion was shared

⁷ For a discussion of the origins of taste in these terms, see Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgment* (Oxford 1989), chapter 2.

⁸ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, 1934), p. 47.

⁹ It is true that what Kant called »productive imagination« plays a role in aesthetic appreciation, as it does in normal cognition, albeit under the guidance of the understanding. But what was produced was a mental synthesis, not an active intervention in the world. For a discussion of its importance, see Michael R. Neville, »Kant's Characterization of Aesthetic Experience,« *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 33, 2 (Winter, 1974), p. 197.

¹⁰ For useful accounts, see Dabney Townsend, »From Shaftesbury to Kant: The Development of the Concept of Aesthetic Experience,« *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48/2 (April-June, 1987), pp. 287-305; and Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1982). For a more general history, foregrounding the questionable political implications of aesthetic discourse, see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990).

by those who saw the source of the aesthetic sense in personal psychology, communal, intersubjective consensus, or the more philosophically grounded »reflective judgment« that had been posited by Kant as a way to get beyond the apparent antinomy of taste, at once personal and universal. In all of these cases, the stress was on the one or ones who did the experiencing rather than on the intrinsic qualities of the object that was experienced. »The beautiful,« as Kant would argue, appeared only as the predicate of a judgment, not as a quality of an object. In some ways reminiscent of the epistemological limits on knowing objects in themselves, whether couched in the Empiricist vocabulary of lacking access to primary as opposed to secondary qualities or the transcendental Idealist vocabulary of unknowable noumena, the object as such was less important than its aesthetic appreciation or enjoyment. Here too a kind of »Copernican revolution,«¹¹ to cite the famous metaphor identified with Kant's first *Critique*, took place in which ontological or axiological questions were subordinated to those concerning the epistemological or, in this case, aesthetic subject. Objects were admired not for what they were in themselves, but for what they could do to us. The telos of this Copernican reversal was an increasing indifference to the object as such, perhaps even extending to its very existence.

Before that endpoint was reached, and this is the second point worth emphasizing, the sensual pleasure produced by the object in aesthetic experience had to be distinguished from that enjoyed in other relations between self and world. As early as Johannes Scotus Erigena's 9th-century »De divisione naturae,« the spectatorial, non-instrumental nature of the aesthetic attitude had attracted attention.¹² Although one might also covet the same objects for what a later age would call their commodity or exchange value, they were appreciated qua objects of art only from a more lofty point of view. Rejecting the egocentric anthropology of a Hobbes, Shaftesbury stressed the fallacy of reducing everything to the question of private interest or need. Instead, and this was related to his belief that aesthetic experience was intertwined with civic virtue and moral sentiment, »disinterested« benevolence was its crucial characteristic.¹³

¹¹ Whether or not the metaphor, which in this precise form did not appear in Kant, adequately describes the innovations of the *Critique of Pure Reason* need not concern us now. For a skeptical account of its applicability, see Robert Hahn, *Kant's Newtonian Revolution in Philosophy* (Carbondale, 1988).

¹² See the discussion in Tatarkiewicz, »Aesthetic Experience: The Early History of the Concept,« p. 23. Jauss points to other examples of medieval anticipations of aesthetic experience, which produce anxiety because they are linked with idle curiosity about the world rather than immersion in the word of God. See *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, p. 4.

It was, of course, in Kant's aesthetic theory that the concept of disinterestedness was fully articulated. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant claimed that our ability to experience pleasure took three forms. The first he called the »agreeable« or »the pleasant« (*das Angenehme*), which was caused directly by sensual stimulation. It involved a purely private and subjective response of attraction and aversion, without any meaningful cognitive or intersubjective dimension. Here the individual body with all its appetites and antipathies was the arbiter, not a cultural or universal norm. Personal gratification or lack thereof was all that mattered. The second variety connected pleasure to the question of the »good.« That is, we can derive »delight in the good« (*das Wohlgefallen am Guten*) through working for and achieving a beneficent goal, which is set by ideas and principles external to sensual gratification. In this case there is always a functional or utilitarian dimension to our pleasure, which is not an end in itself. The real end is the good that is realized, not the pleasure we have in realizing it, although that pleasure may be a subsidiary part of our motivation as well.

The third form of pleasure (*das Wohlgefallen am Schönen*), Kant argued, is what we can properly call aesthetic. As in the case of the »agreeable,« the senses play a role and the body is involved, but with a crucial difference. Whereas in the former the object that produces the pleasure must actually exist – we cannot find a meal pleasant unless there is real food on the table – in the latter, it may not. Or more precisely, our perception of the aesthetic object, and its intrinsic properties or qualities need not coincide, as they must with an agreeable meal (food may look appetizing, but it must taste good to bring us genuine pleasure). Because of this distinction, we have no direct interest in the object, only in its representation or semblance. Or to be still more precise, since the media of representations can themselves be understood as objects (a gold statue is, after all, made of a substance whose value we find difficult to forget), what is important is a certain kind of experience of it. Our pleasure in beauty, in short, is disinterested because we are indifferent to the actual object, which is not itself an object of direct sensual desire. We are no longer immersed in being – *inter-esse*, as the etymology of the word »interest« suggests – but rather somehow outside it. We enjoy an aesthetic meal, as it were, without having to taste and swallow the food, as in the case of certain variants of nouvelle cuisine in which visual more than gustatory pleasure, let alone actual nutrition, seems the main purpose of what is on the plate. It is the same disinterestedness that permits

¹³ For a history of the concept, see Jerome Stolnitz, »On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'« *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XX, 2 (Winter, 1961), pp. 131-143.

the transformation of the lust-arousing naked human form into the idealized, marmoreal nude and allows us to distinguish between pornography and high art (both of which may be representations of real objects, but are differentiated according to our interest or disinterest in their referents as objects of desire).

Aesthetic experience is, however, also akin to the second form of pleasure in its going beyond pre-conceptual sensual gratification or remaining on the level of what Kant dismissively called the mere »egoism of taste.« Aesthetic experience mobilizes cognitive powers, synthesizing transformations of pure sensation evolve into truth or at least value claims, which are then assumed to have universal validity. But it does so without subsuming specific cases under discursive rules, a priori categories or general principles, as is the case with the determinant judgments of the understanding. The latter seem to come from above, as if through the coercive dictates of a ruler. In contrast, aesthetic judgments, singular rather than categorical, are allowed a kind of unhierarchical, free play in which universal claims of beauty can be made by each of us on the basis of analogical and paradigmatic rather than subsumptive or deductive reasoning. We move from particular to particular rather than from universal to particular, as was the case with the synthetic a priori judgments of cognition discussed in the first *Critique*. The concepts involved are thus »indeterminate« because they cannot be expressed in schematic form, as can the cognitive concepts of the understanding. They appeal to a virtual *sensus communis*, an intersubjective community which is to be made, not simply found, as innatist neo-Platonists like Shaftesbury had thought possible. A crucial aspect of disinterestedness for Kant – although not, as we shall see, for the devotees of *l'art pour l'art* – was precisely this assumption that aesthetic judgments evoked an enjoyment and appreciation that was not just one's own, but that could be shared by all. To the extent that judgment was an inherent dimension of aesthetic experience, and not something added to it after the initial response of the senses, disinterestedness had this crucial communicative implication, which was lacking in expressions of idiosyncratic taste.

What also distinguishes aesthetic experience, Kant argued, from the delight in the good, where practical outcomes are sought, is the intrinsic nature of the purposes involved, which are akin to the immanent telos of play rather than work, whose end is a transformation of the world. Kant's celebrated definition of art as »purposiveness without purpose« was designed precisely to set it apart from those activities in which extrinsic purposes dominate and real objects are there to be produced, consumed, possessed or exchanged.

Whether or not the distinction between determinant and reflective judgments really solves the riddle of the antinomy of taste, at once subjective and objective, or provides a useful model for intersubjective consensus rather than merely an ideological simulacrum of one, are not questions I want to address now. Nor do I want to rehearse the debate over whether or not aesthetic judgment and experience are based on a purely psychological concept of the beholding self or a more logically generated one, comparable in some ways to the transcendental, synthesizing self introduced in the first *Critique* to provide a foundation for epistemology. I am equally reluctant to take sides in the argument over the extent to which Kant's position can be reduced to nothing but a defense of an aesthetic attitude or mental state, which has exercised commentators like Jerome Stolnitz, George Dickie and Mary McClosky.¹⁴

What I want to do instead is focus on the implications of disinterestedness for the art object, which must be distinguished from objects in general, and the larger question of the differentiation of value spheres in modernity. For although aesthetic judgments are normally made by means of a rhetoric of objectivity – »'The Mona Lisa' is a beautiful painting,« not »I think it is a beautiful painting« – Kant stresses that it is the subject who is really the source of the judgment. Objectivity, as one of Kant's recent interpreters Eva Schaper has pointed out, is merely an »as-if« concept in his understanding of aesthetics.¹⁵ That is, such judgments act as if they were directed at objects, but those objects are never analyzable for Kant entirely in intrinsic terms, and become important solely for what they produce in their beholder. Or as another student of the *Critique of Judgment*, John Zammito puts it, »While Kant stresses the degree to which the subject is affected (*affiziert*) in the experience, nevertheless it is striking how not merely the object but even the representation of the object shifts far into the background. Its form serves as the occasion, becomes at most a catalyst, for a complex subjective response.«¹⁶

It is often argued, as we have seen, that the nature of that response is inherently contemplative, passive and spectatorial, distancing the self from

¹⁴ See, for example, Jerome Stolnitz, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston, 1960); George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic* (Ithaca, 1974); Mary A. McClosky, *Kant's Aesthetics* (London, 1987). There were many other issues in the long-running debate between Stolnitz and Dickie. For a useful overview, see Peter J. McCormick, *Modernity, Aesthetics, and the Bounds of Art* (Ithaca, 1990), pp. 147-157.

¹⁵ Eva Schaper, *Studies in Kant's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh, 1979), chapter 6. The concept of »as-if« is, of course, taken from Hans Vaihinger, but Schaper wants to restrict it to aesthetic judgments, not to the cognitive ones discussed in Kant's first *Critique*.

¹⁶ John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago, 1992), p. 113.

the world and our appetite to possess or consume it. Although this primarily visual characterization may seem an odd way to describe ways in which some art can seize us and invade our interiority – an experience perhaps most obviously undergone in aural terms when listening to music – even here the subject may not always be actively and productively engaged in intervening in the world. Attentive listening, as James Johnson has recently shown,¹⁷ was an acquired skill in the 18th century based on the suppression of the kinesthetic body and the concentration of faculties on only one sensory input. The experience of passive listening was carefully segregated from that of dancing or communal singing as the ear was educated to have contemplative aesthetic experiences. The public concert hall worked like the museum to deracinate works that had their origins in the church or aristocratic chamber, turning them into what 19th-century aestheticians like Eduard Hanslick would call »absolute music.« In literature as well, the habit of looking for actual personal references in concocted narratives had to be lost and what Catherine Gallagher has called »nobody's story,« the realization of acknowledgedfictionality, put in its place before the novel could come into its own.¹⁸

There is, in short, no practical or possessive intention realized in the act of listening, reading or beholding qua aesthetic experience. We may, to be sure, also want to own the object for its value in the marketplace or because of our passion to collect, but this is not the same as a purely aesthetic response. The possibility of that experience may be situated in an institutional context or cultural field, as philosophers like George Dickie and sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu have argued,¹⁹ but the experience itself cannot be reduced to a mere reflex of that enabling context. For it entails precisely the distance from extrinsic functionality that such reductionism wishes to impose on it from without. It is for this reason that Habermas can claim in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* that »the problem of grounding modernity out of itself first comes into consciousness in the realm of aesthetic criticism.«²⁰

¹⁷ James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1995).

¹⁸ Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Woman Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley, 1994).

¹⁹ George Dickie, *Aesthetics* (Indianapolis, 1971); and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed., Randal Johnson (New York, 1993). For a critique of Dickie, see Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Cambridge, Mass, 1990, pp. 38-41. For a critique of Bourdieu, see Paul Crowther, »Sociological Imperialism and the Field of Cultural Production: The Case of Bourdieu,« *Theory, Culture and Society*, 11, 1 (1994).

²⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), p. 10.

This is not, to be sure, to deny that the boundaries of aesthetic experience themselves may not be entirely impermeable. Recent scholarship has stressed how the third *Critique* itself struggled to find a way to bridge the gap between cognitive and moral judgments and their aesthetic counterpart.²¹ The larger project of the third *Critique* was, after all, to explore the ways in which nature could be understood teleologically rather than mechanistically, thus going beyond the rigid limitations on knowledge set by the first *Critique*. The purposiveness in art could thus be found in nature as well, which suggested a possible reunification of the varieties of reason. »Beauty,« Kant also went on to claim, could be understood as »the symbol of morality,«²² because of its emphasis on purposiveness without extrinsic purposes, which was parallel to the moral ideal of treating every person as an end itself implied by the categorical imperative. Although the link between art and ethics could not be established discursively, drawing on rational arguments, it could be suggested symbolically and analogically. In both cases, the self-reflective subject had to achieve a certain distance to allow judgment to occur. Even more decisively, that dimension of aesthetic experience Kant followed Longinus in calling »the sublime« provided a link with the noumenal origins of practical reason, because it got us in touch with supersensible realities that could not be grasped by synthetic a priori judgments, helping produce a feeling of respect for the moral law that was also beyond cognitive understanding. Here the objective correlate to our feelings is even more remote than it is in the case of the beautiful, as the paradoxical attempt to represent the unrepresentable is the essence of the sublime, which registers both the grandeur and the futility of the quest.

How successful Kant's *Critique of Judgment* actually was in reintegrating what his earlier work had seemed so powerfully to split asunder is, of course, a matter of some dispute; the entire subsequent history of German Idealism suggests that at least his immediate successors thought it was a failure. Beginning as early as Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, they sought to reunite art with the other spheres in the hope of reenchanted life, a project that continued well into the 20th century with not much success to show for it. It has often been remarked that when Kant's ideas were vulgarized in the 19th century, as they were by certain French philosophers like Victor Cousin, they could easily be taken to countenance the opposite conclusion, the extreme aesthetic separatism that became the mark of the *l'art pour l'art*

²¹ See in particular, Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* in which he discusses what he calls the »cognitive and ethical turn« in the third *Critique*.

²² This was the title of §59 of the third *Critique*.

movement.²³ With Schopenhauer's 1818 *World as Will and Representation*, aesthetic experience was reduced to the attitude of non-practical contemplation, a way to fend off, at least temporarily, the meaninglessness of the world.²⁴ Perhaps one of the reasons for this outcome was the difficulty of reconciling the disinterestedness of aesthetic experience – now understood without the public, communicative moment Kant had attributed to it²⁵ – with the interested qualities of both its cognitive and moral counterparts. In the case of the former, it was impossible to suspend for very long our interested involvement with the world, which gratified or frustrated our corporeal needs and desires. In the case of the latter, real objects or at least other human beings were necessary to test our will to act morally and be involved in the world of practical consequences. As Paul Crowther has noted, »for Kant the burden of emphasis in moral existence falls on obstacles and responsibilities in relation to the expression of freedom. In aesthetic experience it does not.... Hence, whilst the pure aesthetic judgment might figure in a moral image of the world, it could just as easily, if not more so, incline us to a life of self-indulgent or indolent contemplation, wherein the demands of moral duty were the least of our preoccupations.«²⁶ There was, in other words, a certain tension between the aristocratic leisurely premises of aesthetic disinterestedness – the ability to see a beautiful landscape where peasants toiling in the fields could only see recalcitrant soil – and the moral imperative to treat everyone as an end in him/or herself.

But whether or not a successful reintegration of the three spheres was achieved by Kant or anyone else, the tacit uncoupling of aesthetic experience from the art object within the sphere of the aesthetic allowed a problematic slippage between spheres that is the real subject of this paper. Schematically put, there were two implications that could be drawn from the withdrawal of emphasis on beauty in the object itself in favor of subjective or

²³ See John Wilcox, »The Beginnings of *l'art pour l'art*,« *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 11 (June, 1953), and Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Art for Art's Sale and Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology and Culture of Aestheticism, 1790-1990* (Lincoln, Neb., 1996).

²⁴ For an account of the debates concerning the reduction of experience to attitude initiated by Schopenhauer, see Bohdan Dziemidok, »Controversy about Aesthetic Attitude: Does Aesthetic Attitude Condition Aesthetic Experience?,« in Michael H. Mitias, ed., *Possibility of Aesthetic Experience* (Amsterdam, 1986).

²⁵ According to Jauss, »as the new ideal of aesthetic pleasure, self-enjoying subjectivity abandoned the *sensus communis* as the expression of a sociable sympathy at the same moment the aesthetics of genius finally replaced the aesthetics of rhetoric.« *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, p. 26.

²⁶ Paul Crowther, »The Significance of Kant's Pure Aesthetic Judgment,« *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 36, 2 (April, 1996), p. 118.

intersubjective response. One, to which we have already alluded, was the progressive obliteration of the object, which paralleled the disappearance of the thing-in-itself in post-Kantian epistemology. Not only was the real world referent of the artwork bracketed in the service of pure fictionality, so too the materiality of the representation itself was often suppressed and forgotten. The second and seemingly opposite implication was the indiscriminate elevation of all objects into potential works of art, depending on the attitude of their beholder. In either case, the specificity of the work of art as such was undermined. Let me take each tendency in turn. Technologies of simulacral mechanical reproduction like photography and the cinema may have abetted the first outcome, leading to what has been called the »immaterialization of reality,«²⁷ but it was already foreshadowed, I want to argue, in the privileging of disinterestedness in aesthetic theory. For an object that was prohibited from soliciting any desire or interest, an object that could never be possessed or consumed, was an object that would ultimately squander its power to engage the very corporeal response that *aisthesis* had sought to explore. Further erosion followed from the leveling of the distinction between works of art and their critical reception, a tendency that culminated in deconstruction's pan-textualist breaching of the boundary between *ergon* and *parergon* (work and frame). By 1981, the literary critic Murray Krieger could loudly lament in a work called *Arts on the Level* the »obliteration of the realm of art, its objects, its museums...everything immersed within the indivisible flood of experience.«²⁸

In the visual arts, the same alarm bell was sounded a few years earlier in Michael Fried's celebrated and controversial essay »Art and Objecthood.«²⁹ According to Fried, the specificity of pictures as such was being undermined by a new literalness, which foregrounded the anti-illusionist, material support of the flat canvas, and a style of beholding he called »theatrical.« By the latter, he meant an indifference to the specific media of the separate arts and a willingness to privilege the experience of the beholder over time rather than the art object itself. The often cited example he gave of the new sensibility was an account given by the artist Tony Smith of a car ride he had taken on the New Jersey turnpike, in which he realized that traditional art was dead. In Fried's gloss, the result was that »the experience alone is what matters.«³⁰

²⁷ Paul Crowther, *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* (Oxford, 1993), p. 18. See also Arthur Danto, *The State of the Art* (New York, 1987).

²⁸ Murray Krieger, *Arts on the Level: The Fall of the Elite Object* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1981), p. 56.

²⁹ Originally published in 1967, it is included with other essays of that period and a long introduction answering subsequent criticism in Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Review* (Chicago, 1998).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Fried's fierce resistance to this trend was not very successful, as he would be the first to admit. If postmodernism has meant anything, it has meant a further erosion of the integrity of the work of art.

When the Minimalist art Fried bemoaned was joined by an even less pictorial Conceptual Art, the radical potential of leveling was still more powerfully realized. Artists like Joseph Kosuth or Michael Asher abandoned the materiality of the work entirely in favor of a textual surrogate (with only a residue of the acknowledgment that inscribed texts can themselves be treated as material objects). Marcel Duchamp's readymades, in which random objects from everyday life rather than ones designed by artistic intention and fashioned by artistic talent were imbued with artistic value by the fiat of the artist, was a way-station to this end. Duchamp's famous visual indifference, his disdain for mere »retinal« pleasure, meant that not only the art object was being obliterated, but so too was the sensual dimension of aesthetic experience, which became a more cerebral, theoretically driven game like the chess he began playing seriously in the 1920's as an alternative to producing – or rather designating – even readymade works of art. Here, ironically, the end of aesthetics turned out to be a kind of anaesthesia in which not only the object stimulating the senses had vanished, but so too were the senses it was supposed to effect. Hegel's notorious claim that philosophy would and should replace art seemed fulfilled by this outcome.

Duchamp's elevation of urinals, snow shovels and bottle racks into objects worthy of being included in the sacred space of the museum was, however, more than a parodic gesture mocking the pretensions of art objects to possess inherent qualities of beauty, more than a denial of the pleasure of the gaze, more than a victory of the concept over the image. From a different angle, it exemplifies the second main implication that could be and was drawn from the privileging of aesthetic experience over art objects, which involved the drifting I have invoked in my title. That is, rather than debunking art by bringing it down to the level of ordinary life, using, as Duchamp provocatively recommended, »The Mona Lisa« as an ironing board, it could seek to elevate life by bringing it up to the putative level of art. In other words, it could promote the promiscuous reenchantment of the entire world, the »transfiguration of the commonplace,«³¹ as if any object or event, however mean, were a legitimate occasion for aesthetic experience. As Jauss has noted, »aesthetic experience does not seem to develop 'organically,' on a field of its own, but to progressively expand and maintain its area of meaning at the expense of bordering experiences of reality, and this by usurpations and

³¹ Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

compensations, the crossing of boundaries, the offer of competing solutions.³² The result was a leveling up rather than down, a conflation of representation with reference, a kind of imperialism of aesthetic sublimation in which every object could be redeemed in aesthetic terms.

Duchamp himself, to be sure, would have scoffed at so lofty a program, but by lowering the threshold of what could be construed as an object of aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment (or at least their conceptual counterpart), he was drawing on, if in some ways also reversing the valence of, a venerable tradition that began as early as the Romantics and continues to our day. It could emerge only when the longstanding disdain for nature as a realm of fallen and debased matter in comparison with elevated spirit was reversed, a transformation that was anticipated by certain heterodox philosophies like Spinoza's pantheism in the 17th century. It was also evident, if in slightly displaced form in social or cultural terms, in that increasing incorporation of formerly »low« subject matter in allegedly »high« art, the democratization of content evident in the genre paintings of early modern Dutch art, the bourgeois, domestic tragedies of the Enlightenment, and most of all the rise of the novel. It was apparent as well in the Romantic incorporation of the fragment, the sketch, and the incomplete or ruined torso into the canon of genuine art. It came into its own with what M. H. Abrams has followed Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* in calling »natural supernaturalism,«³³ the infusing of the natural world with all of the numinous meaning that had hitherto been reserved for transcendent spirit. Now the everyday, the commonplace, could be understood as glowing with immanent significance, or least potentially possessing it through poetic transfiguration, which sought to fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of religious sacralization.³⁴

In a recent work entitled *Into the Light of Things*, George Leonard has traced what he calls the »art of the commonplace« from Wordsworth through Carlyle and Ruskin to John Cage, whose celebrated composition »4'33« imbued even seemingly unmusical silence or more precisely, the ambient noise left when no notes were sounded, with aesthetic value.³⁵ In visual terms,

³² Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, p. 111-112.

³³ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971).

³⁴ This impulse was later to be rechanneled into the quasi-political project of the avant-garde to imbue life with the energies of art, a project whose problematic implications have been foregrounded by Peter Bürger in *Theory of the Avant Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1984).

³⁵ George J. Leonard, *Into the Light: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago, 1994).

Leonard detects a similar transition already taking place between the time of Sir Joshua Reynolds and John Constable. Although he notes that Wordsworth more likely got his anti-hierarchical ideas about aesthetic experience from the English critic Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* of 1790 than directly from Kant, whose German he could not read, the end result was similar. For Alison also argued against elite art objects and in favor of the subjective reaction we can have to anything, however trivial or mundane. Even the sublime, which had been reserved for awesome and unfathomable experiences in the 18th century, could now be applied to the commonplace, just as long as the aesthetic sensibility of the beholder was capable of appreciating it in this manner.

There was, to be sure, an important distinction between natural supernaturalism and the Kantian notion of aesthetic experience, which Leonard does not remark. Whereas the former implied a pantheistic project of reenchanting the world, somehow imbuing it with a secularized religious meaning, Kant had explicitly decried such attempts in his own day. In the famous »Pantheism Controversy,« which divided German intellectuals in the decade after F.H. Jacobi's 1785 attack on Lessing's supposed embrace of Spinozist atheism, he was a fervent critic of the rationalist immanentism implied in the Greek slogan *hen kai pan* (the one is the all) revived by Lessing.³⁶ Kant vigorously resisted what he saw as the determinist implications of that position, which undermined the possibility of human freedom and made practical reason's exercise of will meaningless. He thus never went as far as the natural supernaturalists in reinvesting the world with any kind of aesthetic cum religious »real presence,«³⁷ preserving instead a more orthodox believer's faith in a transcendent God.

But what Kant's stress on the disinterestedness of aesthetic experience did allow, even if unintentionally, was the possibility of having such experiences in the face of objects or events or actions that had not been intended as works of art or deliberately created to provide aesthetic pleasure. In fact, he himself distinctly preferred natural to artificial beauty, the real thing to man-made representations. For this reason, he could be construed as an unwitting precursor of natural supernaturalism. Insofar as this implication was a necessary accompaniment of the redefinition of previously

³⁶ For a good account of Kant's role in the debate, see Zammito, *The Genesis of the Third Critique*, chapters 11 and 12.

³⁷ The urge to do this is still alive, as evidenced by George Steiner's recent book, *Real Presences* (Chicago, 1989), which, to be sure, tries to see art from the point of view of the creator rather than the beholder or critic, and in so doing, stress its links with freedom.

sacred or ornamental objects as purely artistic ones, it produced a valuable disarticulation of the inherent logic of the aesthetic sphere from its cognitive and moral counterparts. The same might be said of the later reevaluation of ritual or utilitarian objects from so-called primitive cultures as objects of formal beauty, which took place during the modernist era. Here too the extension of aesthetic appreciation to cultural artifacts that had hitherto been dismissed as mere examples of less advanced peoples can be accounted an advance in cosmopolitan understanding (however problematic such decontextualization may seem to defenders of the integrity of individual cultures).

But when carried to an indiscriminate extreme, such an extension could lead to a promiscuous aestheticization of the entire world, reducing it to a mere occasion for disinterested subjective pleasure. All objects or events, whether or not they were ever intended as works of art, could be redeemed in aesthetic terms, if they produced an experience that somehow measured up to whatever the common sense of the time called aesthetic. As Jauss notes, »the aesthetic experience of role distance can be intensified and become aestheticism when it is taken up in a real-life situation where the conventions of morality or tact demand a wholly serious involvement. When, for example, a work such as the Isenheim altar is perceived and interpreted solely as a carrier of aesthetic qualities and abstraction is made from everything that makes the representation of the martyrdom shocking, cruel, and thereby exemplary, it is not only a devout sensibility that will be offended. Such an attitude is also inappropriate to the understanding the object itself demands.«³⁸

Perhaps the most troubling implications of this indifference to the qualities of the object were evident in what Walter Benjamin famously called the »aestheticization of politics.« This is not the place to launch a full-fledged rehearsal of its divergent implications, a task I have attempted elsewhere,³⁹ but several points should be made. Benjamin's critique was directed explicitly at what he saw as fascist aestheticized politics, in which human suffering could become an occasion for aesthetic delectation. Most clearly evident in the celebration of war as a spectacle in the work of Futurists like Marinetti, it also appeared in his own day in the threnodies to apocalyptic violence in Ernst Jünger's technological sublime. Perhaps the most frequently cited expression of this attitude was the remark made by the Symbolist poet Laurent Tailhade in reaction to a deadly anarchist bomb thrown into the

³⁸ Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, p. 6.

³⁹ Martin Jay, »The Aesthetic Ideology as Ideology: Or What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics,« *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York, 1993).

French Chamber of Deputies in the 1890's: »N'importe les victimes, si le geste est beau.« Here contemplative disinterestedness was given an especially sinister twist because the object to be »enjoyed« was the destruction of human life. The rigid distinction between aesthetic and ethical values, which derived much of its impetus from a reductive misreading of Kant's third *Critique*, combined with the uncoupling of aesthetic experience from works of art, to countenance what in other spheres would be quickly understood as problematic. That is, in the realm of cognition, epistemological judgments about objects that do not exist are normally called hallucinations or fantasies, and are separated from those that can claim some warrant in the world external to the self. If ethical judgments are applied to behavior or events that have not occurred or that did not involve the exercise of human will, we worry about our inappropriately moralizing what should be understood in different terms. The same caution, it would seem, should apply with regard to aesthetic experience, when it seeks its detached pleasure anywhere it can find it. However much we may applaud the democratic expansion of the realm of art objects beyond the limits of their elite predecessors, however much we may recognize the value of learning to salvage objects that have lost their initial functional purpose in aesthetic terms, it may be wise to acknowledge limits to how far the aesthetic reenchantment of the world can go. The natural supernaturalist project, like all pantheist affirmations of immanence, comes up against the radical evil that exists in the world that it tries to valorize. Although violence can be aesthetically transfigured and represented in works of art – how else could we read with admiration *The Illiad* or stand comfortably before Picasso's *Guernica*?⁴⁰ – when the frame is broken, representation is confused with reference, and unmediated reality becomes fair game for aestheticization, the effect is very different. Aesthetic experience, in short, cannot be entirely freed from a consideration of which objects and events may justifiable evoke it, or else it courts the charge that it produces a theodicy of beauty, which is no less problematic than its ethical counterpart.

Or rather, it cannot avoid that rebuke if we remain within the terms set by the 18th-century's version of that experience. But what if another notion of aesthetic experience could be defended that would avoid the privileging of subject over object and thus avoid the dangers of drifting? One such

⁴⁰ Kant himself makes this point when he notes that at least in one respect man-made art is superior to natural beauty: »Where fine art evidences its superiority is in the beautiful description of things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing. The Furies, diseases, devastations of war, and the like, can (as evils) be very beautifully described, nay even represented in pictures.« *Critique of Judgment*, §48, 5:321.

alternative was, in fact, presented in John Dewey's well-known *Art as Experience*, which has recently been revived in the work of Richard Shusterman, in particular his *Pragmatic Aesthetics* of 1992.⁴¹ Dewey's ire was directed at all aspects of what he took to be the Kantian version of aesthetic experience, which he denounced as the fruit of excessive Enlightenment rationalism with its compartmentalizing mania for categorical distinctions. Against the isolation of aesthetic experience from other variants, he argued for their ultimate integration in an ongoing, participatory interaction between humans and their environment. Against the passive and contemplative notion of aesthetic experience, he argued for an active, practical and productive alternative, which would overcome the gap between artistic creativity and aesthetic reception. Against the tacit elevation of the visual arts through the spectatorial bias of traditional aesthetic theory, he stressed the need to involve the entire sensorium. Against the privileging of disinterestedness and psychological detachment as foundations of the aesthetic attitude, he argued that desire and interest were as integral a part of our sensual encounters with art as with the rest of the world.

But most important for our purposes, against the evisceration of the object in the name of subjective or intersubjective response, he rallied to the defense of the artwork not entirely for itself as an exemplar of a Platonic notion of beauty, but as an integral dimension of aesthetic experience, rightly understood. The extreme separation of organism from world, he argued, »lies behind the idea that esthetic quality does not belong to objects as objects but is projected onto them by mind. It is the source of the definition of beauty as 'objectified pleasure' instead of as pleasure in the object, so much in it that the object and pleasure are one and undivided in the experience.«⁴² »There can be no esthetic experience,« he argued, »apart from an *object*, and that for an object to be the content of esthetic appreciation it must satisfy those *objective* conditions without which cumulation, conservation, reenforcement, transition into something more complete, are impossible.«⁴³

⁴¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, 1934); Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*. See also Shusterman, *Practising Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York, 1997), and »The End of Aesthetic Experience,« and his exchange with Alexander Nehamas in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56, 1 (1998).

⁴² Dewey, *Art and Experience*, p. 248. It is passages like this that allow Shusterman to argue that ultimately Dewey privileges »dynamic aesthetic experience over the fixed material object which our conventional thinking identifies – and then commodifies and fetishizes – as the work of art....art gets defined as 'a quality of experience' rather than a collection of objects or a substantive essence shared only by such objects...« (*Pragmatist Aesthetics*, p. 25).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 146-147.

Whereas a preliminary distinction between self and world may be justified in certain other areas of endeavor, such as natural science, »the uniquely distinguishing feature of esthetic experience is exactly the fact that no such distinction of self and object exists in it, since it is esthetic to the degree in which organism and environment cooperate to institute an experience in which the two are so fully integrated that each disappears.«⁴⁴

Such a disappearance does not, however, betoken the same thing that is implied by the loss of the referential object in 18th-century aesthetic theory or the religious/cum aesthetic reenchantment of the world in the natural supernatural tradition. For although Dewey hoped for the ultimate reconciliation of life and art, he also recognized that it had not yet happened. Therefore, the artwork as object set apart from subject represented a covert protest against the unfulfilled potential for integrated experience in the modern world. The possibility for genuine experience in that world, he paralleled Benjamin and Adorno in lamenting, was severely limited: »Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves many a person, especially in this hurried and impatient human environment in which we live, with experience of an almost incredible paucity, all on the surface. No one experience has a chance to complete itself because something else is entered upon so speedily. What is called experience becomes so dispersed and miscellaneous as hardly to deserve the name.«⁴⁵ The work of art, as Dewey described it, provided a promise of the order, completeness and integration of experience that was missing in everyday life and that was wrongly projected onto the world in its present state.

This argument, which will be familiar in certain respects to those made by the Frankfurt School, must, however, be set against the relatively optimistic expectations of the pragmatist tradition, in which fulfilled experience is now a possibility, despite obstacles that may prevail in the external world. Dewey may perhaps have been a bit too quick to dissolve the distinction between esoteric fine art, the art of museums and concert halls, from life lived aesthetically. As Shusterman has conceded, for Dewey aesthetic experience »could be achieved in virtually any domain of action, since all experience, to be coherent and meaningful, required the germ of aesthetic unity and development. By rethinking art in terms of aesthetic experience, Dewey hoped we could radically enlarge and democratize the domain of art, integrating it more fully into the real world which would be greatly improved by the pursuit of such manifold arts of living.«⁴⁶ As a result, despite its

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Shusterman, »The End of Aesthetic Experience,« p. 33.

laudable intention to redress the balance lost by Kantian aesthetics, the pragmatist attempt to fashion a new notion of experience, including both subject and object in an equiprimordial interaction, may too easily produce the same outcome as that of the natural supernaturalist tradition: the indiscriminate leveling of the distinction between art work and life world through projecting the qualities of the former onto the latter.⁴⁷

To avoid such an outcome, a certain respect for the continued distinction between the two may be required, at least as long as the reintegration remains more a desideratum than a real possibility. Such a distinction would involve acknowledging that works of art, although inevitably intended to produce aesthetic experience in their beholders, somehow exceed that outcome. To honor this difference does not mean fetishizing the elite object or ascetically denigrating any pleasure in the present, as some defenders of aesthetic experience fear.⁴⁸ It entails instead a recognition of the fruitful constellation that keeps subjects and objects irreducible to each other, even as they cannot be understood in isolation. As formed material objects – a characterization more self-evidently true for certain kinds of art than others, but arguably the case for all – artworks resist reduction to nothing but the form-giving or form-appreciating qualities of the creative or receptive subject. In this sense, they preserve the otherness of the nonhuman world that should not be made into a mere occasion for aesthetic delectation as exemplars of natural beauty.

As specifically *art* objects, they resist leveling – either up or down – with other objects in our environment.⁴⁹ The necessarily illusory quality of works

⁴⁷ Although appreciating many aspects of Dewey's approach, Jauss notes that he »assigns the traditional predicates of the beautiful in art to natural phenomena or those belonging to the world of objects. In other words, he projects them onto these phenomena to then demonstrate that they are everyday 'sources' of aesthetic experience....The shortcoming in Dewey's theory is...that it maintains the illusion of the objectively beautiful without tracing the aesthetic quality of the objects and phenomena of the everyday world back to the attitude of the observer.« *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, p. 113.

⁴⁸ This anxiety is evident in Jauss's critique of Adorno as a champion of ascetic Platonism in *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*. For a different view, which shows the importance of experience in Adorno's work, see Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), chapter I. That the rigid separation of aesthetic from other kinds of pleasure in the Kantian tradition can itself be accused of asceticism from a Frankfurt School position is demonstrated in Robin May Schott, *Cognition and Eros: A Critique of the Kantian Paradigm* (Boston, 1988), chapter 11.

⁴⁹ This is not the place to attempt a serious account of the differences between aesthetic and non-aesthetic objects. Perhaps the best known defense of the distinction from a

of art – what German aesthetics designates by the word *Schein* (at once semblance and appearance) – sets them categorically apart from the objects that we encounter cognitively or morally. The pleasure they provide, if indeed in all cases they can be said to produce pleasure, is not of the same order as that provided by other objects that satisfy our desires and interests.⁵⁰ The celebrated claim made by Stendhal and repeated by Nietzsche and Marcuse that art is »une promesse de bonheur« must be understood not only as a rebuke to the coldness of the tradition of disinterested detachment, but also as a recognition that such happiness is not necessarily achievable in the present.

Moreover, as George Steiner has noted, »the objects of scientific speculation and investigation, however uncertain their reality-status outside the relevant hypothesis and observation, are, nevertheless, *given*. They are prior and determinant in ways which differ fundamentally from the 'coming-into-thereness' of the aesthetic....Only in the aesthetic is there the absolute freedom 'not to have come into being.' Paradoxically, it is that possibility of absence which gives autonomous force to the presence of the work.«⁵¹ However much we may admire a sunset for its beauty or be awed by the sublime chaos of a battle, the experience we have of works created by human intentionality can never forget their unique status in this regard. Even if such works can no longer be understood as perfectly formed, organic wholes, an assumption that was laid to rest with Modernism (and anticipated by the Romantic cult of the fragment), they nonetheless still possess some residue, perhaps solely in negative terms, of the utopian implications of that impulse.⁵²

phenomenological perspective was mounted by Roman Ingarden, whose work is discussed in B. Dziemido and P. McCormick, eds. *On the Aesthetics of Roman Ingarden* (Boston, 1989). For a recent extension of his argument, see McCormick, *Modernity, Aesthetics, and the Bounds of Art*. See also the different approaches in the books by Goodman and Genette cited in notes 1 and 2.

⁵⁰ For a recent debate over the role of pleasure in aesthetic experience, see Shusterman, »The End of Aesthetic Experience«; Alexander Nehamas, »Richard Shusterman on Pleasure and Aesthetic Experience,« *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56, 1 (1998); and Shusterman, »Interpretation, Pleasure, and Value in Aesthetic Experience,« in *ibid.*

⁵¹ Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 154-155.

⁵² Krieger claims that »the dethroning of the aesthetic object and aesthetic value and the abolition of the aesthetic realm altogether destroy the closed sanctity of such objects as self-fulfilled, instead opening them anew to an immediate relationship to normal experience. With the theoretical disappearance of closure, which is now seen to have been a deceiving myth, all objects, their would-be fictional boundaries dissolved, flow freely into and out of normal experience, now that they are declared no more than a routine part of that experience.« *Arts on the Level*, p. 55. Such a complaint

Not until the world is itself made by humans who can fashion their environment to realize such an outcome – a telos that may well be unattainable, and may even be itself a deeply problematic goal – can we forget the victims and praise the beautiful gesture that led to their demise. For the present, it is wiser to hold on to the irreducible constellation of objects and the experiences they engender that prevent us from collapsing one variant of experience into another. However porous the boundaries may be, however great the yearning for a fully integrated form of life, the differentiations of modernity – not only among value spheres, but within them as well – may have a validity that we sacrifice at our peril.

overestimates the necessity of absolute closure and boundaried immanence in works of art, which ignores the importance of what Genette has called their transcendent potential. See his *The Work of Art*.

Boris Groys
The Artist as an Exemplary Art Consumer

The current philosophical, or theoretical reflection on contemporary art is dominated by the discourse about the end of art and the end of art history. Of course, it is by no means a new development. But the reaction of today's art world to that message is relatively new and therefore of interest. The first appearance of this discourse in the 70s and 80s was still met with rejection, or at least with some kind of sorrow by the defenders of traditional art values. In our time these sorrows, nostalgia and disappointments are almost completely gone. Quite on the contrary, the news about the end of art provokes in the art world a kind of open jubilation. The artistic community seems to be fascinated and electrified by this discourse and embraces it eagerly and enthusiastically. At the same time every attempt to defend and rescue art theoretically is doomed to be met by the art community with a certain displeasure. There is something peculiar about this suicidal joy, that needs to be explained.

Actually, if asked about art, philosophy tells us time and again that art belongs to the past, that art is dead, and that we are at the end of art and of art history. Plato already stated this in his dialogues, as he sought to demonstrate that poets don't know what they say and that only a philosopher can speak understandably about truth. And Hegel repeated it once more – in a very direct manner – in his famous »Lectures on Aesthetics:« Art belongs to the past because only philosophy is able to free the true content of art from a specific, finite, objectified, artistic form that isolates this true content from the public, creating an aesthetic distance between the artwork and its recipient. Philosophy, on the contrary, erases this distance and makes truth immediately accessible to the recipient, because philosophy proceeds through self-negation and is therefore able to overcome every concrete, finite form. As Descartes has already shown, the negation of all thoughts is also a thought, the absolute doubt being a part, and even a foundation, of philosophical thinking. It means that philosophy becomes indestructible, absolute, infinite, so that the self-reflective movement of philosophical thought makes every concrete and finite form of truth obsolete.

This is why there is a deep-rooted philosophical tradition of art bashing. The library and the museum are especially preferred objects of intense

contempt for the majority of philosophically minded authors. Rousseau admires the destruction of the famous ancient Library of Alexandria, Goethe's *Faust* is ready to sign a contract with the devil to escape the library – and not to be obliged to read all the books accumulated inside of it, etc. But, of course, there is also a strong philosophical tradition of defending art against philosophy which culminates in Nietzsche's writings: There Philosophy is accused of being iconoclastic, ascetic, intolerant and obsessed with the idea of death. Characteristically, in this tradition the defence of art functions simultaneously as a defence of the finite against the infinite, or as a defence of the forms of this world against their destruction in the name of the philosophical truth. Here we can watch the relatively clear fronts between pro-art and anti-art philosophical options. Pro-art means pro-finite, pro-form, and anti-art means pro-infinite.

However, this traditional constellation is completely changed since the emergence of the historical avant-garde at the beginning of this century, because avant-garde art was conceived from the beginning as an anti-art, as a protest against art and, actually, as a (at least, symbolical) destruction of art. The art of the avant-garde internalized the philosophical critique on art: it attempted to escape its separateness, to transcend its objectified, commodified status, to overcome its alienation, to erase the aesthetic distance between the artwork and its spectator. That is why now it is no longer possible to defend contemporary art using the traditional theoretical legitimization of art understood as a sum of the finite, empirically experienceable forms. There is no use in defending art as art, if art became itself a struggle against art; an anti-art.

This vision of the new, avant-garde art as a destruction of the old art, is expressed powerfully and paradigmatically in a short but important text of Kasimir Malevich entitled 'On the Museum' (from 1919). At that time the new Soviet government feared that the old Russian museums and art collections could be destroyed through the civil war and through the general collapse of the state institutions and economy, so the Party tried to secure and save these collections. In his paper Malevich expresses a protest against this pro-museum policy of Soviet power and calls on the state not to intervene on behalf of the old art collections because their destruction opens the path to new art. In particular, Malevich writes:

»Life knows what it is doing, and if it is striving to destroy, one must not interfere since by hindering we are blocking the path to a new conception of life that is born within us. In burning a corpse we obtain one gram of powder: accordingly thousands of graveyards could be accommodated on a single chemist's shelf. We can make a concession to conservatives by offering

that they burn all past epochs, since they are dead, and set up a single pharmacy.« Furthermore, Malevich gives a concrete example of what he means: »The aim (of this pharmacy) will be the same, even if people examine the powder from Rubens and all his art – a mass of ideas will arise in people, and will be often more alive than actual representation (and take up less room).«¹

The act of burning art becomes art. And the ashes of the burnt artworks are proclaimed to be aesthetically more interesting than the burnt artworks themselves. But if the destruction of art is art – and even better art – then art as such becomes indestructible and infinite. The famous »Black Square« of Malevich, understood as the trace of a destroyed, burnt artwork, has the same function as the Cartesian radical doubt in philosophy. Art becomes absolute because it includes its negation in itself. Such an infinite art needs no protection, no theoretical defence and no institutional security any more. (Bakunin: destruction is creation.)

Of course, we know that the struggle of the historical avant-garde against art and against art institutions was not quite successful. The art system seemed to be stable enough to be able to recuperate every kind of anti-art. For many this insight meant a deep disappointment and a kind of inner resignation. This explains why the contemporary, post-avant-garde, international art community reacted to the proclamations of the end of art with relief and joy. The dream of the avant-garde now seems to be realized after all – without and beyond any further individual struggle to make this dream come true. And help came again from philosophy as a critique of the notion of creativity.

To quote some examples: Arthur Danto proclaims the end of art in a true Hegelian manner. He argues that today's art made its own definition its main subject, and, therefore, art attained the degree of self-reflection which used to be the privilege of philosophy alone, so that the further, historical, creative development of art becomes impossible. The only possibility which is left to us, is to use or consume the vocabulary of existing art forms. Therefore, the artist loses his or her privileged position vis-à-vis the art spectator. The artist stops being a creator and becomes merely a user of art.

The art theoreticians influenced by the French post-structuralist discourse also put in question the whole concept of artistic authorship, production and control – of course, in a very different manner. In this perspective, the art system, the language of art and the language of art description deconstruct themselves: there is no possibility to differentiate in

¹ Kasimir Malevich, 'On the Museum', in: Kasimir Malevich, *Essays on Art*, New York 1971, pp. 68-72.

a clear-cut manner between the productive and the reproductive, between the creative and the repetitive. So there is also no need, and no possibility, any more of an individual, heroic, avant-gardistic gesture of revolt against art. The contemporary artist, in a way, just consumes and follows this self-destructive logic of the art system, using reproductive art techniques to demonstrate the ambivalence of the notion of creativity. The theoretical foundation of the closed, exclusive art system seems to be destroyed by this deconstructive argumentation. Art seems to be free at last – infinite, open, omnipresent, always at our disposal and not imprisoned any more inside the confined space of a museum. The difference between the artist and the spectator, or between the insider and the outsider of the art system becomes irrelevant: both are mere user and reproducer of the already known possibilities of making art. Everybody is an artist.

But, of course, at the same time we are watching the accelerated development of the globalized, professionalized art system all around the world. And we are also watching the accelerated construction of new art museums, primarily of museums for contemporary art. The inner contradiction between these two parallel developments is too obvious – and the suspicion of hypocrisy and cynical manipulation arises. (The polemics against contemporary art, which Baudrillard practices now, is very characteristic in this respect.) And it is precisely this contradiction that I would like to discuss now.

Indeed, I would argue that the discourse about the presumed collapse of the art system – the end of art, or the end of art history – follows from a set of too simplistic presuppositions concerning the relationship between the artist and the spectator, which, in a very traditional manner, is still interpreted by this discourse as the opposition between the producer and the consumer. The artist is the producer of art, the spectator is the consumer of art. The art system is producing art, the public outside the art system is consuming art. If that would be the case, the collapse of the myth of artistic creativity should really entail the collapse of the art system as such. But I would suggest that today's artist is not a producer but an exemplary, model consumer of art. The contemporary artist does not practice the production, but the ostensive consumption of art, and the art system is transformed now into a place where such ostensive consumption is demonstrated. Accordingly, the contemporary art spectator does not consume art products produced by the artist. Instead, he consumes the exemplary art consumption – practicing the consumption of second degree.

Actually, the pure destruction of art that Malevich was speaking about is also a kind of extreme consumption and, accordingly, it must also be

explicit and ostensive if it seeks to be art. Avant-garde art has practised a kind of permanent potlatch: To derive the greatest fame the artist should be most radical in the symbolic destruction of art. But Marcel Mauss has already shown that such a radical potlatch needs a special place and a special spectatorship to be effective. The historical avant-garde has transformed the art system – and, principally, the art museum – into such a place of ostensive potlatch, of symbolic destruction and self-destruction of art. From the perspective of the avant-garde, the museum needs old art only insofar as the knowledge of old art is necessary to demonstrate here and now what is symbolically sacrificed by avant-garde itself.

To be sure, in our time the museum extended its space to accept all kinds of ostensive consumption strategies, not only the strategies of sacrifice and destruction. I will try to describe now this new role of the museum, and of the art system in general, using the example of photography in its relationship to traditional painting.

In fact, at the end of the twentieth century, photography finally became established not just as a recognized art form but also as a leading one. The large-format photographic image is today increasingly replacing the traditional painting on the walls of galleries, private collections and museums. The matter-of-factness with which the switch from painting to photography has been recently carried out is witnessed primarily by the nonchalant way in which contemporary photography is assuming the traditional tasks of painting which painting itself is no longer able to fulfil. The painted image has gradually collapsed under the self-destructive strategies and repeated sacrifices by the historical avant-garde. The change of media rescued the tradition of the pictorial image and transposed it into the new historic era. Photography today does in fact do everything that painting did in the nineteenth century. Photography shows us urban life and life in nature, people's faces and their naked bodies, our own living environment, and exotic cultures, wealth and fashion, misery and war. It is neither afraid to appear critical, accusatory, schoolmasterly, nor to seem sentimental, decorative, or aesthetically fascinating. When we now discuss the work of an individual photographer, we usually tend to be concerned with its content, with the photographer's relationship to the object shown, as was common in art criticism before the rise of avant-garde. The photographic image is almost completely immunized against the accusation of being mere kitsch. The photographic image that indulges in everything that is forbidden to the painted image evidently feels no shame about this, and does not find itself in a situation of having to produce some additional apology. Photographic images are effortlessly successful in being accepted

into collections that would quite definitely reject a comparable painted image. Many of Gerhard Richter's pictures demonstrate this problem. If the photographic realism of the sixties could still be seen as a strategy to raise the status of photography in museums and art galleries, painting today only survives when it camouflages itself as photography.

Time and again, the continuously increasing presence of photography and media art (video and cinema installations, interactive art using computer, or Internet, etc.) in museums is regarded as a symptom of the museum loosing its autonomy, its alternative status vis-à-vis media-dominated public life. Some commentators saw this crisis quite positively – as a chance for the museum to become more open, more accessible to the broader public, and more integrated in the mainstream media landscape. But many others deplored this development: they saw the danger of the museum loosing its independence and its own value and to become merely a part of the commercialized entertainment industry as a kind of Disneyland for the better educated. But in any case, the reproductive practices of photography were said to provide clear proof that the traditional claims of art history are illusory because these practices make it particularly evident that the production of images is by no means a mysterious process requiring a work of genius to be accomplished.

This is what Douglas Crimp has claimed in his well-known essay 'On the Museum's Ruins', with reference to Walter Benjamin: »Through reproductive technology postmodernist art dispenses with the aura. The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence, essential to the ordered discourse of the museum, are undermined.«² So, according to Crimp, the new art techniques dissolve the museum's conceptual frameworks, constructed as they are on the fiction of subjective, individual creativity, bring them into disarray through their re-productive practice, and ultimately lead to the museum's ruin. And rightly so, it might be added, for the museum's discourse is purely ideological: it suggests a representation of the historical, understood as a temporal epiphany of creative subjectivity, in a place where in fact there is nothing more than an incoherent jumble of artifacts, as Crimp asserts with reference to Foucault. Thus Crimp, like many other authors, regards any critique of the traditional, emphatic conception of art as a critique of art as institution, including the institution of the museum, an institution which is allegedly purported to legitimize itself primarily on the

² Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press 1993, p. 50f.

basis of this purely ideological – and at the same time outmoded – conception of art.

It is indisputable that the rhetoric of uniqueness has determined the traditional art historical discourse for a long time. It is nevertheless questionable whether it in fact provides a decisive legitimation for the musealization of art so that a critique of this discourse could at the same time function as a critique of the museum as institution. I would say, on the contrary, that precisely at the historical moment when the artwork loses its immediately recognizable, visual otherness in comparison to a mere thing or to a technically produced media image, the museum becomes absolutely indispensable for our ability to recognize and appreciate art as art. And indeed, the aforementioned accelerated development and the proliferation we have witnessed in the recent decades of museums of all kinds, above all, of »museums of modern art« or »museums of contemporary art«, have paralleled precisely the accelerated erasure of the visible differences between the artwork and the profane object (Duchamp is, of course, the best example of this), or between the individually produced artwork and the technically produced media image – an erasure systematically perpetrated by the various avant-gardes of this century. The less the artwork differs visually from a profane object or a technically produced image, the more necessary becomes the clearly drawn distinction between the art context and the profane, everyday, non-museum context of its occurrence. Precisely at the point when an artwork looks like a »normal thing« or like a media image – such an artwork requires a different contextualization by the museum.

The self-destructive, anti-art strategies of the artistic avant-garde, understood as the elimination of the visual difference between the artwork and the profane thing or the media image, therefore lead directly to the building-up of museums which secure this difference institutionally. In our age, we no longer have any way of differentiating between art and non-art, except by reference to the museum. Far from subverting and delegitimizing the museum as institution, the critique of the emphatic conception of art therefore provides the actual theoretical foundation for the institutionalization and musealization of contemporary art. For the very reason that photography and media production constitutes in the context of our contemporary culture a widespread, impersonal and many-faceted practice, one in which every individual artistic achievement is potentially swallowed up, the indispensability of the museum context holds true for photography, video and computer art as well.

In the »museum of contemporary art« simple objects or technically produced media images are promised the longevity and the recognition they

do not enjoy in life itself. This promise is all the more valid and credible the less these objects »deserve« endurance, the less spectacular and extraordinary they are. The modern museum proclaims its new Evangelium in the first place not for the exclusive, auratic work of genius, which in the world at large has never had any real trouble finding the recognition it seeks, but rather for the insignificant, the trivial, and the everyday, which would otherwise perish in the reality outside the museum's walls. The museum of contemporary art is, in a way, a continuation of the Christian mission of saving, of recuperating the world, practiced under the conditions of the modern secularization and at the same time expanded to mere things.

So if an artist says – as the majority of modern artists have said – that he or she wants to break out of the museum, to go into life itself, to be real and to make a truly living art and not a dead one, it only means that this artist wants his works to be collected, because the only possibility to be collected is to transcend the museum, and to go into life in the sense of making something different from the already collected. The museum is like a church in this respect: initially you have to be sinful to become a saint later on – otherwise you remain just a plain, decent person with no chance of making a career in the archives of God's memory. That is why when you want to free yourself from the museum, you become subjected in the most radical way to the logic of collecting.

Actually, if the museum ever is to disintegrate, then the very opportunity for art to show the normal, the everyday, the trivial as new and different, and in this sense as exciting, will be lost, because the historical experience teaches us that in order to assert itself successfully outside the museum walls, »in life itself,« art must break its connection with the banality of everyday experience and begin to repeat the classical, mythological patterns and established art forms. The successful (and deservedly so) mass cultural production of our time is concerned with alien attacks, with myths of the apocalypse and redemption, with heroes endowed with superhuman powers, and so forth. All of this is certainly fascinating and instructive, but at the same time it keeps repeating the repertoire of images already collected in the archives and museums of our culture. So once in a while, one would like to be able to see something normal, something ordinary, something banal, something not yet collected as well. In our culture, this wish can be gratified only in the museum of contemporary art. In so-called life, on the other hand, only the extraordinary and at the same time repetitive is presented to us as a possible object of our admiration.

So if today the debate about whether photography is art or not seems totally redundant, we owe this new situation solely to the further extension

of the modern art museum as an institution. A photograph made with artistic intent no longer needs to differ visibly from an ordinary photograph in order to be recognized as art. Today the difference is produced by the act of putting it into the museum which is sufficient to move the photograph into the domain of art. The difference between artistic and non-artistic photography is thus replaced by the difference between the museum and non-museum context. This accordingly means that the old question of how a photograph should look in order to qualify as artistic is no longer relevant. Certainly, there are many gradations between a museum and everyday space that are of crucial importance for the relationship between collection and photograph. The more museum-oriented a collection is, the more it can allow itself to contain ordinary-looking photographs with no explicit claim to artistic value.

Traditional painting is produced as a result of the painter's physical efforts. And every individual painting bears the traces of this physical labour. From this there arises the impression of an intimate link between creator and work: the individual pictorial image displays material and physical features that are recognizable as a direct extension of the body, as the irreducible »hand« of the painter, or at least can be taken as recognizable according to the ethos of the painting. In this sense one is justified in saying – and this has indeed been said often enough – that particularly in the era of industrial production, which erases the individuality of the industrial worker in the finished product and thus alienates his work, only art is capable of overcoming this alienation and of allowing the individuality of its producer to obtain recognition. From this we gain the impression that the artist holds a privileged position in society as someone who, exceptionally, performs work from which he is not alienated.

The critique of the notion of creativity and of the creation of a special aura around art therefore also has a certain political component. This critique corresponds to the desire to dethrone the artist and set him on an equal footing with other modern producers. The demands made by the historical avant-garde that painting should reveal its technique and give up any claim to being a work of genius initially had this very goal of achieving parity between the artist and the industrial worker. Among the Soviet avant-garde of the twenties, this demand resulted in artists showing also direct political solidarity with the working class. Accordingly, painting production in the twentieth century (from Malevich and Mondrian through Albers and Sol LeWitt to Buren) became so formalized, mechanized and depersonalized that all traces of the painter's physical presence in the painted work were effaced and the result began to resemble an industrial product. In this sense

geometrical abstraction can be interpreted as a transitional stage between traditional painting and photography, as it is also confirmed by the personal biographies of artists such as Rodchenko or Albers.

The question must now be asked whether obliterating the traces in the work of the painter's physical presence, of his or her individual labour did in fact give the artist parity with the worker. In other words, was it possible to realize the democratic egalitarian dream of the modern era by doing away with the traditional concepts of artistic creativity and of the artist-genius? And was it possible to transcend in this way the institutionalized aesthetic distance between artist and spectator? On the contrary, the example of photography shows that the removal from art of every reference to physical labour that has taken place in the twentieth century has radically distanced the artist from industrial work and has moved art near to management, planning, and – ultimately – the consumer. Direct physical work on the picture, which in the past linked the painter to the industrial worker, has largely been eliminated by photography and replaced by a series of conscious, strategic, controllable decisions about how a work of art should look. The artist as photographer discloses and formalizes his techniques and employs them strategically so that he makes their repetition possible from the outset. The mystery of the unique artist's body no longer hinders the methodological or technical repetition of his strategies. The artist's eye is disembodied: a pure gaze, it no longer works but only decides, selects and combines. If the similarity between photography and psychoanalysis, on which Benjamin once spoke, is valid, then surely first of all in this respect it is much easier to identify oneself with the psychoanalytically disembodied Oedipus than with the Greek king Oedipus. In contemporary photography, the history of painting is repeated photographically in a comparable manner – no longer as a history of gifted bodies but as a history of intellectual attitudes and strategies of a disembodied gaze. Consequently, art museums today no longer function as places in which the irretrievability of the historical is presented, but as archives for storing various visual strategies that can be brought out of storage and reused by the spectator at any time.

The photographer is acting on society's behalf as an exemplary consumer. The visual choices are primarily models for further consumption. What the photo-artist offers to our gaze are not so much definite images as the strategies that defined their selection. The photographer does not offer the works of art to our gaze. Instead, the photographer brings us to see other things with his or her eyes. This change of attitude is revealed particularly clearly in the alternate status of the artist as regards the time economy of the gaze. The massive investment in work, time, and energy needed for the

creation of a traditional work of art was irritatingly out of proportion to the terms under which this art was consumed. After the painter has worked hard and long at his painting, the viewer could consume it effortlessly at a glance. Hence the superiority of the consumer, the viewer and the collector over the artist-painter as a supplier of pictorial images produced laboriously through his physical effort. On the contrary, photography does place the artist on an equal footing, as I already said, not with the worker, but with the consumer and with the collector, as the artist too is now able to produce images in an instant with a simple click of the camera. If more time is needed to take a photograph, then this is the result of deliberate strategic planning – not inescapable and obligatory as it was in the past. Thus the producer of a photograph becomes equal to the spectator with respect to the time economy of the gaze. Losing his physical individuality, the photo-artist gains the privilege of the aristocratic gaze.

The aristocracy traditionally personified the figure of the final consumer who himself no longer produces anything. Only in the context of the aristocratic way of life could art therefore achieve true perfection. One can even maintain that nothing could become art unless it can be used by the aristocracy since it was a definitive, no longer functional usage. Aristocratic taste acted as a model for the whole of society. By assuming the position of the pure observer, of the absolute consumer, the artist compensates for the deepest trauma of the modern era, namely the loss of the aristocracy. Today we might visit a great exhibition or installation as people used to visit palaces of the aristocracy. The visitor is given access to art, but he is not its actual consumer. Rather he takes as his model a certain mode of consumption as demonstrated by the artist in his exhibition, just as formerly the aristocratic way of life acted as a model. The present-day art consumer no longer consumes the artist's work, but rather he invests his own work into consuming like an artist.

In other words, the artist has changed sides. He no longer wants to be a worker producing objects that are then exposed to the gaze of others. Instead he has become the exemplary observer, consumer and user who observes, evaluates, and takes in things that are produced by others. He is a person who finds aesthetic stimulus and interest in already known objects that other people may perhaps find dull and uninteresting. This means that the artist can make anything aesthetically consumable, make it to be considered great, fascinating or cool, to become an object of aesthetic enjoyment. Art becomes an open horizon, the last frontier of the modern economy. Contemporary photography shows that everything can be an object of desire. Carl Schmitt already noted: »The passage from the metaphysical and moral to the economic goes by way of the aesthetic, and the passage of

aesthetic consumption and enjoyment, however sublime, is the most reliable and most convenient way to economize intellectual life.³ In the form of photography, the artistic avant-garde becomes the economic avant-garde – the new aristocracy of the modern economy which pushes back ever further the frontiers of the desirable and consumable.

To be sure, if the photographer's attitude is aristocratic, his techniques – as befits our times – are rather more bureaucratic or, more accurately, administrative in nature. The photographer chooses, includes, modifies, edits, shifts, combines, reproduces, arranges, places in series, exhibits, or puts aside. He manipulates pictures just like managers of the large modern companies manipulate all possible data. And he does that with the same objective: so that potential customers can gain a certain vision, a certain perspective.

Thus one can say that the photo-artist stands in the same relationship to the modern company employee and his data processing activities as the painter artist in earlier times did to the factory worker and his manual labour. Just as the painter of those times demonstrated the possibility of recording the traces of individual physical labour in his work, so the present-day photographer lets the aristocratic gaze emerge in the monotony of data processing. The photographer is acting like a bureaucratic institution, a government authority, or a big bank, but also as an unique individual. Thus he establishes the subjective case where it had seemingly disappeared. And this is by no means purely ideological self-delusion or the aesthetization of alienated work. The dream of invisibility, of being able to see everything without oneself being seen, is one of the oldest dreams of mankind. It is certainly pleasant to see, but it is often extremely unpleasant to be seen. Our relationship to the visual is determined as much by scopophilia as by scopophobia. Photography, like modern bureaucracy, gives us a certain promise, that of affording protection from the stranger's gaze, but, of course, only if we take up a position behind the camera, not in front of it.

The museum itself is not simply a neutral and transparent medium for the representation of art, but has its own opacity. Especially as media art takes up residence in the museum, the museum as a medium is put into question in a number of respects, and loses its apparent transparency. First and foremost, the borders between the individual artwork and the exhibition space thereby become problematic and will have to be renegotiated.

I would like to conclude this presentation by drawing your attention to just three ways in which the museum is being called into question by the

³ Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin, Duncker und Humblot 1963, p. 83.

presence of media art in it. First of all: more possibilities to manipulate the gaze to see the world; to see the ordinary in the context of media art.

1. The museum's lighting

Traditionally, the light in a museum comes from outside an individual artwork – and thereby makes possible the contemplation of this artwork. In the museum a perfect day always prevails, even if the day in question is an artificial one. Media art – in the form of video or cinematic installations – has on the other hand, brought night and twilight into the museum. That is probably the most important effect of the musealization of the media. The homogeneous, viewer-friendly lighting of the modern museum has been obscured. The light's purpose is no longer to create the optimum viewing conditions; the exhibition space of the museum becomes, so to say, baroque. The museum as a museum of media art is no longer the locus of absolute visibility it once was. In this museum it is night, darkness and invisibility that are being exhibited.

This raises many issues: for example, what is the status of the entire technical apparatus which makes media art possible? The question is, does this apparatus belong to the work, or to the technical equipment of the exhibition space? This question seems to remain unanswerable in any general terms. (The canvas, for instance, is covered up by the painted image. In the case of media art, the image bearer is not covered up, but merely put into darkness, i.e. covered up and not covered up at the same time.)

And above all, it is no longer the museum lighting that illuminates the artworks, it is now the images themselves (video and computer images) that bring the light into the museum space. Accordingly, one asks whether this light belongs to the artwork or not. In former days, museum lighting was the symbolic property of the viewer; it was in this light that he or she viewed the artwork. Now, the light is becoming a part of the work, and is thus becoming one of the elements controlled by the artist. What is occurring is a shift in lighting modalities, a shift in visibility and in the control of visibility, a shift that is actually still being insufficiently reflected upon.

(And one more thing: the *tristesse* and at the same time the intimacy of the darkened museum space. The museum becomes dark, dangerous and intimate instead of being light (enlightened) and public).

2. Time

Control over the time of contemplation is likewise being passed from the visitor to the artist. In the classical museum the visitor, the viewer, exercises complete control over the time of contemplation. He or she can interrupt

the contemplation at any time, and return, and go away again. The picture stays where it is, remains unmoved and makes no attempt to flee the viewer's gaze. The traditional picture remains self-identical over time. With moving pictures this is no longer the case. Under normal circumstances a film or a video impose their own time of contemplation upon the viewer. When we turn away from the video, we miss something. It is like what happens to us in life, which can be defined as the place in which one misses the most important things. Now the museum too – earlier, the place of complete visibility – becomes a place where we cannot compensate a missed opportunity to contemplate, to see; where we cannot return at any time to see the same we saw before.

Again, a struggle for power arises between the artist and the spectator, a struggle for control over the time of contemplation.

3. Value

Actually, this third aspect has already been discussed here at length. The question is, when does the artistic value of the work come into being? When it is being made or after it has been exhibited for the first time? This is perhaps the most difficult of all of these questions – but the most crucial as well and yet, as one is forced to admit, almost an unanswerable question.

Well, now I come to a brief concluding remark. In our time the artist has disappeared as a unique individual creator but at the same he has re-emerged as the subject of the aristocratic gaze, as the exemplary consumer. And the artist, as a media-artist, has also gained much greater control over the gaze of the spectator. Accordingly, the art system of today has by no means collapsed. Rather, it has become stronger and better organized, so that it can function as the place where such an aristocratic gaze can manifest itself.

And turning back to the relationship between art and philosophy, I would argue that today's philosopher functions in a comparable manner as an exemplary consumer of the language – after he had given up all attempts to create new and original languages. Wittgenstein has already sought to eliminate the philosophical doubt by the specific use of ordinary language. And recently, the discourse of deconstruction taught us that we are even not subjects of our own doubt; rather, this doubt originated in the language itself – and we are never able to return to this origin. So if art became philosophical, philosophy is now becoming now increasingly artistic. The traditional competition between art and philosophy compels them to exchange their places time and again.

Maryvonne Saison
Playful Thinking: Theater and Philosophy
(*du jeu dans la pensée*)

Prologue

In *The homecoming*, Pinter portrays the philosophy professor Teddy grappling with the »spontaneous philosophy« of Ruth, a prostitute and his wife, of Joey, the boxer, and Lenny, a pimp. Teddy is convinced that he is the only one able to see or understand (»I'm the one who can see.«) And yet Lenny and Ruth explore philosophical issues:

»Lenny: But you're a philosopher. Come on, be frank. What do you make of all this business of being and not being?

Teddy: What do you make of it?

Lenny: Well, for instance, take a table. Philosophically speaking. What is it?

Teddy: A table.

Lenny: Ah. You mean it's nothing else but a table. Well, some people would envy your certainty, wouldn't they, Joey? For instance, I've got a couple of friends of mine, we often sit round the Ritz Bar having a few liqueurs, and they're always saying things like: take a table, take it. All right, I say, *take* it, *take* a table, but once you've taken it, what you going to do with it? Once you've got hold of it, where you going to take it?

Max: You'd probably sell it.

Lenny: You wouldn't get much for it.

Joey: Chop it up for firewood.«

When staged by the theater, the failure of philosophy is patent: Teddy leaves his family to return to his American university. Ruth, who chooses Joey over Teddy, has the last word and directs her comments as much to her husband as to Philosophy:

»Ruth: Eddie, don't become a stranger.«

The occasional severity of theater with regard to philosophy is merely an echo of a long and lasting relationship. To this corresponds philosophy's malevolent fascination with theater: beginning with the third book of the *Republic*, has not theater been the haunting specter of the philosopher, to the point of excluding the tragedians from the polis? It is not simply a

question of attacking the state of theater, but more radically of discerning the harmfulness of its very essence: »The West as a whole, in its explicitly philosophical and truth-based plan, was founded on this hate.«¹ The credibility of the philosopher's remarks suffers when, in this same polis of the theater, a make-believe world creates illusions as indirect means of arriving at the truth. The same holds true when the spectator requires the philosopher to »play« within structures of emotional identification and seduction. When exposed to the risks of theater, all of philosophy's projects are challenged in its metaphysical concerns as well as in its educational, moral and political aims. With full knowledge of the facts and lamenting the powers of theater, philosophy can only master, control, or tolerate them. The staging of theater and philosophy together will necessarily take place in the mode of rivalry. In this essay, while acknowledging the lasting character of this relationship based on a power struggle, my aim here will be to expose its weaknesses and to illustrate how other options might be sketched out.

Love and Hate

It should be recognized from the start that rivalry only makes sense in a context of close proximity. It is because theater and philosophy seek in part the same effect that a power struggle has any meaning; that is, because philosophy, like theater, seeks to have an effect, by making sense, and transforming those whom it addresses by the unveiled truth or path opened up by that meaning. An action is directed: therein lies the power which is at stake and demonstrates to what extent the interlocutor (spectator or reader) is the target of this arrangement. Whether dramatic or philosophical, these exchanges are directed at an individual and leave room for this interlocutor, sometimes enough for his existence and his reactions to materialize: it is not a coincidence that dialogue is so often a simple paradigm of the philosophical or theatrical relationship. Such a formal analogy generates periodically re-emergent attempts to philosophize on the dialogue mode² and to introduce into the theater philosophical dialogues or thought put into motion.³

¹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, in *L'art du théâtre*, Spring 1986, n°4, Arles, Actes Sud/Chaillot, p. 12.

² Cf. for example, also Jean-François Lyotard, in *Que peindre? Adami Arakawa Buren*, Paris, ed. La Différence, 1987.

³ Cf. *Platon/G...*, from *Le Banquet* and *Le Mépris*, Michèle Foucher, Théâtre de Gennevilliers, April 1997; cf. also *La légende des anges*, by Michel Serres, Dijon, May 1998.

These exchanges founded on proximity and which circulate thoughts and thinking in the well-suited arena of the polis are rooted in a long and complex history. These beginnings would result as much in the annexation of the theater by philosophy or the government (pedagogical theater, theater of enlightenment, didactic or political theater) as in the appropriation of philosophical texts by the theater. For the contemporary period, I would cite the efforts of Grüber, who worked on fragments of Heraclitus in Milan in 1988, or the staging of »literary« texts by Jean Jourdheuil (*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Montaigne: *Le rocher, la lande, la librairie*, Spinoza: *Vermeer et Spinoza*, Lucretius: *La nature des choses*⁴). Much is at stake in these exchanges and acknowledging proximity is far from implying the use of a common practice, an effective collaboration or even the creation of a mixed genre: theatrical philosophy or philosophical theater. Each foray from one domain into the other represents a risk and a chance for renewal, and at the same time an occasion for further plays for power. Against this backdrop of potential rivalry arise the accusations of annexation or appropriation, in other words, of denaturation.

Nevertheless, all of these exchanges reveal a truth: they question the exclusively solitary practice of philosophy as well as the systematically pusillanimous and entertaining character of theater. Each displacement gives birth to thought by incarnating it and restoring its »agoretic«⁵ dimension: thought in theater rediscovers its strength of address and the theater, by fulfilling its connection to thought, regains its function as an agora. Theater and philosophy therefore maintain a relationship based on proximity that encourages movement and exchange as much through the practice of thought as through the public, dialogic or collective aspects of this practice in the polis. However, radical proposals deriving from the acknowledgement of the agoretic role in the arts and philosophy have not, to this date, taken shape. For example, the producer Jean Jourdheuil was not given the means to create his »Theater-Painting-Philosophy« project on Robespierre. It was an ambitious project that was to include a painting exhibit exploring the theme »Robespierre«, a symposium for philosophers on this same theme and the staging of Gilles Aillaud's *Le masque de Robespierre*. The novelty of this project was found in the idea of a contradictory »art space« that, in this case, Jourdheuil imagined as being »tumultuous.«⁶ The problem presented by the hypothesis of an association which would create the conditions for both

⁴ 1978, 1982, 1984, 1990.

⁵ Denis Guénoun uses the term »agoreutique« for »assembly function« of the theater, in *Lettre au directeur du théâtre*, Le Revest-les-Eaux, Les Cahiers de l'Egaré, 1996, p. 31.

⁶ Cf. *Théâtre/Public*, no. 140, p. 47.

proximity and rivalry, was that of practical specificities versus common themes and objectives. With annexation or appropriation, specificity was transgressed or transposed. In a space allowing for the juxtaposition of genres, the specifics maintained highlight a certain proximity without giving rise to a power play: the effect being the creation of mutual recognition.

The problem posed by specificity in theatrical and philosophical practices still leaves room for many questions. We might begin by considering the following: it is the institutional practices most greatly influenced by the academy, be it in the realm of theater or philosophy, which develop and exacerbate their secular characteristics and satisfy the expectations and aims of the genre. Consequently, philosophers consider the theater as entertainment (or at best, culture), and theater people consider philosophy as an esoteric exercise accessible only to a minority. The two practices are thus divided using a system of oppositions: fundamental/futile, serious/recreational, arid/attractive, etc. In fact, theater and philosophy have often developed their autonomy by accentuating the rivalry between them and by cultivating differences. The thought that circulates between the two and is obviously present as much in theater as in philosophy does not possess the same characteristics. For the one, thought is systematic and conceptual and for the other, it is not distinguished from the words used to express it and the forms that implement it; here, thought is not coerced to subject itself to any demonstrations, nor does it prove its legitimacy. As Pierre Macherey demonstrates, with literature, there is an anonymous thought which presents itself and reintroduces some freeplay into its presentation. The fact remains that it is this supposed specificity which excludes what appears as deviant and exacerbates rivalry. In this type of configuration, each discipline exposes the limits of the other, thereby implicitly criticizing it. Any change of form or challenging of genres is out of the question, as a reform of practices, whatever they may be, implies a reexamination of their traditional characteristics and a sort of contamination. But before considering the possibility of more intimate links between theater and philosophy, it should be noted that the practices of the majority still cultivate, at the same time, specificity and rivalry, and that this behavior encourages distorted perceptions, false images and hypocrisy.

If philosophers were to casually turn their attention to the theater, or if by chance, dramatic authors were to philosophize, the result would be nothing less than reciprocal carping and misunderstanding. Philosophy knows, ungratefully, to not overestimate the texts from which it nevertheless derives its models and subjects: it stigmatizes their inadequacies or attempts to set forth their truths out of which it will create the theory. If the philosopher

cannot deny that dramatic literature frequently expresses truths, in particular those most often not revealed, and thus exercises an »eye-opening« function, he balks at admitting that subversion and transgression are two constant elements in theater. He merely illustrates and supports his remarks with quick references to those works which secretly inspired him. He hesitates even less to borrow thoughts after lifting them from context and altering their mode of enunciation. In this way, all that remains is a theoretical content that the philosopher can falsely claim credit for. This ingratitude by philosophers finds its parallel in the disparagement of current philosophical research by those who write for the theater: from Aristophanes to Brecht or Müller, philosophy is returned to its history and context. But critical freedom and attempts at comprehension do not always meet up. Freud's case, though it deals with psychoanalysis rather than philosophy, can serve as an example to illustrate the two aspects of this phenomenon. Imbued with theater, Freud transforms what he has gleaned from it, but the theater gets even with him through the way it anticipates psychoanalysis and portrays it.

Even the concrete alliances between philosophers and theater people, either true contemporaneous collaboration or intellectual alliances across time, have rarely proved to be without difficulty. Did Jaspers do justice to Strindberg? Nothing is less sure.⁷ The same question might apply to Shakespeare scholars, analysts, or philosophers. Did the many philosophers grouped around Brecht have a decisive influence on his work? Though we may be drawn to study certain episodes in the tumultuous relationship between Brecht and Benjamin, Bloch or Lukács, we soon conclude that they are pervaded by rivalry. This fact detracts from our analysis, offers no theoretical insight into the relationships and leaves us with no more than value judgments. Misunderstanding is the norm, be it for Hölderlin or Artaud. One of the most persistent (and surprisingly heuristic!) of these ideas is that which permitted philosophers to invent a strong philosophical figure in Greek tragedy, very different from the one known to historians. A recent work by Jacques Taminiaux⁸ reveals the extent to which philosophers transform this art form »whose birth, rise and decline mirrored that of Athenian democracy« into an ontological document. Examining the roots of tragedy, he refers to Plato and, after separating and bringing out Hölderlin's singular stance concludes: »The Platonic source contradicts the German current in that Platonic tragedy possesses none of the dignity inherent in an ontological document attributed to it by German philosophers.«⁸

⁷ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Strindberg und Van Gogh*, Bern, 1922.

⁸ Jacques Taminiaux, *Le théâtre des philosophes*, Grenoble, ed. Millon, 1995, p. 5.

Be it carping or misunderstanding, our interest lies less in the negative side of this statement than in the inevitable consequences of the withdrawal of these disciplines into their respective protectionist autonomies and academic traditions. Repression accumulates at the margins of institutions and seeks outlying spaces with no predetermined purpose to express itself: thus, a critical philosopher at odds with this academic or university abusive practice, may, by rediscovering dialogues or poetry, find asylum in the theater. Inversely, the more adventuresome undertakings of theater which reject the constraints of entertainment, find an answer in philosophical dialogues. Distancing themselves from sterile convention and conventional expectations, theater and philosophy seek salvation and renewal by exchanging their stages and language.

Do the necessary conditions for dialogue, exchange and collaboration truly exist and is the present situation a new one? There is no lack today of enthusiastic scholarship by philosophers specializing in theater, well received by theater people interested in philosophy and competent in this domain. We cannot, however, ignore the great tradition of scholars which begins with Aristotle and Diderot and brings us, in France, to Henri Gouhier, Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze, as well as Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. This indulgence for personal tastes or for the clever handling of reciprocal misunderstanding has often been dismissed as being suspiciously and conveniently self-serving. Lacoue-Labarthe seems convinced of this in suggesting that the love displayed by the philosopher differs from hate only in a simple inversion of values: »Hate or love (...) are, in this case, the same thing. What it amounts to, at any rate, is an *arraignment* of the theater or its theorization.«⁹ Any alliance created merely represents a power play by philosophy, desirous of controlling the theater in order to subject it to its own designs. Lacoue-Labarthe's analysis may be suggestive and valid, but it does not consider the will of each party to come out of confinement or to attempt an objective alliance against their shared long-standing sclerosis.¹⁰ Besides the theater portrayed as victim is perhaps excessive: does the theater not tolerate with polite indifference much talk of legitimization, the effects being no more threatening than those of the compromises made at every stage of production?

⁹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ As a matter of fact Lacoue-Labarthe assisted the producer Jean-Louis Martinelli when he staged *Oedipus-Tyran* by Hölderlin (Avignon, July 1998).

Playful Thought

We could endlessly ponder the conditions necessary for genuine collaboration between dramatic authors, producers and philosophers. We may come closer to finding an answer by examining the ideas of philosophers who defend the concept of »aesthetic rationality«.¹¹ They abandon exaggerated appreciation of artistic creation, dismissed as »speculative art theory« and, influenced by Habermas, work from an angle based on a critical rereading of Adorno. They proceed by exposing the principles on which the perception and interpretation of works of art are based. An aesthetic associated with German philosophy that abandons a central role in philosophical thought in order to contribute to »the general debate on aesthetic categories, the state of Art, and rules for defining and interpreting works of art,« would reestablish the bond uniting aesthetics and poetics. Could such an aesthetic unite artists and philosophers around one object? To not stray too far from the theater, I would say that nothing is less sure, and this for several reasons.

The first reason is that philosophy's or aesthetics' interest in theater shifts the focus from the performative to the theoretical realm. As much as dramatic writing or staging is derived from implicit or explicit theorization, so theoretical reflection, when uprooted from its performative context, is of little concern to artists. When the writer or director creates a speculative work and occasionally theorizes about its practical representation, he is nonetheless a creator of art, participating in a process which has more to do with action than knowledge. The logic of action and commitment obeys its own inherent requirements. Mikel Dufrenne agrees that, »thought and action are in perpetual discord. (...) Human choices, no matter how justified, are never satisfactory, insofar as they express man's unjustifiable being.«¹² Though the dramatist and the philosopher may agree about thought and thinking, they diverge when it comes to the fabrication of Art. On this point, the dramatist is misunderstood by the philosopher unless, as Alain Badiou suggests, he transforms himself into an »anti-philosopher« striving to confront concept with reality and defending truth, »that is the subjective dimension of the act« and as such, »implies an encounter.«¹³

¹¹ Cf. Rainer Rochlitz, »Religion de l'art et théorie esthétique en Allemagne«, in *Histoire et théories de l'art de Winckelmann à Panofsky*, Revue germanique internationale, Paris, PUF 1994.

¹² Mikel Dufrenne, *Jalons*, La Haye, Nijhoff, 1966, »Les aventures de la dialectique«, p. 173.

¹³ Alain Badiou, »Paul, le saint«, in *Art Press*, no. 235, May 1998, p. 54.

The second reason is at least as decisive. It concerns one of the greatest acts of violence philosophy has committed against the theater: that of reducing theater to its literature. Philosophy has undeniably played a central role in the overemphasis placed on theatrical authors and texts, thus detracting from their representation in the technical and theatrical sense of the term. There is no need to review the Aristotelian condemnation of »opsis«: even if it requires careful handling, it stigmatizes a preference that would exile theatrical representation from philosophical reflections and considerations on the theater. Philosophy, in this case, becomes the faithful ally of Literature in the subjugation of the theatrical production by the tyranny of text. Today, it is in this area that further investigation must take place if we hope to establish a dialogue between theatrical art and philosophy and between director and philosopher. It is not a question of separating author and director, but of uniting the specificity of dramatic writing to its production on stage, with all of the problems that staging presents. Herein lies the art of the theater: as an ephemeral encounter between actors and audience, this event, which organizes itself around bodies and inextricably binds thoughts and emotions, represents without a doubt philosophy's repression. This event also finds its place at the margins of society: the building or site assigned for a performance functions exceptionally, according to its own set of rules. To employ terms used by Michel Foucault, this site acquires a heterotopic function in the etymological sense of the term: the theatrical space is a singular space and an exception, and as such, is authorized to question that which takes place outside of its walls and, in particular, in »the negative structure of society.«¹⁴

Looking at this from a different angle, but one that builds on this line of reasoning, Gilles Deleuze contrasts two forms of theater or two staging operations. In the first, a traditional operation, everything is extrapolated »on élève au 'majeur:' a thought becomes a doctrine, a way of life becomes a culture, an event becomes a History. In this way, we claim to recognize and admire when, in fact, we 'normalize'.«¹⁵ The other operation allows us to discover an »active minority force« in, for example, Shakespeare as staged by Carmelo Bene. Theater (its staging) finds, therefore, an »anti-representative function in outlining, constituting in some way a figure of minority consciousness as the potential of each of us.« A definition takes

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, »Des espaces autres«, 1967 and »La folie et la société«, 1970, in *Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, t. 4, p. 756 and t. 3, p. 478.

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Superpositions*, Paris, Minuit, 1979, p. 97.

shape: »Theater will emerge as that which represents nothing but which presents and constitutes a minority conscience, as a universal becoming.«¹⁶

Extending Foucault's line of reasoning, I would invoke the power of theater in terms of opposition and transgression and perceived as »the act that involves limits.«¹⁷ »Opposition is not the result of thought which denies existence or values, but rather the act which takes each thought to its limit or, perhaps, to the realm in which ontological decision is made: to oppose is to reach an empty core where a being reaches his limit and where this limit defines a being. At that transgressed limit can be heard the resounding 'yes' of opposition which has the 'hee-haw' of the Nietzschean ass ring empty.«¹⁸ Conceived in this manner, the theater is no longer philosophy's foil but takes up philosophy's most urgent questions and creates a forum for playing things out. The limit and the acts that violate it thus exist simultaneously. The stage mirrors our categories and their fragility; it questions us about our being and about the existence of the systems we establish (without identification or compassion). It is as though, as an effect of the stage and the theater, the philosopher confronts the conditions of incarnation and experiences the ability to think and to represent. This happens amidst the tension of an unassignable reality that the theater, in its best moments, has us feel.

A dialogue is established when the philosopher exposes thought to the risks of reality and when the dramatist opens up the stage to receive ideas that are not exclusively entertainment. This dialogue unites the protagonists who, without championing the same ideas, inspire one another to satisfy the same conditions. These encounters, as real and as frequent as they may be today, are unfortunately neither indispensable nor do they take place in real time; their occurrence depends solely on chance or affinity. In fact, their only site is moved within the spectator who, at the time the event unfolds, is able to realize the encounter between theater and philosophy.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 125 and 130.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, »Préface à la transgression«, 1963, *op. cit.* t. 1, p. 236.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

Miško Šuvaković

Advocates: Art and Philosophy *

Approaching the 'Relations' of Philosophy and Art in the 20th Century

Introduction: Advocates

There exist quite different and incomparable cases of the relation between

* The lecture entitled »Advocates: Art and Philosophy. Approaching the *Relations of Philosophy and Art in the 20th Century*« was given in collaboration with dancer and philosopher Jill Sigman. The paper that is now before you wasn't read; I presented to the audience its main theses instead. During my talk Jill Sigman performed an improvised dance. Between the dance and the speech there were some necessary and some incidental correspondences and reactions.

I began my talk with an introduction that was not written down and was therefore 'advocating' my relation towards presentations by other participants of the congress. Here is a written reconstruction of this introduction:

Who am I? I am not Boris Groys, Mikhail Epstein, Komar and Melamid, or NSK.

My grandmother was a story-teller. She liked to tell private and public stories. I am a story-teller and am telling public stories. Her favourite story was about my grandfather and his schoolmates, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and, maybe, Adolf Hitler. I am not sure if this was a true story. She said that my grandfather and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and, maybe, Adolf Hitler, attended the same primary school. ... Why I am telling you this? Why am I returning to narrative speech?

Today, here and now, my task is to return philosophy and aesthetics to thinking and speaking. I have to separate them from the 'paper' (text) and return them to the body, thinking and voice. And I do it in the way as this was done by Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, or in some other way, by Martin Heidegger. Wittgenstein once said »Philosophy is hell to me!« And just now, in front of you and for you too, to think and speak in English about 'advocating' between art and philosophy is hell for me too; I show you my hell. The hell of my thoughts and my mind. My task is to return voice and thought to philosophy, to return the body to it.

Our task was to return voice and body to philosophy, wasn't it, Jill? This was Jill Sigman, the dancer and philosopher. I thank her for her endless assistance. Thanks to all of you!

And this was the introduction. Later, someone from the audience asked why I returned to family stories and why was I telling the story? One possible answer would be that because this is the way of building history and tradition – these are the mechanisms in which postsocialist cultures build a phantasm of their own reality. I come from such a world (from the world of dramatic and tragic postsocialism) and reveal to you the relation of the voice to the body. Then another person noticed that the body of dance and voice of the lecture were in contradiction, that they took the focus away, be it from dance or voice (the spoken word). I hope my answer was clear, that the relation between the

art and philosophy, and it is therefore, according to Morris Weitz,¹ unnecessary to give generalizations of a certain relation between art and philosophy in order to explain some other relations which are quite different and incomparable. I shall designate these different relations with the vague term 'advocating' which can, among other things, designate the following:

- (i) The use of art in philosophy or the use of philosophy in art in the manner in which philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that »the meaning of a word is its use in the language.«² Similarly the painter Marcel Duchamp claimed that by the ready-made he called the choice and the naming of an ordinary and mundane object an artwork.³
- (ii) The claim, closely related to that of philosopher Louis Althusser, that philosophy doesn't possess its proper object of cognition, but is constituted instead as the subject of the desire, as a realm of combat, domination and intervention. It therefore does not exist as a domain of knowledge, but is, instead, an advocate of politics in the domain of science, separating the imaginary from the scientific, etc.
- (iii) Identification, description, and explanation of 'activity' instead of pointing to the ontological disciplinary essence. Thus the poet Charles Bernstein claimed: »Another traditional distinction between philosophy and poetry now sounds anachronistic: that philosophy is involved with system-building and consistency and poetry with the beauty of the language and emotion. Apart from the grotesque dualism of this distinction (as if consistency and the quest for certainty were not emotional!), this view imagines poetry and philosophy to be defined by the product of their activity, consistent texts in the one case, beautiful texts in the other. Rather, philosophy and poetry are at least equally definable not as the product of philosophizing and poetic thinking, but, indeed, as the process (or activity) of philosophizing or poetic thinking.«⁴
- (iv) It could designate Jacques Lacan's definition of signifiers: »The signifier is something that represents a subject for another signifier,« or: »For one signifier every other signifier can represent a subject,« or: »One

body and the voice was external to the effect of the 'paper' (text) and that I worked with difficulties in concentration – with confrontation among thought, voice and body.

¹ Cf. Morris Weitz, »The Role of Theory in Aesthetics«, in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 150-153.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), § 43.

³ Michel Sanouillet, Elmer Peterson (eds), *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp. 32, 141-142.

⁴ Charles Bernstein, »Writing and Method«, in *Content's Dream. Essays 1975-1984* (Los Angeles: Sun&Moon Press, 1986), p. 218.

signifier represents a subject for all other signifiers.«⁵ In other words, 'an artwork is something that represents a subject for all other artworks'; 'an artwork represents subject for philosophical discourse'; or 'a philosophical discourse represents a subject for all artworks'; or:

- (v) To point to the relation between art and philosophy resembles the situation of a legal proceeding (trial) in which 'advocates' speak in the name of the accused as well as the victim, but also in the name of the metatext which is represented by the 'people', the 'sovereign', 'God', 'universal justice' or 'truth'.⁶

Such options are but a preparation for approaching the examples of 'advocating' art and of advocating 'philosophy'.

An-Artwork Precedes the Discourse of Philosophy

It is often claimed that an artwork precedes the theoretical (philosophical) discourse. The starting point is the belief that an artwork is an expression or an effect of an individual, intuitive and original artistic act of creating. Art emerges from the 'opaqueness' of artist's intuitions. The painter Jackson Pollock said that an artist creates as nature does. According to Charles Harrison, »In this voice, the individual artist is celebrated for that wilful extension of cultural and psychological boundaries which he (or very rarely she) achieves in pursuit of newness of effect. Thus, for, example, the work of the American 'First Generation' painters, and particularly of Pollock, is associated with the liberation and purification of art's resources of expression, and with the possibility of a greater spontaneity and immediacy in painting.«⁷ In this model an artwork is described as being similar to nature (a natural object, situation, or event). An artwork is thus external to the theoretical or philosophical discourse.

Philosophy (theory) (a) names; (b) describes and translates from non-discursive into the discursive; (c) explains the intentions, the concept, or an artwork in relation to another discourse; (d) mediates in the communication within cultural frameworks; and (e) interprets what cannot be enunciated of the artistic the 'sensual', 'material' or 'vital', highlighting what can be said and enunciated in philosophy. The philosophical or theoretical discourse appears as an excess of meaning, sense and value in relation to an artwork.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 819.

⁶ Names such as Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Rorty spring to mind.

⁷ Charles Harrison, »A Kind of Context«, in *Essays on Art&Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 4-5.

At the same time the ontology of the work (of the art) and the ontology of the discourse (of philosophy) are two different and incomparable 'worlds of existence' which can only partially be brought into a certain descriptive, explanatory and interpretative correspondence with the aid of a third metadiscourse, that of philosophy on philosophy and on art.

An Artwork and the Public Metatext of Culture

An artwork exists in relation to the public metatext of culture. The starting thesis is that an artwork is a human and social product which, by this very fact, engenders and carries specific (differential) meanings. These meanings are not something originating in the artist or in the object that he/she made or in the 'mirror nature' of the object in relation to the world, but originating in the necessity that what an artist has made is in a certain 'intertextual relation' with cultural metatext(s).⁸ In other words, a painting by Caravaggio or Kandinsky does not represent the world, i. e. a musical composition by Haydn or Schoenberg does not express the human spirit or emotions because it resembles 'the world' or 'spirit', but because it is in an intertextual interpretative relation with the public metatext of an epoch or a civilization⁹ or in relation to particular texts of a certain culture, an art, a philosophy, politics, a religion, or even, 'private languages' that after a certain time enter into the domain of cultural 'public language'. The relation between a cultural metatext and a particular artwork in 20th-Century art is often not a stable and invariant one; one that would be legalized by a social contract. It rests, on the contrary, on a case-to-case basis and is open to transformations (to the 'penetration of the signifier into the signified').

The Artworld

Art is not only an artwork, but an 'artworld'. In the mid-sixties Arthur Danto expressed a characteristic thesis about the 'transcendent' nature of art. He wrote: »To see something as art requires something the eye cannot deny - an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art:

⁸ Jean-François Groulier, »Reading the Visible«, *Art Press*, no. 177 (Paris, 1993), pp. E15-E17; Louis Marin, »Questions, Hypotheses, Discourse«, in *To Destroy Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 15-29.

⁹ In European tradition such a text is the Testament; in countries of »real socialism« such a text was Marx's or Lenin's.

an artworld.«¹⁰ In other words, art is not an object (a painting, a sculpture, a building) or a situation (an environment, a scenic arrangement, an installation), or an event (a musical artwork, a cinema projection, a dance), but a constitutive relation of an 'artworld' in which the very object, event, or situation appears as an artwork: »The world has to be ready for certain things, the artworld no less than the real one. It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible. It would, I should think, never have occurred to the painters of Lascaux that they were producing art on those walls. Not unless there were Neolithic aestheticians.«¹¹ Such an approach could be designated as 'transcendent' for it implies an 'ontological' presence of an artwork as such by that which is not in artwork itself, although it is 'crucially overdetermining' it. Hence an African mask in the British Museum, Duchamp's snow-shovel or a porcelain urinal exhibited in the Georges Pompidou Centre or whichever painting by Henri Matisse do not share common morphological characteristics which would constitute them as artworks: a mask belongs to the 'world' of ritual, a shovel was made as a utilitarian object (as a tool for removing snow), and Matisse's painting was made as an artwork (as a painting appertaining to the realm of painting).

All these cases are identified as 'artworks' only in that historical world which offers a specific (not any other) theory of the 'artworld' and the 'artwork': a theory of existing (ontology), a theory of looking (reception), a theory of creation (poetics), a theory of interpretation (philosophy) and a theory of use (the use is a 'practical' phenomenal interpretation of the relation between an object, art, and philosophy). This continuum does not exist in other historical or geographical 'cultures', but only in the culture of Western hegemonic modern art in relation to religion, magic, politics, utilitarian function, etc. Arthur Danto therefore identifies his 'ontological art' by the following words: »My view, philosophically, is that interpretations constitute works of art, so that you do not, as it were, have the artwork, on one hand, and on the interpretation on the other.«¹²

Transgression, Art, and Philosophy

Avant-garde transgressions in art are 'deviations' (subversions,

¹⁰ Arthur Danto, »The Artworld«, in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, p. 162.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹² Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 23.

violations, disruptions, transitions, innovations, experiments, revolutions) in relation to the dominant hegemonic hierarchical power in art, aesthetics, culture, and society. In avant-garde art in the late 19th and early 20th century the avant-garde transgressions signified:

- (i) a critique (subversion) of the dominant (mainstream) institutions of the aesthetic (of the values of the sensual and of reception), of the artistic (of the creation of an artwork), of the existential (of forms of behavior, and the function of art in a specific historical society and culture), and of the political (of the model of carrying out of the social ideology as a power structure); and
- (ii) a projection of the 'new' as a dominant characteristic of the present (modernity) or the future (the utopia of the optimum projection).¹³

The avant-garde transgression is therefore the 'avant' of the dominant modernist culture and, simultaneously, its immanent critic and its transgression in the name of the 'new' or 'different'.

The philosophy of 'transgression' was anticipated by Georges Bataille who pointed to the two characteristic transgressions of the discourse of reason. The first transgression introduces lower elements (a cry, a howl, silence, failures). The second one points to the higher elements (provokes a symbolic code from within, problematizing the guarantees and the legitimations of sense).

By opposing these two transgressions Bataille provoked and questioned the 'gap' (hiatus) between the high and the low. Jacques Derrida,¹⁴ following Jacques Lacan,¹⁵ suggests that transgression of the discourse rules implies transgression of the general Law. According to Bataille, transgression is an 'inner experience' in which an individual or, in the case of ritualized transgressions such as communal celebrations, the community transgresses the borders of rational, mundane behavior governed by profit, production and self-preservation. In transgression the power of the taboo manifests itself.

Transgression employs the power of the forbidden (of 'crazy Law'). A post-Bataillean definition of transgression includes:

- (a) subversion, disruption, rupture and revolution - literally, of subversion, disruption, rupture, and revolution in an individual existence;
- (b) a parody of transgression for, according to Marcelin Pleynet, »in our time, there is no more transgression, no more subversion, no more

¹³ Cf. Aleksandar Flaker, 'Optimalna projekcija', in *Poetika osporavanja. Avangarda i književna levica* (Zagreb: Kultura, 1984), pp. 62-72.

¹⁴ Cf. Jacques Derrida, »De l'économie restreinte a l'économie générale«, in *Ecriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 373-384.

¹⁵ Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* (Ljubljana: Analecta, 1984), p. 18.

rupture, « only » a parody of transgression, a parody of subversion, simulacrum, a repetition of rupture;»¹⁶

- (c) the absence of the meaning;
- (d) matter devoid of metaphysics (*bas materialisme*);
- (e) ecstasy and anarchy;
- (f) intervention of the body in the text (*écriture corporelle*);
- (g) a theory of the need for a deficit or a loss, but not a theory of a deficit or a loss;
- (h) sliding (*glissement*);
- (i) the fear of the sublime;
- (j) horizontal vs. vertical;
- (k) entropy vs. creation and production;
- (l) the lack of the sourceless and homelessness;
- (m) architecture against architecture;
- (n) eroticism;
- (o) opposition between perversion and normality,
- (p) functions of interpretation and the 'blind spots' that every interpretation reveals;
- (q) formlessness (inform, formless);
- (r) transparency;
- (s) an open work;
- (t) trauma;
- (u) entrance into a project;
- (v) transgression of bodily dimensions;
- (w) promised elimination of symbols, metaphors, and allegories, and
- (x) entropy of the sense.¹⁷

Art and philosophy are thus neither two separate worlds nor two complementary ones. They are instead a realm of arbitrariness and transgression in relation to what emerges as the Law of art, or Law of philosophy, or Law in relation to art and philosophy.

Representation of Art in Philosophy

An indicative case is that of Heidegger, for he with the philosophical discourse, which is a picture (mimesis) of 'thinking', points to art. The art

¹⁶ Marcelin Pleynet, »Les problèmes de l'avant-garde«, *Tel Quel*, no. 25, Paris 1966, p. 82.

¹⁷ Cf. Yves-Alain Bois, Rosalind Kraus (eds.), *L'informe. Mode d'emploi* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996), p. 7.

that Heidegger speaks about is neither concrete historical art, nor an ideal (ideal figure) of the desired art. He speaks about art for philosophy's sake. It is art that is represented by philosophy within the language invented within philosophy, and which consists of the traces of philosophical metaphysics. Not without reason, Heidegger writes: »What is art should be inferrable from the work. What the work of art is we can come to know only from the essence of art. Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle.«¹⁸

Or: »What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. This being emerges into the unconcealedness of its Being.¹⁹ Here, the pair of shoes painted by Van Gogh's hand is not in question. Neither is the fact that these are not the farmer's shoes, but those of the artist or of the artist's friend.²⁰ The real shoes in the real artwork are in question. And a 'real artwork' is not an historical concrete art, but the fictional (theoretically formed) artwork with the help of which philosophy for its own purposes (i.e. for the purpose of philosophical truth or speech about philosophical truth of art) projects the artwork which mediates for philosophy, or philosophical questioning the wariness or even horror of the 'baseless' nature and 'homelessness' of Western thought.

Discourse of the Artists: From Van Gogh to Malevich

Let me consider a specific story about theory and art, for example, that told by Lawrence Alloway.²¹ Writings by artists could be traced in the past up to the 15th century examples such as Ghilberti's *Commentaries* or Alberti's *Treatise on Art*. The first interview comes from the 16th century when Brendetto Varchi questioned artists (Michelangelo, Bronzino). In the 17th century artist's correspondence (Rubens, Poussin) and artist's books (Charles Le Brun) appeared. A polemic between writers (Diderot) and artists (Falconeti) is well known. In the 19th century artists wrote letters (Pissarro, Van Gogh), traveler-diaries or memoirs (Hunt, Gauguin). Writings from the late 19th century are neither technical treatises, nor tractates, but a discourse in the first person by the artist about himself, art and the world.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, »The Origin of the Work of Art«, in *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper, 1977), p. 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

²⁰ Cf. Meyer Shapiro, *Selected Papers. Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society*, vol. 4 (New York: George Braziller, 1994), pp. 138-139.

²¹ Lawrence Alloway, »Artists as Writers, 1: Inside Information«, in *Network. Art and the Complex Present* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 208.

What does this little story tell us? It points to specific changes in the status of the artist and his identity from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance to the modern age and modernism. Speaking schematically we could say that an artist in the Middle Ages was plunged into a Christian totalizing metalanguage, a legitimizing metalanguage which offered an unspoken and self-understandable continuum between the world, the artist, and the artwork. The abandonment in which the modern artist finds himself/herself, an artist who is no longer plunged into the great unifying-homogenous metalanguage of the world, the society, and the power of religious totalizing transcendence, forces him/her to identify and advocate himself/herself. Michel Foucault wrote that the subject is a historical phenomenon.²² The 'artist' is theoretically anticipated in the 19th century private writings (letters, diaries, correspondence, journals) of various artists. In the 20th century it is formulated as a *pas tout* metalanguage for specific use. (This use can be personal, as in an artist's poetics; specific, as in pedagogy; or specialist, as in philosophy of art).

What, then, does 'theory of the artist' mean if we are aware that:

- (i) the idea of theory of the artist appeared in a certain epoch of art (painting, sculpture), and in a certain epoch of discourse (the way in which a thought was expressed, the way of producing a text);
- (ii) the theory of the artist is thought of and expressed as an idea, a concept, and a project in discourse which structurally and axiologically included certain relations between speech (and writing) and the appearance of an art object (object, situation, event);
- (iii) the theory of the artist is not just a secondary tool in the process of creating or producing an object, a situation, or an event (artwork), instead it is, primarily, in the service of establishing and making work an artwork, an artworld, and an art history.

I will now point to the difference between the stage of discourse in the time when Vincent van Gogh wrote letters to his brother,²³ and the suprematist 'philosophy' of Kasimir Malevich.²⁴ The letters are the 'speech' of the modern subject who is constituted as a hypothetically autonomous 'Self' in the domain of the necessity of identification of intuition, of the private nature of his existence and auto-poetic spelling of 'the truth in painting'. Van Gogh becomes 'van Gogh' through parallelism of his practice, existence

²² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Science* (New York: Random House, 1970).

²³ Cf. Ronald De Leeuw (ed.), *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

²⁴ Cf. T. Anderson (ed.), *Malevich: Essays on Art 1915-1933* (Chewster Springs: Rapp and Whiting; London: Dufour Editions, 1969).

and thinking. In Malevich's case the situation is rather different. He works under the circumstances of a social revolution (first the bourgeois and then the Bolshevik), of decentred eclectic modernism and at a time of emergence of particular discourses: that of the Bolshevik revolution, of literary theoretical formalism, of allegorical theosophy, and the discourse of a self-observing autonomous modernist painter. In paintings such as »Black Square« (1913-15?) and »White on White« (1917-18) the fundamental practical (poetical) questions of suprematism are solved.²⁵

During the twenties Malevich posits theoretical questions which finally drove him out of art altogether, towards mediating the 'idea of suprematism' in relation to philosophy.

His questions were:

- (i) the question of the science of painting (of a theory of the 'additional element');
- (ii) that of an artistic education; and
- (iii) the question of the possible 'suprematist world'; painting, sculpture, architecture and applied arts that appeared in the twenties, are not art in its creative literal sense, but an attempt to show that the painting, sculpture, architecture and applied arts advocate the philosophy of suprematist world.

The Troubles with Wittgenstein's Philosophy

It is paradoxical that the great philosopher, who believed solved all philosophical secrets and paradoxes (in *Tractatus*), is today read and interpreted in the artworld and in the synchronically theoretical worlds (in criticism, aesthetics, philosophy of art) as a paradigmatic model of writing (*écriture*) in art.²⁶ It is this example that I will discuss here. Wittgenstein's books *Tractatus* (1922) and *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (1953) are not written as poetical studies, books on the aesthetics or philosophy of art. On the contrary, they are written as books about the ultimate questions of philosophy, of philosophy which is akin to scientific thinking (that of the natural or formal sciences). But since Dada and Fluxus, i.e. from the end of the fifties (cf. notes by the painter Jasper Johns, ideas by the composer John

²⁵ »By suprematism I understand supremation of pure feeling in visual art« – Kasimir Malevitch, *Die Gegenstandslose Welt* (Berlin: Florian Kupferberg, 1980), p. 65.

²⁶ Cf., for example, Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Jorn K. Bramann, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus and the Modern Arts* (Rochester: Adler Publishing Company, 1985).

Cage) through minimal and conceptual art of the sixties (cf. works by the painter Mel Bochner, choreographer Yvonne Rainer, conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth and the group Art&Language or the group Kod) to postmodern strategies of the seventies, eighties and nineties (cf. poetry and theory of the American movement 'l=a=n=g=u=a=ge poetry', film experiments by Derek Jarman, 'deconstructivist' prose by Kathy Acker), his philosophy is read in a quite different way. It could be said that this way is an asymmetrical one in relation to the philosophy understood as a philosophy of science.

Let me offer some examples. Jasper Johns destroyed the critique of the modernist Greenbergian autonomous pictorial painterly plane (ranging from abstract expressionism to postpainterly abstraction) by introducing nonaesthetic conceptual relations between the words and the painting (i.e. painting »Fool's House«, 1962), modelling this procedure after Wittgenstein's discussion of the use of the word in his *Philosophical Investigations*. The instrumental power of taste (of Kantian judgement based on taste) is dramatically confronted with the critical powers of conceptual analyses of painting and of conceptualization of the manual-pictorial analysis of painting.

Within the context of conceptual art Joseph Kosuth based the idea of working within art as a form of theoretical investigation of 'propositions' on the analogies with Wittgenstein's investigations of 'propositions' in philosophy.²⁷ He saw his own artistic work as an art appropriating philosophical competences, as 'art after philosophy'. Art is thus defined thanks to the mediation of the language 'art games' which represents a way of critical self-reflective healing of art from the illusions and illnesses of aesthetics as a philosophy of taste. The confrontation of theory (i.e. Wittgenstein's philosophy) and art does not lead towards an understanding of an art work as a central element of art, but to art as an activity or explicitly as a practice of a specific conceptualization of the function of an artwork as the product and of art as a context of such a production.

I would like to begin my discussion of the status of Wittgenstein's philosophy within the interpretative frames of art by remarking that Wittgenstein does not offer a slogan or a statement which would support the beliefs (taste, intentions) of an artist or a theoretician of art, i.e. that he does not speak about art or artistic at all. But what is it, that Wittgenstein's philosophical writings do? It demonstrates how a self-reflective observation, analysis, discussion and production of a system of the 'language of art' are possible and how it is possible to represent art in a discursive manner for

²⁷ Cf. Joseph Kosuth, »Art after Philosophy«, *Art after Philosophy and After. Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 13-32.

art in relation to philosophy and theory. In other words, how philosophy advocates philosophy for philosophy.

What Wittgenstein's philosophical writings offer art is an open analogy: how to observe, analyse, discuss, and produce, from within art, a system of an 'art language', i.e. how can art be discursively advocated in the name of art and in relation to philosophy and theory. This is the basis on which artists from the late fifties on raised the question of philosophy, but not within the philosophy that speaks of art, but in art (painting, music, dance, poetry, film) itself and therein started to employ the languages of art to speak about the nature of their work (of the subject in the process). Wittgenstein's philosophical work was a promise of such a paradigmatic approach: not to philosophize about philosophy, but to ask oneself and to demonstrate one's questioning by employing a special active language used by the speaking, writing, painting, sculpting, singing, playing, or dancing subject, i.e. and hence advocates for other 'texts' of culture and history.

From an Inquiry into Music to the Theory at Work

Arnold Schoenberg carried out an extraordinary revolution: he questioned the tonal system and offered a creative and theoretical answer to it with the idea of atonal music. What I am interested in here is the intertextual relation of his discussion of music with his composing. This relation is not a philosophical one and directed against aesthetics as it was understood at the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century: »If I should succeed in teaching the pupil the handicraft of our art as completely as a carpenter can teach his, then I shall be satisfied. And I would be proud if, to adopt a familiar saying, I could say: 'I have *taken* from composition pupils a bad *aesthetics* and have *given* them in return a good *course in handicraft*'.«²⁸ Carl Dahlhaus²⁹ thought that Schoenberg discarded the metaphysical discourse of musical beauty as unnecessary, and offered a quite different discourse on music: a discourse of pedagogy, that of a musical theoretician, a discourse of musicology, of a composer and, of course, a discourse of advocating a conceptualization of the metamorphosis (a deconstruction) of tonal into atonal music. However, Schoenberg is a real modernist for his theory is an autonomous 'system' of articulation of a discursive

²⁸ Cf. Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 12.

²⁹ Karl Dahlhaus, *Estetika muzike (Musikästhetik)* (Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, 1992), p. 5.

sense which follows after the creative musical act and is exterior to it. Schoenberg's work is autonomous in relation to his discourse, and his discourse is a discussion of music exterior to music itself, an almost scientific discourse.

In John Cage's music³⁰ the process is quite different from the forties until the nineties, for therein we see theory at work. His work leads Cage outside of music. Music hence develops as an 'extended activity' which can exist in an intertextual relation with music of the Other, of other arts or discursive forms of expression and representation.

What is created as a theoretical discourse could be described as:

- (a) 'Metamusic' - Cage speaks of a fundamental transformation of musical ontology (intentional expression with sounds) into a theoretical discourse on music which is realized in the location and under the circumstances in which the performance of a musical work is expected (the intentional creation of sounds). It appears as if the music advocates a certain 'philosophy' or 'theory' within the context of music in relation to the philosophical and theoretical discourse that is exterior to it.
- (b) 'Lecture poetry' - Cage speaks of the displacement from one art discipline (music) into another (poetry). This poetry is not just any poetry but that of the avant-garde sort, in which the poetic (expressive) character of the discourse is confronted with fragments or traces of metalanguage on art, politics, existence, religion, and textual production.
- (c) 'Textual production' is the production of a text which is neither music nor poetry, but 'textual productivity' in art. To claim that a text is productivity (let us approach this definition gradually, first from outside, through its normative aspect) means that textual letter (*écriture*) presupposes, as its tactic, the defeat of the descriptive orientation of language and the emergence of a device that creates conditions for a full development of its generative capability.³¹ In other words, a certain text of art advocates music for other texts of music, other arts (poetry, literature), theories of art and culture, philosophy, etc.

And yet another difference! Schoenberg builds his autonomous metatext on music which has a relatively consistent structure of description, explanation, and interpretation. The 'discourse of a composer' is constituted in the interspace of a differentiating discourse of music, musicology and

³⁰ On Cage see, for example, Marjorie Perloff, Charles Junkerman (eds.), *John Cage. Composed in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967).

³¹ François Wahl, »Autour d'une critique du signe«, in O. Ducrot & T. Todorov (eds.), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 445-446.

philosophy. Cage, on the contrary, presents the productivity of the text as an open eclectic intertextual relation between:

- (a) a letter (*écriture*) from 'music as an artworld' which through artistic procedures (of a certain open and undefinable discipline of representation, expression, and acting) takes over the voices of a religion as a world of existence (Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki),
- (b) politics as world of existential and behavioral beliefs (David Thoreau), and
- (c) philosophy as a world of procedures in language (Ludwig Wittgenstein).

But what does appropriating the VOICES of religion, politics and philosophy signify? This is neither the postmodern citation (an arbitrarily appropriated and quoted voice of the Other, taken from the archive or a labyrinth of textual hypotheses), nor a modernist explication of slogans (statements, beliefs or discursive verification of an act). It is instead an act or action performed within a text, an analogy of a performative act or speech act. It is therefore possible to speak, in the case of Cage's texts (letter/*écriture*/) or lecture (speech), of 'theory at work'. The meaning of a certain text, of the »Lecture on Nothing« (1959),³² for example, is neither the meaning of a text as a closed system of consistent meanings, nor closed meaning of a text which establishes arbitrary or necessary relations with other texts of art, culture, or theory. It is a meaning of the words that gain their meaning by the performing act (of writing down, speaking out, of mentally representing, semantically, syntactically, or of typographically advocating in writing or in reading).

The Entryway Between Philosophy and Literature

In Jacques Derrida's writings there is no equivalence between literature and philosophy, between writing in literature and writing in philosophy. Instead, there is an open and postponed promise: the promise of a 'close' (intimate) relation between literature and philosophy, or the promise of crossing the entryway which separates philosophy and literature.

What is philosophy if not thinking? The answer could be, for example: philosophy is writing. But where is the 'source' of writing, and what does writing demonstrate? To whom or to what does the writing show itself: to the thinking, the spirit, the other text - to the very writing - or to the essence of writing, the essence of philosophy? Heidegger might have said: »We ask about the essence of art.« If we return from Heidegger to Derrida, the answer

³² John Cage, »Lecture on Nothing«, in John Cage, *Silence*, pp. 109-127.

is posited as a 'flow of questions': »What is literature? And first of all, what is it 'to write?' How is it that the fact of writing can disturb the very question 'what is?' and even 'what does it mean?' To say this in other words, (...) when and how does an inscription become literature and what takes place when it does? To what and whom is this due? What takes place between philosophy and literature, science and literature, politics and literature, theology and literature, psychoanalysis and literature? The question was doubtless inspired in me by a desire which was related also to a certain uneasiness: why finally does the inscription so fascinate me, preoccupy me, precede me? Why am I so fascinated by the literary use of the inscription?«³³ The questions are not just about the 'inscription', they are the inscription 'performed' in such a way that it is not possible to separate clearly the inscription (writing) of literature from the inscription (writing) of philosophy. What is at stake is not the diachronic play of questions and answers about the primacy of literature or philosophy, or whether literature becomes philosophy, or whether philosophy by its letter (*écriture*) crosses the entryway of the inscription of literature. The production of inscription is the question at stake here, which causes the complex nature of the differentiation between the 'sources' and 'outfall' of the inscription or leaving the trace (of writing). No, this is not the epochal turn of philosophy in pre-philosophical or post-philosophical writing of prose, poetry or essay. It is the 'unstable inscription' at the entryway between philosophy and literature.

Conclusion

What do these examples, and there could have been many more, demonstrate? A critical and suicidal relation between art and philosophy or, on the contrary, an ecstatic and eclectic richness of the 'pleasure in the senses' (*jouissance*) of the possibility of advocating art and advocating philosophy, or a nomadic displacement from 'one possible world of advocating' into 'a possible world'? At a time when nothing is self-evident when it comes to art and to philosophy, some of the relevant questions are:

- How to define and describe openness, the specific nature of examples, and eclecticism or nomadism so that we acquire a systematic view of art and philosophy?³⁴

³³ Jacques Derrida, quoted in David Carroll, *Paraesthetics. Foucault Lyotard Derrida* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 83.

³⁴ Heinz Paetzold, »How to Bridge the Gap between Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics of Nature. A Systematic Approach«, *Anthropos*, no. 3-4, Ljubljana, 1996.

- How to show that our ‘baselessness and homelessness’³⁵ are a ‘normal’ human condition? It is not just now that it became evident that nothing which has to do with art is evident by itself, even its right to existence.³⁶ Nothing that has to do with art or philosophy was ever evident by itself.
- How to be an ‘advocate’ in relation to a signifier which advocates a subject for another signifier, or for all other signifiers?
- How is it possible HERE and NOW to destroy with one’s mortal and vulnerable body the ‘advocating’ or ‘mediating’ screen of the signifieds³⁷ which separates art and philosophy, and then to face one’s own experience of the destruction of that break?

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, »The Origin of the Work of Art«, p. 149.

³⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Estetička teorija (Ästhetische Theorie)* (Beograd: Nolit, 1979), p. 25.

³⁷ Roland Barthes, »Rasch«, *The Responsibility of Forms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 308.

Art and the Reconfiguration of Contemporary Experience

Introduction

In his celebrated essay 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project' Jürgen Habermas addresses the issue of how aesthetic experience can be reintegrated into the life world. He observes that

Albrecht Wellmer has drawn my attention to one way that an aesthetic experience which is not framed around the experts' critical judgement of taste can have its significance altered: as soon as such an experience is used to illuminate a life-historical situation and is related to life problems, it enters into a language game which is no longer that of the aesthetic critic. The aesthetic experience then not only renews the interpretation of our needs in whose light we perceive the world. It permeates as well our cognitive significations and our normative expectations and changes the manner in which all these moments refer to one another.¹

Habermas illustrates his point by using an example from Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. Weiss describes a group of young workers in Berlin in 1937, who, though evening-classes acquire a knowledge of the general and social history of European art. Habermas notes that

Out of the resilient edifice of this objective mind, embodied in works of art which they saw again and again in the museums in Berlin, they started removing their own chips of stone, which they gathered together and reassembled in the context of their own milieu. This milieu was far removed from that of traditional education as well as from the then existing regime. These young workers went back and forth between the edifice of European art and their own milieu until they were able to illuminate both.²

Even if we interpret 'chips of stone' here in both a literal and metaphorical sense, Habermas's example is not compelling. For to steal such chips of stone (or, in the metaphorical reading) fragments of art historical knowledge and to reassemble them in a different context, is, at best, a use of art. Essentially found objects are taken from their high art context in order

¹ Jürgen Habermas 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project' included in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Pluto Press, London 1985, pp. 3-15. This reference, p. 13.

² Habermas in Foster *ibid.* p. 13.

to yield broader existential knowledge. Why this should count as aesthetic experience is, alas, not clarified by Habermas.

The example is, nevertheless, instructive in a much broader sense, both negatively and positively. In negative terms, the strategy embodied in Habermas's example is one that prefigures the limits and ultimate failure of much conceptual art. Such art is putatively a means of wresting meaning back from the critic, and investing it in the ideas of the artist. It appears even to have a democratising function in that it allows the use of – in principle – any material, any object, all in all any means to get the artist's idea across. No 'skills' are necessary. Hence in its subversion of traditional art methods, this seems an ideal way for specific individuals, social groups, and (especially) marginalised minorities, to illuminate and declare their experiences.

Such illumination is, however, massively restricted. For whilst the activities of the Berlin workers considered by Habermas (or indeed the activities of most conceptual artists) may give the people concerned some existential fulfilment, they do no more than that. Such fulfilment is not only substantially non-aesthetic in character, but also (since it lacks an inter-subjectively valid code of articulation which would enable it to illuminate more general contexts) it is hugely localised in character. Unless the artist explains the intention and significance of the object, its meaning is unavailable. The road is thus clear for the critic to step in. And this is the supreme irony. Of *all* the artistic idioms it is conceptually based ones which affirm the hegemony of that insidious, priestly class of curators, critics, and art historians, who dominate the contemporary art scene. If such works are to illuminate the life world in a genuine objective sense, as opposed to the narrow context of their point of origination, then they require a critic to speak for them and through them.³

Now it might seem that the only alternative to this is equally unacceptable. It would involve a reversion to the traditional specialised practices of high art, and, accordingly, to modernist critical practices based on the primacy of form. However, this alternative is not inevitable.

We are led therefore to the positive implications of Habermas's example. It has two aspects. The first is that if artistic form is to be a vital element in life world experience, it must have the capacity to offer aesthetic illumination of personal and group situations. The second is the possibility that this can be achieved through the fragmentation and reconfiguration of the historical continuum. Habermas seems to see this as a more demo-

³ A sustained critique of conceptual art can be found in Chapter 8 of my *The Language of Twentieth-Century Art: A Conceptual History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1997. See especially pp. 171-186.

cratised form of artistic activity. Indeed it can be; but it does not have to be in opposition to the more specialist critical judgement of taste. To see why this is so, I shall, in the remainder of this paper, set out the basis of a distinctive form of art practice. Its origins extend far back in to the century with the development of photomontage by Man Ray, John Heartfield and others. The essence of photomontage is to combine multiple photographs, and (sometimes) other visual material, into a single image. This can involve a simple juxtaposition of photographs, or the use of cutaway fragments of prints, in which latter case, we might justifiably speak of *photo-collage*.

There is a crucial question which must be asked about such a practice, namely does it matter that the image is derived solely from photographs taken by the artist him or herself? The verdict of history so far has been, in practical terms, no. Artists working in this idiom have, by and large, been willing to use photographs taken by both themselves and others in composing the final image. However, historical circumstances have changed. What if a form of photo-collage developed which was founded on the convention that the photo-collage should be composed exclusively from photographs taken by the artist? At first sight this might seem like an arbitrary stipulation about how photo-collage should be done. But is not. Photo-collage is, like all visual idioms, predominantly an art of spatial realisation. There is, however, also a temporal dimension, which in normal photo-collage, is scattered. We find images taken by different people combining different places and times. If all the combined photographs or fragments thereof, are, in contrast, taken by one individual, what results is a combination of places and times which are moments from the continuum of the artist's personal history. Visual aspects of events in an individual life are made into an object. We might term this form of photo-collage, accordingly, the 'event-object'. Such objects – in their conjunction of images – can be developed in a broadly surrealist idiom. However, the more the final object is composed from fragments, or from photographs disposed so as to mask their own figurative content, the more it approximates to the condition of abstract content, the more it approximates to the condition of abstract or semi-abstract painting. This painterly absorption of photography has a distinctive and remarkable ontology which achieves a kind of philosophical illumination. To show this, I will first clarify some key characteristics which the Event-Object shares with painting *qua* aesthetic object, and will then go on to outline its distinctive inflections of these characteristics.

Part One

Let me begin with some general points about the nature of the aesthetic object.⁴ To perceive the world in any terms at all involves the interaction of two mutually dependent basic cognitive capacities – understanding and imagination. In the former, sensible particulars are subsumed or discriminated under a concept or concepts. We have the basic act of cognition. This act is only made possible, however, in so far as it is informed by the imagination's powers of attention, recall, and projection. The generation of images enables us to relate an immediate object of cognition to its past, future, and possible appearances. Imagination, in other words, in conjunction with the understanding, serves to stabilise the sensible manifold and organises it as a coherent perceptual system.

Most of our perceptual judgements can be characterised as discursively rigid. They involve the application of definite concepts to definite objects on the basis of definite practical interests or physiological needs. Understanding and imagination are, in this context, tightly bound by the following of rules. However, there is one context in which their co-operation is much freer. This is in the enjoyment of aesthetic form. In such enjoyment we explore the different possibilities of structure in the way an object is made present to the senses. And if the object is an artwork, this making present involves reference to needs, desires, fantasies and values shared by both artist and audience alike by virtue of the common condition of embodied subjectivity.

The importance of this is as follows. The discursive rigidity of ordinary cognition does not come ready-made; it is *achieved* through the body's active positioning in relation to the perceptual field. Indeed, our particular cognitive acts are informed by a network of more fundamental concepts which originate in the body's movements and active manipulation of things. These concepts include figure and ground, reality, negation and limitation, and unity, plurality and totality. The enjoyment of aesthetic form is one which flows out from these. Rather than simply identifying the form as a 'this' or 'that', we explore the different possibilities of virtual structure which inform its appearance. Understanding and imagination interact with relative freedom and playfulness. They return us to the mobile origins of perception, and the very possibility of conceptualisability.

Now *qua* aesthetic form the Event-Object shares in all this. However, it does so in an especially perspicacious way. This is because of two factors.

⁴ For a full theory of the aesthetic object see Parts I and III of my *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

The first is that photographs are mechanical reproductions of visual experience; the second is that, in the Event-Object, the experiences in question are the direct causal traces of moments from a specific person's individual life history. Hence, in our aesthetic exploration of such an object, the virtual realities which it reconfigures are, in a sense, closer to actual experience than are painting or natural forms. There is a more direct and intimate link to the being of the artist. The events of seeing which the artist has actually experienced – his or her past bodily positionings – are woven into a fabric of new appearance. Painting and other visual aesthetic idioms embody this in a tacit way; the Event-Object – insofar as we know it to be composed from photographs taken by the artist – makes this thematic.

On these terms, then, whilst all aesthetic form involves the exploration of structures of appearance, the Event-Object more clearly locates the origins of this structuring – of perception itself – as a function of the individual body, its cognitive capacities, and its positioning.

Now as well as engaging this direct perceptual dimension, our responses to artifactual aesthetic forms engage what I shall call the holistic structure of experience. This consists in the fact that no single moment in a human life exists as an isolated self-subsistent atom. Any present experience is given its specific character through the reciprocal relation between what is given in that experience and a complex horizon composed of past experiences, our anticipation of future ones, and our counterfactual sense of alternative ways in which our life might have developed. The individual moment 'contains' as it were, the whole of our experience. And with each new moment of experience, the character of the horizontal whole is modified. In the passage of life each individual moment is contingent – things in the past might have happened differently and the way our future will unfold is a developing situation. However, once a moment has gone into the past it is a necessary part of what we are in the present. Remove or change any moment from a person's past then that person's present and future are also changed.

This holistic structure is one of the necessary conditions of the human mode of finite self-consciousness. It is, however, something we are rarely aware of, except in a philosophical analysis such as this, or, indirectly, through the arts – most notably through painting. Aristotle noted the fact that mimesis has an intrinsic fascination for human beings. He did not note, however, how the actual process of making is itself involved in this fascination. When the painter places brushstrokes on a surface, each new stroke is given its character not only by its own qualities but also by its relation to those which went before it and those future ones which the artist might be anticipating. Reciprocally, this horizontal whole of strokes in place and strokes

which might be made, is modified by the execution of the present stroke. Of course, areas might be painted over and reworked on the basis of this stroke, but, in that case, its significance is changed. The painting-over is a causal consequence of this decisive stroke, and serves to aesthetically relocate it.

Now the important point to note is that this process exemplifies the holistic structure of experience. This is because the making of a painting just *is* a successive series of experiences in a person's life. It embodies, and leaves the traces of a holistic structure. These traces, however, are not part of the artist's inner life; they are objectified, i.e. rendered in a publically accessible medium. This gives them a special significance. For it means that the present in which the painting is completed, is, in principle, eternalised – along with all those other moments involved in the process of making. The painting marks an episode in the artist's life which has now been brought to completion. Of course, any episode in a life can reach a culminating point, but it is then absorbed in the on-going holistic development of a person's life history. In the painting, however, the episode attains a more fully realised completion in that it is embodied in an artifact which is physically discontinuous from its creator. All the individually contingent moments which informed the work's creation are now rendered necessary – as part of the full identity of the finished work. And since the finished work exists independently of its creator, he or she and, indeed, the audience can identify reflectively with this completed structure of experience, rather than be immersed in the experiential flow of moments.

The painting also manifests the narrative structure of the experiential flow. This is because, in applying paint, the artist does so selectively. Previously executed areas can be erased or modified on the basis of the present stage of composition. Likewise in life, one comprehends and defines one's present not as the simple consequence of one past moment after another, but rather selectively as an element in an on-going narrative wherein some moments of the past are more important than another. Significantly, however, whereas much of one's past is simply forgotten – and forgetting is an *involuntary* act – the artist's erasures and reworkings are voluntary. They allow the present to regulate the past volitionally.

On these terms, then, the painting is not only an object of aesthetic pleasure in terms of its structures of appearance, it is so also – and in a much deeper way – through its completion and refinement of structures of experience. There is, however, a limitation; and, again, it consists in the fact that the painting's completion of experience is indirect. The evidence for this is manifest in the way that, historically, painting has been valued for the

messages of its figurative content, or for the beauties of its formal qualities. The aesthetic-ontological dimension which I have identified has scarcely figured in the explanation of the nature of our aesthetic responses to art. It has not been articulated as a convention of appreciation.

The Event-Object goes some way towards rectifying this lack. In juxtaposing and composing photographs and fragments thereof, it manifestly exemplifies the structures already alluded to. This is because, of course, the photographic material involves direct causal traces of the artist's experience. It is composed *wholly* from such traces. The experiential structure link is here virtually inescapable. In fact, it is taken one step further. In painting the work is composed in temporally linear terms. Even if one goes back in order to erase or rework, this 'going back' is actually metaphorical. Literally, the erasure or reworking is another stage forward in temporal terms, from the previous stages of work. In the Event-Object, however, the artist can use images from the distant past of his or her life on top of images from more recent experience. Physically, and in terms of linear time, the far past images are here more present than the more recent ones. Here, the linear time of the actual process of composition, is subverted by the formal assertiveness of material from the distant past. And again this is, in an important respect, true to the narrative structure of experience. For the present is often given its character more by events in the distant past, than it is by more recent happenstances. Even more than in painting, the temporality of the Event-Object is genuinely experiential.

We are left, then, with the following situation. The Event-Object uses photographs *as if* they were the material and means for painting. But it is not painting, and neither is it a variety of photography. Rather it forms a symbolic means of articulating experience which is inescapably photographic and inescapably painterly, but which is reducible to neither. The Event-Object is an emergent art form (in every sense) with its own distinctive properties.

Now as I mentioned earlier, the Event-Object is prefigured by developments in photomontage and photo-collage from earlier on in the century. But it has not been systematically worked as a distinctive idiom. One reason for this has been the facile progress, or, rather, lack of progress of philosophical aesthetics. A more significant reason is that historical circumstances have only now favoured its development. I shall now address this factor in my final section.

Part Two

Recent times have been characterised by a rhetoric of deconstruction which affirms such factors as the instability and transience of meaning, relativity in values, and the decentredness of the self. Now whilst it is true that there is a prevailing sensibility of fragmentation in culture, the elements in the rhetoric which I have just cited are more its surface manifestations – intellectual fashion – rather than actual truths about our mode of insertion in the world.⁵ The problem for them is that instability, relativity and decentredness, only make sense in the context of a stable spatio-temporal continuum of re-identifiable individual material items. Language is the means of re-identification in such a context, and involves those powers of understanding and imagination which I alluded to earlier.

Now, at first sight, the Event-Object as an artistic idiom seems very much of its time. This is because its very essence involves photographic fragmentation of the linear continuity of experience. However, as I showed earlier, this fragmentation manifests much deeper and more constant structures in perception and experience, to which the Event-Object gives its own distinctive inflection. Indeed, the Event-Object is also of its time in that it is not *per se* a high-art format. Anyone can cut up and reconfigure snapshots so as to create objects with the experiential structures I have described. These considerations suggest that the Event-Object would satisfy Habermas's demands of the aesthetic – that it should illuminate personal experience and situations, and not be the province of the specialist critic alone. This being said, however, it is vital to emphasise that it is not antagonistic to critical practice culture. For whilst it is an easily accessible medium, it can be refined and developed – perhaps in surprising ways. Keen-sighted critics can keep abreast of these factors, pointing out repetitions, refinements and innovations, as well performing more traditional formal appraisals. The fact that systematic pursuit of the Event-Object as an idiom is new, indeed, means that the critic is more effectively placed in order to carry out these tasks. There is less purely historical ground which has to be mastered.

Earlier on I mentioned how the Event-Object is photographic and painterly but is neither photography nor painting. It breaks down the barriers between these in a way that advances itself as a distinctive idiom, yet at the same time, illuminates photography and painting. In respect of the former, for example, whilst the symbolic form of mechanically-reproduced representation has been massively developed in the form of filmic, televisual,

⁵ For a sustained critique of Derrida's version of 'deconstruction' see Chapter One of my *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 25-39.

and video images i.e. in the direction of temporal realisation; its development in terms of static, more spatial realisation has been more restricted. The Event-Object, however moves us in just this direction. Again, through its use of painterly compositional means, it illuminates (in ways shown earlier) the experiential structures which inform the act of painting.

I am arguing, then, that the Event-Object is a more accessible medium, yet one which contributes to specialist art practice precisely through overcoming some of the boundaries between two such practices.

Let me now conclude by developing the implications of this in relation to the connection of philosophy and art. For a long time philosophers have concerned themselves with problems of definition in relation to art *per se*, its ontological properties, and the kind of experiences which we have before us. Debates on the definition of art have, I think, led us nowhere. Formalist approaches, for example, have told us very little about why aesthetic form should be so significant. Institutional definitions seek, in effect, to ratify anything which artists choose to call art – a strategy which, in effect, reduces art to mere theory or ideas whose connection with the art object only becomes manifest when explained linguistically by the artist, critic, or curator. What is lost in both approaches is an adequate account of why art has a history, why it should lend itself to so many different uses; all in all why art answers a distinctive need in human beings.

What needs to be done, I would suggest, is as follows. We need to clarify the symbolic structures of specific media, noting, in particular, the epistemic conditions of their legibility i.e. the way in which such symbolic structures acquire a communicable meaning which is not tied to accompanying explanations from the artist or critic. This means, in effect, a clarification of the possibility of effective communicative codes. By revealing the sometimes obscure or indirect epistemic conditions which sustain perception of art objects the philosopher enables these to henceforth act as an acknowledged and explicit convention of reading. He or she thus opens out the possibility of new communicative codes in art.

Marina Gržinić
The Virtual-Image and the Real-Time Interval

Introduction

One could argue that virtual reality and cyberspace are merely fashionable passwords to contemporary culture; however, this paper takes the position that addressing questions of virtuality may enable a fuller understanding of some of the changes which deeply affect the notion of aesthetics today. Wolfgang Iser, in his book *Undoing Aesthetics*, asserts that aesthetics is undergoing a process of epistemologization, referring no longer only to questions of the beautiful and the sublime. Iser argues that we are witnesses to a profound aestheticization of knowledge and reality, time and space, and even truth itself (Iser, pp. 20-22). On the other hand, a similar shift in the definition of the paradigms of reality, time and space can be traced through the function (i.e., definition, meaning and significance) of cyberspace and virtual reality. Issues such as the nature of the human being, the difference between reality and the real, and those of the changed parameters of space and time, seem to be not only more deeply, but above all, differently questioned by the theme of virtual reality with its postulated construction of perfect, simulated environments.

In the present paper I intend to explore the changes in the space-time paradigm produced by cyberspace and virtual reality.

If I attempt, as an introduction, to delineate in a drastically reduced form, the transformations in the paradigm of space in art from Renaissance to the present day, a bird's-eye would trace out a path that begins with perspectival space in painting, continues through the illusionist spaces of panoramas and dioramas that were so popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, right up until the space created by the cinematic moving picture. This leads all the way to the virtual space of the nineties and into cyberspace. Despite the prevalent criticism declaring that all it takes to enter a cyberspace is the click of a button on a remote control server, the latter remains localized and spatially limited, unlike the Internet, whose totally virtual nature (excluding the only possible material side of the Internet, the computer console) means it is based on communicative non-limitation. Ken Hillis makes a useful distinction between cyberspace and virtual reality, or

VR for short. »To date, no single technology or machine circumscribes this emerging technology/medium of virtual reality – a term confusingly interchanged with cyberspace, but here understood as the technical means of access to the ‘parallel’ disembodied and increasingly networked visual ‘world’ named cyberspace« (Hillis, p. 5).

The essential point to grasp is that all of these paradigms or concepts of space in the sphere of the visual are related to a broader context of conceptions of time and space and the subject within them. For example, the industrial and technological revolution and the associated industrialization and urbanization of towns and the environment turned on its head the paradigm of visuospatial experience at the turn of the twentieth century. In his book *The Production of Space* (1974), Henry Lefebvre characterizes the period around 1910 as a watershed in the constitution of the paradigm of space. It was around that time that the space of classical perspective and geometry, which developed from the Renaissance onwards in the tradition of Greek Euclidean logic, began to disintegrate. Until then, a certain shared space of knowledge and political power, grounded both in the everyday discourse and in abstract thought, was shattered as a result of ever increasing industrialization. This disappearance of embodied spatiality, of the very concept of space, had far-reaching consequences for a shift in the field of representation. Classical models of vision were shattered together with the stable spaces of representation that had previously been formed by various techniques of perspective composition – techniques for deceiving the eye and imitating nature.

It was this change in the production of space and the spatial model, which meant an ever greater meditation of space and, at the same time, the loss of direct experience of space, of its sensory apprehension by means of one's own body, that permitted the various technical advances in observing the subject in space, or the viewer in the visual sphere. The explosive proliferation of optical, illusionist toys, exhibitions and settings (e.g., the panoramas and dioramas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) was also a kind of surrogate for the reduced role of direct sensation for the individual in contact with space.

What happens, for example, with the paradigm of space in the field of moving pictures? If in film, ‘space’ as a montage of attractions is beamed onto a remote white canvas, then the screen of electronic images, or the TV receiver, has enabled the space of illusion to enter our living rooms. The monitors of the data helmets we must place over our heads in order to enter the virtual world have brought space right onto our eyes. For Mark Poster, »virtual reality takes the imaginary of the word and the imaginary of the

film or video image one step farther by placing the individual inside the alternative worlds» (Poster, p. 189).

What is important to comprehend here is that in virtual reality data-environments some of the issues that arise are those relating to the sense of distance and weight, and questions of mass and time. The same is true for real-time telecommunications, operating at the absolute speed of electromagnetic waves, allowing local users of the Internet to communicate with any point on Earth without leaving – Tokyo, for example – as if there is no geographical or spatial distance. At this point, I can offer just a hint of the possible further political re-reading of cyberspace. Simultaneous collective processes of reception and communication in cyberspace have become the central determining metaphor for the new media environment. That which takes place on the Internet is increasingly seen and utilized as the ‘new’ public space. The Internet and the World Wide Web are becoming spaces that are not only parallel to the existing public one, but increasingly becoming a substitute for it. So-called public opinion is formulated via our own questioning, in the manner of Fredric Jameson, »what space, which actors, whose agents and what subjects?«

As I intend to conduct an analysis of the signifying and aesthetic principles generated by the space-time paradigm, I will first describe the mechanisms of its construction and constitution. Finally, precisely because of this constructed character of the paradigm of space, it is open to constant re-articulation.

The Cinematic Image

To understand the significance of a shift in the space-time paradigm, I propose a mapping out of a (historical) discursive timeline; to interpret the results of changes in the time/space paradigm, and in its experiences and sensations, as produced by the various technologies of the moving and digital images, e.g., photography, the film apparatus and virtual reality. This is a necessary step also if we are to go beyond the kind of theoretical stasis we currently face in re-philosophizing cyberspace and virtual reality. This stasis is the almost exaggerated quantity of mainly excellent descriptions awaiting classification. One of the aims of this paper is to begin to articulate a possible and/or hypothetical approach to such a classification.

To do so, I will first make use of two paradigms, or time models, developed by Gilles Deleuze in the eighties within two books: *The Movement-Image* (first published in 1983) and *The Time-Image* (first published in 1985).

The books examine mutations in the history of cinematic signification. D. N. Rodowick, in his compelling book *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* explains that, for Deleuze, »the semiotic history of film is coincident with a century-long transformation wherein we have come to represent and understand ourselves socially through spatial and temporal articulations founded in cinema, if now realized more clearly in the electronic and digital media« (Rodowick, 1997, p. xiii). For Deleuze, it is not to produce another theory of film, but to realize how aesthetic, philosophical and scientific modes of understanding converge to produce cultural strategies for imagining. What is specific to the image, writes Deleuze, »is to make perceptible, to make visible, relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present« (Deleuze, *Time-Image*, p. xii).

I would like to present some of the elements of the two principal time-machine paradigms of the image conceived by Deleuze: the movement-image and time-image – in order to suggest a third model: the virtual-image – which would be appropriate for an understanding of the temporal and spatial characteristics of cyberspace.

Deleuze linked the notion of the movement-image to the classical cinema, for example, to the films of Eisenstein, Keaton etc.; in short, Deleuze's movement-image draws upon the American silent cinema, the Soviet school of montage, and the French impressionist cinema, whereas the time-image originates in the modern European and New American cinema, for example, the films of Resnais.

The following outline of the two Deleuzian models of time – images is extremely schematic, but for the purpose of the thesis of this paper, I will summarize here that it is their respective spatial rendering of time (i.e., time through space) which divides the movement-image from the time-image. The main platform of this unusual idea derives from Deleuze's re-thinking of the interval – the space or division between photograms, shots, sequences – and how the organization of intervals informs the spatial representation of time in cinema.

According to Deleuze, in the movement-image (e.g., in Eisenstein and Keaton films), time is reduced to intervals defined by movement as actions, and the linking of such movements is accomplished through montage. The movement-image can only provide an indirect image of time. On the contrary, when reality in the film image is represented in a dispersed way, and the linear actions dissolve into the form of aleatory or random strolls, then, as result of this, the action-reaction schema of the movement-image begins to break down, producing a change in the nature of both perception and affect.

Since the linking of images is no longer motivated by action, the nature of space changes, becoming disconnected or empty. Acts of seeing and hearing replace the linking of images through motoric actions, as in the case of the movement-image. In the time-image, the interval is no longer part of the image or sequence either as the ending of one action or as the beginning of another. In the time-image, the interval becomes an autonomous value, giving us a direct image of time. The interval no longer facilitates the passage from one image to another in any detectable manner.

The movement-image and the time-image, however, each manage this relation with time differently. The former provides us with an indirect image of time, and the latter, a direct image of time. On this basis, in the time-image model, according to Rodowick, the interval functions as an irreducible limit, the flow of images or sequences bifurcate and develop serially, rather than continuing as a line, or integrating into a whole. The time-image produces a serial rather than organic form of composition (Rodowick, p. 14), as is the case in the movement-image.

Whereas the cinematic movement-image presents an indirect image of time as exteriority, or extensiveness, in space (Rodowick, p. 48), the cinematic time-image presents a direct image – the anteriority of time as creative evolution, the pure form of time as change or Becoming (Rodowick, pp. 48-49). What happens, we have to ask ourselves, when actions no longer master time? Deleuze, through Rodowick, argues that the image must turn from exteriority in space toward a process of genesis in mental relations of time.

The Virtual-Image

Here, in proposing the third image – the virtual-image – I would argue that what occurs here is, first and foremost, the reversal of the Deleuzian established basic relation of time and space: instead of the spatial rendering of time (i.e., time through space) we experience in the cinematic image, my thesis is that in the virtual-image, space is rendered through time.

To comprehend the time-space features of this possible third model, or paradigm, of the virtual-image that I would like to propose here, I will make use of its time-space characteristics as described by Edmond Couchot.

In Couchot's summary: »In fact, virtual space and time obey laws different from those of the reality we perceive with our senses. Data space is an exclusively symbolic space: neither largely substrate in material, nor in energy, even though the computer circuitry (hardware) itself is a part of our physical reality; it is made up of information. It has no dimensions per

se, no set permanent place or topos. Hence its fundamentally utopic character. Yet it can also merge with real space as interfaced. Likewise, corresponding to this utopic space is a simulated virtual time, itself with its own extraordinary properties. That is, 'it seems' (phrase added by the author, M.G.), an autonomous time without past, present or future, wholly beyond any deterministic or non-deterministic becoming, or again, of any living sense of becoming. A time that partakes not of *chronos*, but is an *uchronic* (or better to say, *achronic* – added by the author, M.G.) time, hence its ability to also merge – hybridize – with the time where dwells the manipulator or observer. (...) *Uchronic* time comes into its own in the immediacy of image-calculations and simulational-model parameter modifications without any delay in the unfolding of the visualized phenomenon. Changes in parameter value take effect the very moment the equations are being calculated, intervening in 'real-time,' as the technicians say, upon successive operations and displaying the results instantaneously via realistic or abstract images according to the models simulated, giving these simulation technologies fantastic effectiveness. Under such conditions, we can thus speak of creating a reality and modifying it at the rate of creation, as if 'real' computer time took the place of temporal reality, in such a way that reference time loses – at least partially – its pre-existence. In a sense, synthesized virtual time marks the end of time. In these virtual time-space relations, the determinant factor is no longer the speed of information transfer, but rather the speed of data calculation time. It's as if that invisible barrier, the speed of light at which television and radio information circulate, were at the point of being overtaken by the immobile speed of calculation« (Couchot, pp. 16-17).

In short, changes in parameter values take effect the very moment the equations are being calculated, intervening in real-time. And real-time, which is time entirely processed by the computer, is equal to zero space. For example, for Mark Poster too, this point of the real-time interval in virtual reality is crucial. Virtual reality is close to real-time, which arose »in the audio-recording field when splicing, multiple-track recording and multiple speed recording made possible times 'other' to that of clock-time or phenomenological time« (Poster, p. 189). In virtual reality, the normal or conventional sense of time has to be preserved by the modifier 'real,' exactly as in the coinage: real-time. Real-time is, according to Kac, an immediate transmission and reception of a signal as it is produced by a device, without delays; live television is a common example of real-time transmissions (Kac, 1998).

In the virtual-image, the interval disappears; real-time is not direct time, but a time without intervals, where space has the value zero. Moreover, the non-place, which may be defined as a cyberspace interval, produces a

meaning in which the distribution of information is a result of a synthesized process of calculation. This is not the movement-image's differentiation and integration of meaning, nor the time-image's relinking of irrational divisions, but a simulational process. Instead of the organic form of composition that belongs to the movement-image, and the serial form of composition that belongs to the time-image, the virtual-image produces a synthetic one.

I would like to propose the following models of time-images, according to the following temporal, spatial and compositional characteristics, respectively:

the movement-image – indirect-time interval – exteriority of space – organic form

the time-image – direct-time interval – anteriority of space – serial form

the virtual-image – real-time interval – non-space – synthetic form

It is important to emphasize the already mentioned constructed character of the discourse of space, as the space paradigm is, so to speak, never grounded in space, but is always ex-, an- or non-space. »The non-place of cyberspacetime,« as Nguyen and Alexander pointed out, »contains innumerable networks resting on logical lattices abstracted from unthinkable complex data fields that unfold across an endless virtual void« (Nguyen and Alexander, p. 102). A non-space can be understood here and now, not as a form of utopic space, but above all, as a conceptual matrix, a paradigm of such a space.

At this point, a path to follow might also be examined in reverse mode, by taking spatial modalities inherent in cyberspace as a starting point and transposing them back into reality. That means that some of these paradigms can perhaps be functional outside the realm of the computer. Or vice versa, we might ask how radicalized spatial organizations manifested in reality may serve as models for active intervention in cyberspace. Such a case is the project of the Slovenian visual art group IRWIN, entitled NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST (NSK) STATE IN TIME. One of the most attention-grabbing projects of the NSK movement in the 1990's has been the »State in Time« project, which is primarily carried out by the above-mentioned group, IRWIN. It was within the context of a paradigm of this sort that the NSK Embassies and NSK Consulates were realized. NSK Embassies were realized in Moscow (1992), Gent, Belgium (1993), etc. NSK consulates were opened in Florence, Italy (1993), at the Hotel Ambasciatori, and in Umag, Croatia (1994), in the kitchen of the private apartment of gallery owner Marino Cettina.

The group IRWIN established the NSK Embassy in Moscow in a private apartment (address: Leninsky Prospect 12, apt. 24) in May and June 1992. The facade of this residential dwelling was embellished with the artistically

articulated insignia of a state embassy. The project took place within the context of the internationalization of one of the greatest Eastern European phenomena, Apt-Art (Apartment-Art), which was a phenomenon of artistic creation and exhibition in private apartments within the Moscow art underground. The Moscow Apt-Art emphasized the status of private space and changed it into a center of communication through the self-organization of those most excluded. The NSK Moscow EMBASSY project represented a new actualization of the phenomenon of life and creation in private apartments during the era of Communist totalitarianism.

In his book, *Spectres de Marx*, Jacques Derrida put into play the term 'spectre' to indicate the elusive pseudo-materiality that subverts the classic ontological oppositions of reality and illusion. Slavoj Žižek argues that »We should recognize the fact that there is no reality without the spectre, that the circle of reality can be closed only by means of an uncanny spectral supplement. ... 'Spectre' is not to be confused with 'symbolic fiction'... reality is never directly 'itself,' it presents itself only via its incomplete-failed symbolization, and spectral apparitions emerge in this very gap that forever separates reality from the real, and on account of which reality has the character of a (symbolic) fiction: the spectre gives body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured) reality« (Žižek, pp. 26-28). In an attempt to emphasize the synthetic dialectical moment developed in the NSK State in Time, we are compelled to ask ourselves how can we label this spiritual element of corporeality (NSK State In Time) and this corporeal element of spirituality (embassies in concrete private spaces)? I propose we conclude: SPECTERS. Allow me to state the following: the NSK State in Time is the specter of the state, NSK Embassies are the specters of Embassies. As Richard Beardsworth has shown in his important book *Derrida & the political*: »Any country, any locality, determines its understanding of time, place and community in relation to this process of 'global' spectralization« (Beardsworth, p.146).

On the other hand, we can re-articulate the NSK STATE IN TIME also as a precise articulation of the evacuation of the specific historical, social and political space of the former Eastern Europe, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Peter Camborn Wilson, alias Hakim Bey, stated in his lecture at the Nettime meeting entitled »Beauty and The East« in Ljubljana in 1997, the Second World has been erased, and only the First and Third Worlds are left. In place of the Second World, Bey argued, there is a big hole from which one jumps into the Third (Cf. Bey, 1997). NSK STATE IN TIME is a transposition, as much as it is also a spectralization, of the evacuation of the specific historical, social and political space of the former Eastern Europe,

of this non-space condition. It is possible to find the same condition in the center of the myth of liberating and innocent cyberspace. »What you discover (in cyberspace – added by the author, M.G.) is always,« according to Olivier Marchart, »your own image in a reversed form. (...) This sentence – since obviously, it paraphrases the Lacanian communication formula – has an axiomatic status. Wherever you go, you are always already there« (Marchart, 1998). And this is exactly to what the IRWIN NSK STATE IN TIME project is pointing a finger. The group IRWIN has the power to articulate its proper position using the same mechanisms and matrices that seem, at first glance, to be part of another »absolutely virtual« territory.

Contestational Errors

Since what I am proposing here is a research into the discursive constructions and articulations of the changes of time and space paradigms produced by image technology, to look also at the characteristics of the time-space paradigm developed and sustained in the photographic image would offer more insight into the latter stages of such a proposed research.

In his »Short History of Photography«, Walter Benjamin focuses on how the problem of time characterized the evolution of early photography. I will summarize briefly Benjamin's insights, relying on D. N. Rodowick's presentation:

»Neither the indexical quality of the photograph nor its iconic characteristics fascinated Benjamin as much as the interval of time marked by exposure. In the technological transition from an exposure time requiring several hours to only fractions of a second, Benjamin marked the gradual evaporation of aura from the image. The idea of aura invoked here is clearly related to Bergson's *durée*. For Benjamin, the longer the interval of exposure, the greater the chance that the aura of an environment – the complex temporal relations woven through its represented figures – would seep into the image, etching itself on the photographic plate. (...) More concretely, the temporal value of the interval determines a qualitative ratio between time and space in the photograph. In the evolution from slow to fast exposure times, segmentations of time yielded qualitative changes in space: sensitivity to light, clearer focus, more extensive depth of field, and significantly, the fixing of movement. Paradoxically, for Benjamin, as the iconic and spatial characteristics of photography became more accurate by decreasing the interval of exposure, the image lost its temporal anchoring in the experience of duration, as well as the fascinating ambiguity of its 'aura'« (Rodowick, pp. 8-9).

Rodowick attempted such a summary because he is interested in Benjamin's commentary on the photographic exposure time, which can be seen simultaneously as the accumulation of duration and as a reduction of the time intervals, as a kind of a prototype of both of Deleuze's time-image models. In face of this, I myself am interested in this contraction of the interval of exposure time because it depicts a process of erasure, the desire to rid ourselves of the uncontrollable movements and mistakes that can occur over such long exposure times. Furthermore, today we are witness to, metaphorically speaking, the constant decreasing, the constant shortening, the condensation of the interval of exposure, on the trajectory moving from photography through cinema to cyberspace. This amounts to a process of cleaning and leaving behind the mistakes. With the virtual image and its real-time interval – when the speed of light at which television and radio circulate information is overtaken by the immobile speed of calculation – we experience an ever more exact and radical process of complete image evacuation, or emptying. The result is an aesthetic process of the sterilization of the image. With the arrival of the new media, and with digitalization, a physicality of the connection of the image within reality-time is lost. Mistakes in the image, which were evidence of its reality-temporality existence, are traumatically lost. With mistakes, one might say, the subject finds ways to make a place in time. With the virtual image's real-time contraction, with the contraction of the temporal-reality intervals, the image undergoes a process of complete 'emptying out.'

In short, I want to emphasize the technical constitution of temporality. »The temporalization of time thus changes with a change in the technical process that forms it« (Beardsworth, p. 161). Moreover, it is possible to detect a process of constant tension between the nature of the technical tools that allows the mediation of time and the human experience of time. This tension can be named, again, as spectralization. At stake in this process of spectralization lies the human experience of time. »Most immediately, it is clear that with the digitalization of memory support-systems, our experience of time is being rapidly foreshortened, creating, among other things (...) the tension between the international nature of the electronic and digital gaze and the corporal realities that make up much of human life. Less immediately, but more profoundly, it is also clear that future technical intervention on the genetic 'ingredients' of the human will accelerate processes of evolution at such a speed (if this remains the right term) that present conceptions of history, inheritance, memory and the body will need to be dramatically reorganized, if the 'selection' of what is 'human', and what is not, is not to become the monopoly of an organization between the

technosciences and capital. Just as these techniques together with developments in machine intelligence will soon wish to suppress human 'failure(s)' (precisely our submission to time), so the real time of the teletechnologies risks reducing the *différance* of time, or the aporia of time, to an experience of time that *forgets* time« (Beardsworth, pp.147-48).

This process of evacuation reached its limit of absurdity, for example, with the virtualized visual scenarios of the Gulf War, which can be contrasted with the lack of information about the 'dirty' and very real war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Instead of the direct images from the war in BiH, we were, in most cases, via the so-called live, real-time programming connections, confronted, on the one hand, with old televised images, and on the other with the voice of the radio amateur reporting live, in real-time.

Dimitris Eleftheriotis notes a similar process in a different, though complementary, field. According to Eleftheriotis, »'The Digital Image Stabilizer' is a popular feature of many new camcorders: it operates through a digital analysis of each frame which detects and eliminates 'abnormal' movements. In a similar fashion, visual surveillance technology depends upon the identification of 'abnormal' or 'irregular' movements which disrupt the 'normal' flow of people in a street, a shopping center or supermarket – research currently undertaken looks for ways in which the detection of abnormal movement can become an automaton built into the system« (Eleftheriotis, p.105). Both processes can be understood as the opposite parts of the same mathematical, legal, as well as aesthetical operation, emptying out and sterilization of the image. As Mark Lajoie has stated, »The distance between the user on one side, and the seeming space on the other is absolute. It should come as no surprise that many of the technologies involved in the virtual reality interface have their origin in machinery designed for performing tasks in environments inhospitable to human beings – chemical factories, nuclear power plants, vacuum space. Cyberspace offers to do the same with all relations to the material, treating the material as a toxic agent, or poisoned environment, to place an imperceptible yet omnipresent barrier between all material relations with others« (Lajoie, p. 163).

In contrast to the clean, pure space of virtual reality, the material becomes an object of horror and disgust because it cannot be integrated into the matrix. In other words, the material becomes an abject. As Julia Kristeva has pointed out, »It becomes what culture, the sacred, must purge, separate and banish so that it may establish itself as such in the universal logic of catharsis« (Kristeva, »Psychoanalysis and the Polis,« p. 102, in Lajoie, p. 165). Materiality is entirely extracted from cyberspace, and reduced from object to abject – a senseless, obscene intervention (Cf. Critical Art Ensemble and Pell, 1998).

The entrance of mistakes in perfect, simulated environments can be viewed, therefore, as a point of developing new aesthetical and conceptual strategies, as the mistake as object of horror and disgust cannot be integrated into the matrix. Antiorp, a mysterious Danish composer whose gender – or even humanity – is unknown, promotes the idea that technology used to create art inevitably becomes the subject of the art itself. Errors, for example. Antiorp writes, »Generally, (people) aren't anticipating errors, browser deconstruction or denials of service. Incorporating these into programming generates an element of intrigue, seduction and frustration. Error is the mark of the higher organism, and it presents an environment with which one is invited to interact or perhaps control« (Cf. *antiorp@tezcat.com* /=cw4t7abs/ (1998)).

What matters in cyberspace is namely the possibility to interact concretely, hence materially, by means of different devices – from joysticks to datasuits – with the virtual world. It is exactly at this precise point of contact, at the interface between the virtual and real, that the user is called to insert his or her fingerprints, and ultimately, his or her material body also in the form of a mistake. The interface can be considered an obscene stain constantly reminding the user of his or her inability to become fully subject in cyberspace, and we might also say the same with regard to the mistakes. Mistakes in the image are like a fingerprint on the film, a scratch or scars on the skin – the evidence of the existence of the image. To make a mistake is to find a place in time. A mistake is like a wound in the image; it is like an error in the body, or, as formulated by Beardsworth, failure(s) represent(s) precisely our submission to time (cf. Beardsworth, p. 148). This is a situation of producing a gap, a hiatus, where we can insert not only a proper body, but also its interpretation.

We must continually engage to locate ourselves in the world in relation to others – human and non-human. »I am conscious of my body via the world, that it is the unperceived term in the center of the world towards which all objects turn their face; it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of the world through the medium of my body« (Merleau-Ponty, p. 82).

In December 1997, TV Tokyo suspended the weekly regularly broadcasting of the popular 'Pocket Monster' cartoon, known as 'Pockemon,' because nearly 700 people nationwide, mainly children, were taken to hospitals after watching the show on 16 December. The TV viewers were afflicted by an outbreak of convulsions and faintness, ending with catalepsy. The scene from Pockemon, which was suspected of sending hundreds to

hospitals, can be described as four seconds of flashing red, blue, white and black lights. It was a kind of strobe flash, like second sunlight, something so hyper-bright that it resulted in both blindness and catalepsy.

Through this example, we can discuss some other important points raised in connection with the relationship between our physical body and the image. While I wish to avoid falling into the trap of mass psychological hysterical readings of the eternally bad and dangerous influence of TV upon generations of viewers, I will try to establish an almost heretical interpretation of the event. We could say that the TV-induced epilepsy-like illness brought back to a mass of TV viewers the reality of their physical bodies. The human body has been, for more than a century, captured or frozen as images via photography. It has been approximately 120 years since 1877-80, when the psychiatrist Martin Charcot, at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, photographed his hysterical patients with the intention of making their illness visible (due to the underlying pathology of hysteria being invisible). Now, in the 1990's, the body fights back! With the hysterical suffering body of Pockemon, we witness a reaction, a disobedience, to the until now immobile, or frozen, body's relation to the image. The success of photography in capturing hysteria had to do precisely with the mechanisms internal to photography, which are connected with its »reality effect,« and with the photographic apparatus' potential to freeze the convulsive and hysterical body.

It seems that today, in a world supersaturated with images, to make the body visible – to simply remind ourselves that we have a physical body – the body had to fall back again into hysteria, into an outbreak of convulsions and faintness. On the other hand, Pockemon allows us to discuss the idea of total visibility constantly produced by the mass media. But this kind of total visibility is just media-processed; it is simply another form of misconstruction. In reality, we have, as Peter Weibel once noted, zones of visibility and zones of invisibility. The Pockemon 'Cataleptic Tuesday' event (Pockemon has been aired every Tuesday since April 1997) brought us not only to the core of the processes of representation, and to the so-called zero-point of representation in relation to the physical body, but it represents an almost psychotic appearance of these phenomena, by the constantly hidden zones of invisibility in mass media. These zones flashed for a moment so brightly on the surface of the image, they allowed the body to become blind and hysterical.

This phenomenon may also be described through the perspective of Paul Virilio, who claims that the introduction of computerized technology simply makes visible what had been assumed or, I use the word overtaken, – the fleeting time of exposure in instantaneous perception, which results

in »a collapse of mnemonic consolidation« (Virilio, p. 7). It is a process showing that the observer's moment of perception is no longer in synch, no longer integrated into the time of exposure, in the topographical perception and memorization processes impressed in the time of exposure. For Virilio, what characterizes the replacement of the depth of space by the depth of time, is a splitting of viewpoint, the sharing of perception of the environment between the animate (the living subject) and the inanimate (the object, the seeing machine). The vision(s) of this viewpoint, its visualizations, are what is already there in the eye of the camera(s), remaining in »a state of latent immediacy in the huge junk heap of the stuff of memory, wanting to reappear, inexorably, when the time comes« (Virilio, p. 43).

To reappropriate the place of this memory, of virtual memory, in the modern way means, therefore, not to use any more traces – as virtual memory is no longer in a function of the past, but of the future – but instead to use mistakes, as the speed of light at which TV and radio information circulates are at the point of being overtaken by the immobile speed of calculations.

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Life as Screen? Or how to grasp the virtuality of the body

In her book *Life on the Screen*, Sherry Turkle assumes that the new computer technologies materialize »postmodern theory and bring it down to earth« (Turkle 1995, 18) And she continues: »Thus, more than twenty years after meeting the ideas of Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, I am meeting them again in my new life on the screen. But this time, the Gallic abstractions are more concrete. In my computer-mediated worlds, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language; sexual congress is an exchange of signifiers; and understanding follows from navigation and tinkering rather than analysis.« (Turkle 1995, 15)

Turkle is not the only »cyber-theorist« defining the new technologies as a kind of materialization or visualization of something previously invisible. Kathryn Hayles and Slavoj Žižek, to name but two, develop a similar position from within a Lacanian framework. But in doing so, they erase important differences. The difference, for instance, between a topological and a descriptive notion of the unconscious, the difference between the Other and the other, the difference between the body and its unconscious image.

Various examples of psychoanalytic cybertheories and (art) practice (media art, net-projects) demonstrate this impulse to erase these differences. But when an equation is made between an (artistic) netpractice and psychoanalytical theory, a crucial difference is lost, namely that which constitute the space of the subject.

New Technology (NT), it is claimed, reconstitutes the subject in a fundamental way, not only effecting his mental state but also and foremost his body. The new modes of perception introduced through NT claim to bring to an end the modern way of vision and the corresponding subject of central perspectivity. But the discourse on NT does not clearly define the subject nor is the notion of vision placed under rigorous scrutiny. With Lacan's question »What is a picture« both vision and the seeing subject are defined in a radically different way. In my paper I will work with a psychoanalytical definition of the subject in order to theorize the *otherness* or the novelty of the subject of NT.

Discourse about endings is at this moment very much to the point. The

spectre of the end of media, esp. mass media has been raised. The end of art has also been prophesized; not to mention the implosion of the public realm and the undermining of its apparent opposition the private. The end of the subject has been invoked again, on this occasion including the end of gender. In addition a lament for the passing of the human being has been intoned.

Such talk of endings leads naturally to a consideration of beginnings. It presupposes a beginning which is either ontogenetically or phylogenetically defined, or an inauguration of a conjuncture between specific historical epochs and psychical stages.

I have suggested the title »Life as Screen?« in order to evoke the question of those endings and their corresponding beginnings, as well as to pose the question of what and who comes to an end. Lacan's question »What is a picture«, which he posed in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, was from the beginning essentially implicated with the question what is a subject. My question here will be which subject Lacan has in view and how it relates to the discourse of NT.

I shall begin with a short extract from Marge Piercy's novel *Body of Glass* (1992). In the following scene Shira, a programmer, encounters Jod, a cyborg:

»She wondered exactly what one did with a cyborg. She had waded through gigabytes of material on his hardware, but she was still confused. Could one kiss a cyborg? Would not his mouth be dry as an can opener? It was not. His lips were soft on hers. His tongue was a little smoother than a human tongue but moist. Everything was smoother, more regular, more nearly perfect. The skin of his back was not like the skin of other men she had been with, for always there were abrasions, pimples, scars, irregularities. His skin was sleek as a woman's but drier to the touch, without the pillow of subcutaneous fat.« (Piercy 1992, 227)

After initially hesitating to begin a sexual relation with Jod, Shira comes to be overwhelmed with his perfection to the point that she could no longer ignore her own human defects. Jod continually pursues her with questions about what it is like to be a human woman. Shira became ever more uncertain about the advantage of being human and the essential difference between human and non human.

A question raises itself here: whether in the context of the encounter between the technological, the machinic and the non-human the precarious nature of the centered human subject, to which Descartes drew our attention, has become manifest.

Lacan's meditations are germane to this issue. He argued historically

that the Ego (and I mean here the ego and not the subject) is not only a precarious psychic structure but also a fragile socio-historical accomplishment. The tragedy of this subject, to put in its fully pathetic dimension, is that in order to avoid losing itself in its environment, it must erase all difference between itself and its surroundings. (Cf. Brennan 1993, 4 ff.)

The tenor of the theorists of the new technologies is that this subject has come to a total end. In the epoch of the human interface there is no more place for Cartesian dualisms: Instead nature/culture, body/mind as well as male/female are transformed into technical questions in the sense that they are only temporarily fixed through a coupling of the human with the machine. (Cf. Poster 1995)¹

Donna Haraway's cyborg illustrates this new hybrid form of being, half electronic, half biological, but also historically constituted. According to Haraway the cyborg arises at historical moments of social transition; times of radical uncertainty when borders are broken or under threat, and traditional strategies of drawing boundaries no longer function: moments such as the present when the distinction between man and cybernetic organisms are breaking down. (cf. Haraway 1990) In this context Haraway draws particular attention to the porosity of bodily boundaries, in particular the skin. According to Freud the skin is a key element in the construction of the Ego as such. It follows that the bodily interface is not only a question of the NT but also, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the question of the subject itself.

Thus, when Lacan refers to a historical formation of the Ego he means this in a thoroughly material-bodily sense. This historically unfolding Ego – a social-psychotic figuration – must physically demarcate the boundaries of its body.

In the next section I move from considering the historical Ego to an exploration of the psychic subject, a subject which according to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, is always and already at war not only with its environment, but also and especially with itself, and with its image which is always othered, and to which it can never be reconciled.

The excess of the image

Lacan relates the embattled status of the subject to narcissism. The subject neither loves its image nor is beloved by it, but rather loves that which

¹ This is, of course, only one dominant strand in discourses on the NT. The other strand signals the fulfillment of the Enlightenment conception of the subject. (Cf. Penny 1994, Žižek 1997)

exceeds the image. The subject loves the picture's excess, a picture behind the picture. This »behind-the-picture« is the ideal-ego, that psychic function in which the child exists as its own ideal or, to put it more correctly, will have become its own ideal retrospectively. As Lacan makes the point, the ideal-ego is that point »at which he [the subject] desires to gratify himself in himself«. (Lacan 1981, 257) Or as he defines it elsewhere: »That where the subject sees himself, namely, where that real, inverted image of his own body that is given in the schema of the ego is forged, it is not from there that he looks at himself.« (Lacan 144)

Here a distinction appears between the eye and the gaze which will be important to us in what follows.

The basis of this distinction is Freud's differentiation between the drive and the instinct. Through this radical differentiation, which Freud and Lacan were never tired of invoking, the notion of primal lack is introduced. This lack is the proper place of the subject. For the rest of his life the subject will haunt and be haunted by this lack, which takes form in his image, before his image, behind his image.

The drama of being part of the picture

Lacan has associated this overdetermined split (Spaltung) between drive and instinct, ideal-ego and egoideal, eye and gaze with the constitutive function of primal aggression. He explains this aggression in terms of an unusual concept of mimesis as an intransitive resemblance in which there is no resembled object.

Lacan adapts this concept from Roger Callois's work on the mimetic capacity of insects. According to Callois the tendency of insects to take on the colour of their background is not to be understood as self-protection or flight from an aggressor but rather as an attempt to become part of a picture. As Michael Taussig puts it in »Mimesis and Alterity« it is a matter of being seduced by space, a *spacing out* of the self, a drama »in which the self is but a self-diminishing point amid others, losing its boundedness.« (Taussig 1993, 34)

Whereas animals hunt each other through the sense of smell, mimicry arises in the field of seeing. It signals a failure to maintain the boundary between inner and outer, between the body and its environment, or as Joan Copjec defines it, between »an unconscious being and a conscious semblance«. The effect of mimicry or the effect of representation, as Copjec argues, does not place the subject in »happy accord with the reality« but

rather induces the »suspicion that some reality is being camouflaged«. (Copjec 1995, 37) In response to such representation – mimicry, the subject's own being breaks up between the unconscious being and conscious semblance. As Lacan makes the point: »To imitate is no doubt to reproduce an image. But at bottom, it is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it.« (Lacan 100)

Picture and gaze do not meet

How do these considerations bear on the question of NT's, mourning for the subject and the hymn to a new »fluid and polymorphic structure of identity«?

At the end of the *Four Fundamental Concepts* Lacan surprisingly mentions what he says we can call the »mass media«. He indicates that it is tempting to see these media as augmenting the society of the spectacle, to use Guy Debord's term. Instead, he claims, they contribute to a diffusion of the gaze and the voice, but he makes no further comment on this matter.

I shall attempt to relate this diffusion of the gaze to the novelty of the NT specifically in order to follow up the question of the »location of the subject«.

In his book *Techniques of the Observer* (1995) Jonathan Crary argues that NT are new insofar as they operate without a point of view, that is without a place which the viewer can occupy. Thus the camera obscura model with its centrally focussed perspective is undermined. And this, Crary observes, might potentially have fatal consequences for the subject and might foreground in concrete fashion the spectacle of its fragility.

As I already noted, Lacan defines the Ego as historically and psychically always already precarious. He has emphasized this precarious status through his distinction between the Subject and the Ego, echoing the split between eye and the gaze, a gaze which poposes an impossible location which cannot be occupied by the subject.

By thinking together these two impossible locations, the computer-generated one mentioned by Jonathan Crary, and the psychic one considered by Lacan, I propose to bring together the radical exteriority of both the technical and psychic structuration of the subject.

In order to undertake this thinking together I will criticize two strands of thought in media theory: on the one hand, Screen and Apparatus theory, which both focus upon the image, the screen, and their equation with the mirror. And on the other a similar equation of the mirror with the monitor

within the discourse on NT. In the latter discourse the monitor is understood as a mirror and virtual reality is conceived as the space of the Lacanian imaginary.

At the center of film theory lies the model of the Lacanian mirror stage as an original misrecognition of the subject in the image of »an-other«. Both Apparatus theory (Baudry, Comolli, Metz) and British Screen theory (Mulvey, Heath, Wollen) take over Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in order to identify the screen as a mirror before which or better in which the subject misrecognizes itself. In this taking over, the Lacanian mirror stage is subjected to an overgeneralization which is fatally repeated in the field of NT.

I want to demonstrate this briefly by discussing Kaja Silverman's definition of the gaze as a cultural gaze.

According to Lacan, in the relation between the mirror image and the child a third element intervenes, the gaze of the mother. In the same way, according to Baudry, in the relation between the screen image and the spectator a third element is involved, which Baudry like Lacan identifies as a gaze. This third element makes possible and guarantees the identification between the child and the mirror image as well as that between the spectator and the screen image. In the case of the cinema, Baudry argues, this third element is the gaze associated with the camera.

I now want to return to the question of the split between the eye and the gaze about which Lacan says: »I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.« (Lacan 72) We are, he continues, »beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world. (...) Is there no satisfaction in being under that gaze (...) that circumscribes us, and which in the first instance makes us beings who are looked at, but without showing this?« (Lacan 75)

In a conscious waking state this function of the gaze is usually elided, but shows itself only in special moments (Lacan mentions the images of the dream, paintings etc.). In other words, the gaze is that which is invisible. This is also the moment through which the absence of the signified is manifested. The gaze does not acknowledge the subject, it does not look, but rather causes a disturbance, a toppling of the subject. This gaze unfolds itself in the place of the Other and enables the child's first identification at the cost of an originary alienation: »The gaze is something from which the subject has separated itself off, but which was once part of the subject; it is thus an *objet petit a*.« (Cowie 1997, 288)

Silverman takes up this difference between the eye² and gaze in asserting that the gaze does not look, that in this sense it is misleading even to refer to

² In Silverman's considerations the eye is the look, the bodily context of the eye, the

it as a gaze. Nevertheless in her subsequent arguments she indicates, in explicit reference to Lacan, that the gaze is in a metaphoric relation to the camera. The only function of this cinematic apparatus, according to Silverman, is to put the subject in the picture. How this »being in the picture«, this »being photographed«, how this operates is not a function of the gaze, but rather the concern of the »cultural screen«. While the gaze represents the presence of the others as such, it is the function of the eye-look to determine the direction of meaning production, that is to decide which aspects are mobilized in/through being photographed. Thus the eye-look becomes the place in which the imaginary subject encounters the almighty gaze. In this context there is a dedifferentiation of the gaze and the eye through the mediation of the »cultural screen«. The gaze as cultural gaze becomes the site of socio-cultural power which leads individuals into their respective modes of being.

The definition of the gaze as an anonymous societal look in the sense of the Foucauldian panopticon resurfaces in modified form in the analysis of the NT.

In this context the computer monitor is assimilated to the mirror and the electronic space is taken as a materialization of the unconscious. In this respect, then, it is the ideal ego which greets us in cyberspace.

To consider these claims, I shall briefly consider two examples, taken from Kathryn Hayles and Slavoj Žižek.

Virtual reality, Žižek writes, renders explicit that mechanism which until now has been hidden but was always and already foundational to the subject. And Kathryn Hayles claims in connection with cyberspace that it materializes the Lacanian mirror stage. Lacan's imaginary is thus given a three-dimensional physical reality. That is, the imaginary is made real in the sense of a technological production. Whereas Hayles equates the imaginary with physicality, she introduces the symbolic through equating it with the virtual, i.e. the electronic produced data realm or data space. Thus, she argues, »cyberspace represents a powerful challenge to the customary construction of the body's boundaries, opening them to transforming configurations that always bear the trace of the Other. The resulting disorientation can function as a wedge to destabilize presuppositions about self and the Other.« (Hayles 1993, 187)

As is well known, Lacan makes a distinction between the (lower case) »other« and the (capital) »Other«, a distinction which Žižek equates with the difference between the ideal ego and the ego-ideal as well as between

look as bodily spectacle, which is to a certain extent resistant to the gaze. (Cf. Silverman 1996, 137 ff.)

symbolic and imaginary identification. Whereas the relation with the other is imaginary in the sense that the self resembles the other, the relation with the Other is symbolic, that is, depends on the structure of language. Symbolic identification is identification with the Other, the place from where we see ourselves as likeable. This place of the Other, the symbolic order, carries within it a kernel, a Thing (das Ding), a void which the subject must conceal. That is, this gaze from the place of the Other is not a gaze in a full sense. Rather, it is an empty gaze, by which the subject is haunted and feels itself observed, but nevertheless *for whom* the subject wants to »play a role«, as Žižek points out. Both identifications – the imaginary and the symbolic – are not strictly separable because imaginary identification is always an »identification *on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other*«. (Žižek 1994, 106)

In Hayle's considerations of the »Mirror of the Cyborg«, thus the Lacanian Other slides very over into concrete others. Cyberspace is understood as offering a whole range of possibilities to interact, to communicate with »other people«. According to Hayles, the self's boundaries have to denigrate their outside. Thus women are constructed as castrated men, blacks as inferior whites, etc. The mirror (of the cyborg), by contrast, conflates self and Other, thus entailing new encounters where the Other »is accepted as both different *and* enriching«. (Hayles 188) The puppet on the screen, the avatar, thus carries the »potential to become more than a puppet, representing instead a zone of interaction that opens the subject to the exhilarating realization of Otherness valued as such.« (188)

Here it becomes clear, that both the Lacanian mirror stage and his concept of the Other have lost their meaning. The Other, as the site from which the subject is spoken, has been reduced to multicultural and social differences.

And even Žižek takes on a somewhat mystical tone when discussing the increasing computerization. He like so many others asks himself the apocalyptic question whether it is possible that the end of sexuality and the end of the human subject are at hand through the emergence of the PC. (Cf. Žižek 1996, 284)

According to him, a confusion arises with the advent of the computer, one which reactivates a stage before originary loss, before the split between ideal ego and ego-ideal.

The end of sexuality as Žižek describes it, is introduced through a partnership with a post or non-human being. Here the story between Shira and Jod, which I mentioned in the beginning, is relevant. Through this non-human being into which the subject is so to speak locked, a primordial asexual stage of being is achieved, a stage before any sexual marking and

therefore before subjectivity. Žižek illustrates this in terms of the possibilities the net offers for gender switching and creating new bodies: »What fascinates people far more than the unprecedented access to information, the new ways of learning, shopping, and so on, is the possibility of constituting 'virtual communities, in which I am free to assume an arbitrary sexual, ethnic, religious, etc., identity. A gay male, for example, can enter a closed sexual community and, via the exchange of messages, participate in a fictionalized group sexual activity as a heterosexual woman.« (Žižek 1996, 285)

Žižek concludes that these encounters represent the absolute fulfillment of the Cartesian subject, because all features (of the subject's identity) are contingent and interchangeable. In his description of changing one's identity on the net, Žižek equates sexual identity with ethnic and religious identity. Thus he conflates the decisive difference between the »role of gender« and the »imperative of sex«. According to Charles Shepherdson, sexual difference in contrast to gender roles is not a »human convention, like democracy or monarchy, a social form that was invented at some point in historical time, a contingent formation that one culture produced, but that might be replaced by another form«. (Shepherdson 1994, 160) Rather it has to be seen as the effect of the drive which Freud has strictly distinguished from the instinct. Gender difference, by contrast, is tied to representation, to the symbolic order, to the call of the Other and his desire.

To emphasize the imperative of sexual difference means to insist upon the structural inevitability of representation for human sexuality. This does not imply a return to a bodily nature or a natural body but rather is an indication that sexuality (according to both Freud and Lacan) is comprehended neither as gender nor sex, and the body neither as a biological fact nor a social construct, but rather as constitutively denaturalized »organ-ized by the image and the word«. (Shepherdson 1994, 170)

Upon entry to the symbolic order, the subject is organized in terms of a binary opposition, either having or being the Phallus. The Other is implicated in this relation in the sense that the subject wants either to have or be for the Other. The question of which position will be/can be taken up depends upon the desire of the Other. As such switching between gender positions is only possible to a limited extent. That is, the phantasmatic exchange of sexual positions is always accomplished from an already relatively fixed position. This applies equally to Žižek's phantasies as to other stories of gender exchange on the net such as Sherry Turkle's. As Elizabeth Cowie makes the point: »The apparent mobility of sexual fantasy, whether enacted or imagine, can only arise with a – relative – fixing of the subject's position of sexual difference and its identifications.« (Cowie 1997, 248)

The earlier mentioned connection between the field of vision and sexual difference »takes place« on the level of the drive. Due to the split between the eye and the gaze it is »in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field«. (Lacan 73) The way in which Lacan defines masculinity and femininity coincides with this split to the extent that the two sexes or better their appearance in the symbolic order, involve a similiar structure of deception, of masquerade.

Lacan takes the reality of the unconscious as a sexual reality, which has no representation of masculinity and femininity. Their difference appears only in the symbolic order as a masquerade which has to conceal its fundamental loss. A loss which is not a sexually marked loss, but rather refers, as Lacan says, to »the relation between the living subject and that which he loses by having to pass, for his reproduction, through the sexual cycle.« (Lacan 199)

The fact that masculinity and femininity have to mimic this loss, to conceal it in a masquerade, can now be identified with the dialectic relation between the eye and the gaze. That is, both relations bear upon a fundamental structure of deception. Describing love Lacan himself has made this comparison.

»When in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that – *You never look at me from the place from which I see you.*« (Lacan 103) And with respect to the field of vision he continues:

»Conversely, *what I look at is never what I wish to see. (...) A triumph of the gaze over the eye.*« (Lacan 103)

What I have said, suggests that media apparatuses such as film and NT, each in their different way, conceal this masquerade, in the sense that they make the subject believe him/herself to be part of the picture. One now could speculate about NT's different modes of concealing than film's.

In sum, in order to theorize the end of the modern subject, and relatedly the end of art and media, as well as to understand the novelty of NT, it is necessary to define the notion of the subject one is talking about. Merely to state that NT undermine Cartesian dualisms and its gender-marked subject trivializes the issue. It is also misleading to equate the subject of the unconscious with the social other in the net, as Kathryn Hayles does echoing the »cultural screen« as introduced by Kaja Silverman. In Žižek's approach the Other is excluded in NT. But as Henry Krips made the point – isn't the Other in the case of the net a prosthetic Other (a cruel superego) from which pleasure can be derived. And isn't this function taken over by the virtual community of the users? In his more recent analysis – in the *Plague of Fantasies* (1997) – Žižek argues that what happens in VR is the foreclosure of the real. This comes very close to what I am arguing: that media

apparatuses are means of concealing the void. The question, then, is in what different ways NT blurs the line between the subject and the user? More specifically, what drives the subject, so that his location, which is strictly speaking a non-location, can be encompassed – as image, before the image and behind the image. Or to put it in a slightly different way: ... *in-between time after before but before after*.

This phrase by Brian Massumi, then, marks the bridge between the body (as such) and the representational body and might therefore be taken as an image to think with, to think of the relation between the body and its various stages of virtuality.

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Jos de Mul
Virtual Reality
The Interplay Between Technology, Ontology and Art

Höher als die Wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit.

Introduction

In their millennia-old histories art and technology have always been closely related. It has often been pointed out that the Greeks used the same word – *techné* – for craft and art and called the craftsman and the artist by the same name: *technites*. Like the craftsman, the artist in his creation is dependent on (the mastery of) specific tools. Even the prehistoric artist depended on specific technical knowledge (for example the reddening of yellow pigments found in the cave by burning them), and made use of ingenious tools to engrave and paint figures on the cave walls. Although since Greek culture art and technology have gradually gone their separate ways, the modern artist is obviously no less dependent on technological tools than his prehistoric predecessor. We might even say that artists today, extensively using photography, film, synthesisers, samplers and computers as their tools, are even more than ever dependent on technology. This is especially obvious in the case of virtual reality. It has even been suggested that in virtual reality (VR) art and technology are coming back together again (Pimentel and Teixeira 1993, 229). As Michael Heim states in his book *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*: »Perhaps the essence of VR ultimately lies not in technology but in art, perhaps art of the highest order. Rather than control or escape or entertain or communicate, the ultimate promise of VR may be to transform, to redeem our awareness of reality – something that the highest art has attempted to do and something hinted at in the very label *virtual reality*, a label that has stuck, despite all objections, and that sums up a century of technological innovations« (Heim 1993, 124).

In order to elucidate the ontological dimension of art and technology that Heim is aiming at, it is worth recalling Heidegger's remark on *techné* in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Although Heidegger admits that the reference to the Greek practice of calling craft and art by the same name is convincing to a certain extent, he immediately adds that this reference remains oblique

and superficial. According to Heidegger the Greek *techne* signifies neither craft nor art, and certainly not technicality in the present-day sense. In Greek culture *techne* doesn't mean a kind of practical performance, but rather a mode of knowing: »For Greek thought the nature of knowing consists in *aletheia*, that is, in the uncovering of beings. It supports and guides all comportment toward beings. *Techne*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* present beings as such beings *out of* concealedness and specifically *into* the unconcealedness of their appearance; *techne* never signifies the action of making« (Heidegger 1975, 59). Considered from the point of view of modern aesthetics, which strongly emphasises the role of artist's originality and authenticity in the »bringing forth of beings«, Heidegger in this statement seems to underestimate the artist's contribution to the realisation of the work of art. However, true as this may be, Heidegger rightly points at a dimension of the work of art that, just because of the modern emphasis on the creative artist, has been largely neglected in modern aesthetics: the fact that a work of art discloses a world. This disclosure of a world by a work of art is not a kind of representation, but rather an evocation: »A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is in itself the extension and delimitation of the precinct as a holy precinct. The temple and its precinct, however, do not fade away into the indefinite. It is the templework that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people« (Heidegger 1975, 42).

In order to understand the intimate relationship between the ontological 'working' of art and technology, it is necessary to consider the fact that the way a work of art discloses a world cannot be isolated from the technologies used in the different artistic disciplines. The way a work of architecture (like the Greek temple mentioned by Heidegger) discloses a world, differs essentially from the way this happens in a painting, a tragedy, a dance or in a piece of music. But even works within one artistic discipline can have quite different modes of disclosure. An example taken from the visual arts may elucidate this. The way Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes (a second example Heidegger mentions in his text) discloses a world, is essentially different to the way this happens in a photograph or

in a digitally synthesised image of a pair of shoes. These three different techniques of two-dimensional representation express different implicit ontologies or world views and as such are part of three succeeding epochs in the history of (the understanding of) Being (cf. De Mul 1997).

In my contribution I want to break some ground for an analysis of how artworks that make use of VR technology disclose worlds in their own way. I will present my analysis of the implicit ontology of VR along the axes of technology, ontology and art. Together these three axes enable us to develop a deeper insight in the essence of VR.¹

Technology

From a sheer technological point of view, virtual reality (also known as virtual environments, artificial reality, virtual space, or immersive media) can simply be described as the most recent offshoot of the development of (ever more user-friendly) man-computer interfaces.² It can be defined as »a

¹ Obviously I do not claim that these three axes offer a complete understanding of the nature of VR. Like any other technology, VR is the result of a complex interplay of various technical, scientific, military, socio-economic, (sub)cultural, ideological and philosophical factors. Far from being an isolated domain, VR (especially in its networked variants: virtual agora's, malls and communities) is part of a broader societal development that is characterized by a decline of urban communal space and the infiltration of the life-world and society with virtual technologies like television, radio, video, portable stereos and mobile telephones (Ostwald 1997, 126-7) and is strongly supported by the emergence of 'informational capitalism' (Castells 1996, 361, 366). Many authors have pointed at the male-gendered, North-Atlantic and colonialist ideology of many VR-applications or even of VR technology as such (Dietrich 1997; Hayles 1996; Kramarae 1995; Penny 1994; Stone 1995; Vasseleu 1997; Wise 1997). Moreover, as has already been suggested in my introduction, VR is the (tentative) culmination of a specific tradition of artistic representation, in which the central perspective from Renaissance painting, the realism of photography, the immersion of panoramas and the movement of film are combined (Hayward and Wollen 1993; Penny 1994). Others have pointed at the strong influences of sub-cultures such as the psychedelic counter-culture of the sixties, the successive popular music cultures from rock to house with their accompanying audiovisual practices, New Age mysticism and science fiction, especially of the cyberpunk that originated in William Gibsons 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, in which the idea of 'jacking in' to cyberspace, as well as the term 'cyberspace' was introduced (Hayward 1993; Zигуrаs 1997). Moreover, the development of VR is characterized by the dualism of an important tradition in Western religion and philosophy, represented by Plato, Christianity and Descartes. (Heim 1993, 83-108; Penny 1994).

² The term 'virtual reality' was introduced in 1989 by the computer-aided design software company Autodesk and the eclectic computer company VPL and became a 'hot' topic

three-dimensional, computer generated, simulated environment that is rendered in real time according to the behaviour of the user« (Loeffler and Anderson 1994, xi). As such it succeeds the two-dimensional graphical user interface of the MacIntosh and Windows operation systems, just as this two-dimensional interface replaced the one-dimensional command-line prompt of DOS, Unix and other early systems. Whereas in the case of DOS you remove a file from your computer by typing in the command 'delete' and in the case of a MacIntosh or a Windows computer you do this by dragging a two-dimensional representation of this file with the help of your mouse to a two-dimensional representation of a wastepaper basket, in the case of a VR interface you take up a three-dimensional representation of the file in your hand and throw it in the virtual basket next to your chair.

Although VR is still in its infancy, the three elements that together constitute the VR-experience are already present in the current VR systems (cf. Aukstakalnis and Blatner 1992, 23; Lavroff 1992, 9-13). The first element is *immersion*. In a VR system the user is not merely observing the data presented by the computer through a window, but is experiencing an alternate reality from the inside. In the present VR-systems the experience of immersion is mostly evoked by the use of a head-mounted display, with binocular parallax displays and stereo earphones to create 3-D optical effects and sound. In still experimental VR systems laser light is used to project images immediately on the retina. Even more experimental are the attempts to connect the computer immediately to the brain in order to evoke the images and sounds (and perhaps also tactile and olfactory sensations) electronically. VR systems share the element of immersion with older modes of representation like the panorama or theme park attractions such as StarTours in Disneyland Paris.

The second element of the VR experience, which distinguishes VR from these older modes of representation, is *navigation*. Navigation is the ability to move about in the computer-generated environment. Whereas in a traditional panorama and in Disneyland's StarTours the position of the viewer is fixed, in the case of VR the 'visitor' can navigate through the virtual environment and view it from different perspectives. This is made possible

in the media soon afterwards. However, the technology itself has a somewhat longer history. From 1969 onwards, the artist Myron Krueger developed a series of multi-sensory environments, that could interact with the visitor by using pressure-sensitive floorpads and infrared lights and which he called artificial reality. The head-mounted displays built by Ivan Sutherland, also in the late 1960s, were the first precursors to current VR-systems and were further developed in military and aerospace applications in the 1970s and 1980s and in the game industry in the 1990s (Chester s.q.; Coyle 1993).

by (mechanical, ultrasonic, magnetic, or optical) position/orientation tracking devices in the outfit of the cybernaut that instruct the computer, which part of the environment to display when the user moves his body or his head. Of course, navigation by the user only goes as far as the computer program allows. You can only explore locations that are pre-programmed and stored in the computer's memory.

The third and perhaps most innovative element of VR, compared to all foregoing types of representation, is that it allows the user to *interact* with the virtual environment. This means that the user, thanks to input devices such as datagloves or datasuits, can manipulate the objects in the virtual environment which respond appropriately. Moreover, virtual agents can act upon the user, or better: on the *representation* of the user (these 'virtual bodies' are usually called 'avatars' or 'personae'). In instances where more than one user is simultaneously immersed in the virtual environment, it becomes a shared world, in which their avatars can also interact with each other. In the popular arcade game *Dactyl Nightmare*TM, for example, the players try to accumulate as many points as possible by shooting at and hitting the avatar of the other players. In doing so, they are constantly threatened by a virtual pterodactyl, which attempts to pick up these avatars and kill them by dropping them down.³

As the (almost) real time rendering of images and sounds requires very powerful processors and a huge storage capacity, most VR systems today are implemented in specially designed and therefore very expensive stand-alone computers. However, in principle VR can be implemented in computer networks as well. Interesting examples are virtual worlds such as *Alphaworld*, which are emerging on the Internet. Although these virtual worlds (still) lack the element of full immersion (the inhabitant merely looks at them through his computer 'window'), they enable the 'inhabitant' to navigate through this environment with the help of his avatar, cultivate his virtual estate, and interact with other inhabitants. In these virtual worlds the users are not only visiting a pre-constructed environment, but become the (intuitive) co-programmers of this environment, too.

The environments VR technology gives access to are not necessarily completely virtual. It is also possible to mix them with 'real' environments. This happens for example in augmented reality and telepresence systems. An example of an augmented reality system is the helmet of a pilot where additional information about the environment is displayed on the inside. The pilot finds himself situated in a multi-layered environment that combines

³ For a more detailed phenomenological description of the experience *Dactyl Nightmare*TM see (Green 1997).

virtual and real elements. In the case of telepresence systems, the head-mounted display and datagloves or datasuit are connected with a robot in another real location, which acts as the avatar. The user perceives the remote environment with the help of the 'senses' of the robot, and uses the robot's 'limbs' to navigate through this location and to interact with the things he finds there. This way a fireman could virtually go into a burning house to rescue its inhabitant or a scientist could virtually walk on Mars or move between molecules. VR, augmented reality and telepresence can be mixed in a number of ways. Hans Moravec of the Robotics Institute of Carnegie Mellon University, for example, imagines a hybrid system where a virtual 'central station' is surrounded by portals that open on to views of multiple real locations. While in the station one inhabits a virtual body, but when one steps through a portal, the harness link is seamlessly switched from the simulation to a telepresence robot waiting at that location (Moravec 1995).

In some respects VR itself might be called a virtual technology. On the one hand, the systems available at present are still far from being a realisation of the promises and dreams of their builders and savants. Although we may expect that VR technology will show impressive improvements in the next decades, some of the promises and dreams projected in VR will certainly remain virtual forever, as they are based on an inadequate understanding of VR. On the other hand, VR is a virtual technology in the sense that we do not yet seem to grasp its unique potentials. VR still is in search of its own distinguishing 'grammar'. We might compare this situation to that of film in its formative years. Only with the invention of montage did film acquire the specific grammar that has made it a unique way of disclosing the world. As in the early days of film – consider Vertov's *Man with the Camera* – many artists today are investigating this ontological dimension of VR in their work (see Loeffler and Anderson 1994; Moser and MacLeod 1996).

Although we cannot predict the future development of VR, we can tentatively explore its ontological potentials by studying the way the present VR systems disclose a world. In addition, this will enable us to consider some of the implications of VR as an artistic medium.

Ontology

Prior to my analysis of the ontology of virtual reality, I have to say a few words about the meaning of the word 'ontology'. I use this word in the sense it was introduced by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger 1979, hereafter cited as SuZ). Ontology has to do with the Being of beings, that is:

the way beings appear to us, human beings (or, in Heidegger's terminology: human *Dasein*, a term that indicates the awareness of Being that characterizes human existence). This notion of ontology presupposes an ontological difference between (on the ontic level) individual *beings*, that are independent of the experience by which they are disclosed (e.g. rocks, computers, trees, animals, humans, gods), and their (ontological) *Being*, which 'is' only in the understanding of these beings by man (SuZ 183). Although beings are independent of human existence in the sense that they are not constituted by the human subject – and for that reason Heidegger, contrary to Husserl, might be called a 'hermeneutic realist' (Dreyfus 1991, 255) –, their Being is not. For that reason Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* regards the analysis of human existence as the fundamental ontology on which all regional ontologies (of nature, history, art, etc.) are grounded.

Probably this clarification of the ontological difference between beings and their Being, and the related analysis of the problems of traditional ontology that result from the neglect of this difference are Heidegger's most important contributions to philosophy. In traditional ontology Being and human beings (*Dasein*) were mainly conceived of as if they were beings. Being was conceived of as the highest being and ground of all other beings (e.g. the Idea of the Good in Plato's philosophy or God in the Christian tradition). And human being was also considered from the perspective of beings as a being with specific characteristics that could be determined. Contrary to this view Heidegger argues that human existence is a concerned Being-in-the-World. *Dasein* is not the isolated *ego*, which Descartes described, but is always already bodily in the world, dealing with the beings it encounters there. In this context the concept 'World' is not an ontic term referring to the totality of beings, but an ontological concept, pointing towards the (not necessary explicit) meaningful totality of relationships between *Dasein* and the available (*zuhanden*) beings. World is not an object opposite to a subject, but a structural aspect of *Dasein*. Correspondingly, other persons are part of *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-World too. *Dasein*'s being is a Being-With and its World is a common environmental whole (SuZ, 120).

This concerned and bodily Being-in-the-World with others has a specific temporal and spatial structure. *Dasein* is not in time like, for example, a rock; it is temporal in the sense that it is a *project* that is always pressed forward into future possibilities. *Dasein* is a *Seinkönnen*, a potentiality to be (*Möglichkeit*). At the same time these possibilities are not infinite in number, but determined by the situation *Dasein* is always already in, the *thrownness* or facticity of his existence. *Dasein*'s spatiality cannot be understood as simply having a location within an objective space among other beings. Spatiality

rather is a function of bodily Being-in-the-World: »Only to the extent that beings are revealed for *Dasein* in their dis-stancedness, do 'remotenesses' and distances with regard to other things become accessible in intraworldly beings themselves« (SuZ 105).⁴ From the perspective of Heidegger's fundamental ontology objective time and space as they are conceived in the natural sciences are deficient modes of the temporal and spatial structure of *Dasein*'s concernful Being-in-the-World.⁵

What I wish to argue here is that Heidegger's fundamental ontology can help us in our attempt to grasp the ontological dimension of VR. It can help us understand VR as a specific mode of *Dasein*'s bodily Being-in-the-World, with a specific temporal and spatial structure. I have to add immediately, however, that the analysis in *Sein und Zeit* also raises two serious obstacles to this attempt. In the first place Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, in spite of his emphasis of the temporality of *Dasein*, seems to present the existential structure of *Dasein* as a timeless structure, leaving hardly any room for an analysis of alternative modes of Being-in-the-World other than deficient modes. In the second place, in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger, although extensively examining the role of instruments such as hammers in *Dasein*'s disclosure of World, barely pays attention to *modern* technology. One might wonder whether the work of Heidegger after his famous *Kehre* is not better equipped for this task, because here the temporality (that is: the epochal character) of the understanding of Being as well as the role of modern technology plays a prominent role. However, the fact that in this later work – for reasons I cannot deal with here – the emphasis also moves from the projectivity of existence to the thrownness (now conceived of as *Ge-schick*), the later work prevents us from grasping the projective character of VR. Therefor I suggest to approach VR from the projective perspective of the fundamental ontology of *Sein und Zeit* with a simultaneous attention for the epochal and technological dimension of Being-in-the-World. What is needed, then, is a phenomenological description and interpretation of the different structural aspects of *Dasein*'s Being-in-a-virtual-World, such as virtual embodiment, virtual Being-With, the spatial and temporal structure of virtual worlds and their specific worldliness.⁶

⁴ »Das Zuhandene des alltäglichen Umgangs hat den Character der *Nähe*. Genau besehen ist diese Nähe des Zeugs in dem Terminus, der sein Sein ausdrückt, in den 'Zuhandenheit' schon angedeutet. Das 'zur Hand' Seiende hat je eine Verschiedene Nähe, die sich nicht durch Ausmessen von Abständen festgelegt ist. Diese Nähe regelt sich aus dem umsichtig 'berechnenden' Hantieren und Gebrauchen« (SuZ 102).

⁵ For a more detailed exposition of Heidegger's fundamental ontology see my forthcoming book *The Tragedy of Finitude* (De Mul 1999b).

⁶ In his Heidegger inspired analysis of the ontology of digital domains Chester states

As I intend to elucidate the way VR-artworks disclose World, I will mainly focus on the spatial and temporal structure and the 'worldliness' of virtual worlds, and will only remark on other aspects in passing. With regard to the way VR affects Being-in-the-World § 23 of *Sein und Zeit* provides us with a clue. In the context of the spatial dimension of Being-in-the-World, Heidegger emphasises that *Dasein* is characterized by a typical tendency to nearness (*»eine wesenhafte Tendenz auf Nähe«*). He remarks: »All the ways in which we speed up things, as we are more or less compelled to do today, push us on towards the conquest of remoteness. With the 'radio', for example, *Dasein* has so expanded its everyday environment that it has accomplished an expansion and devastation of the everyday 'world' – a de-severance which, in its meaning for *Dasein*, cannot yet be visualised« (SuZ 105). Heidegger talks about a devastation (*Zerstörung*) of the everyday world because the radio disorders the relationship between physical and human nearness. A voice we hear on the radio or on the telephone can be nearer to us than the receiver. In the case of immersive, navigational and interactive technologies such as VR and telepresence the notions of nearness and remoteness undergo an even more radical expansion and devastation.

At the *ontic* level networked VR and telepresence-technology are, like the radio and telephone, part of the process of *globalization*, that is: »the compressing of time and of time costs in relation to spatial displacement, as well as the meaning and effects of such displacement« (Binsbergen 1997, 2). Because of the specific properties of the earth's surface and the mobility of *homo sapiens*, we may say that the global displacement of people, ideas and goods is as old as humanity itself. From an *ontological* point of view we might add that this process of globalization ultimately is grounded in *Dasein*'s tendency to nearness and de-severance. However, in the age of modern technology this process shows a striking acceleration and radicalization. As the cultural anthropologist Van Binsbergen states it: »When messages travel at the speed of light across the globe using electronic media, when therefore physical displacement is hardly needed for effective communication yet such

that the spatial metaphors to denote digital domains (like the metaphors of cyberspace, desktop, and Electronic Superhighway) are misleading, because these domains are not spatial at all. He is certainly right in asserting that computers rather eliminate space by »encoding logical and physical entities as symbolic, addressable signs« (Chester 1997). However, as he notices himself, in order to function within a human context, computers not only have devices to convert the spatial analogue to the non-spatial digital (keyboards, mice etc.), but also devices to reconstitute the analogue (screens, display's, speakers). Although digital domains are not spatial themselves, from the perspective of *Dasein*, the immersion in a digital domain certainly has a spatial character.

displacement can be effected within one or two days from anywhere on the globe to anywhere else, and when the technology of manufacturing and distribution has developed to such levels that the same material environment using the same objects can be created and fitted out anywhere on the globe at will – then we have reduced the fees that time and space impose on the social process, to virtually zero» (Binsbergen 1997, 3). In the age of information and communication technology, especially in the case of telepresence and networked VR, *Dasein*'s tendency to nearness undergoes a radical change, which has no less radical ontological implications.

Let me first elucidate this by a closer examination of both constituents of the phrase 'virtual reality', starting with the notion of 'reality'. As noticed before, Heidegger criticises traditional ontology for understanding World and Being from the perspective of intraworldly beings. In modern ontology since Descartes being is conceived from the perspective of substantiality, and the world as a totality of things that are occurrent (*»vorhandender Dingzusammenhang (res)«*) (SuZ 201). From the perspective of fundamental ontology, however, Being (not beings) is dependent on our understanding, which means that reality (not the real) is dependent on concernful Being-in-the-World (SuZ 212). This implies that different interpretative practices can reveal different aspects of nature. From this point of view one cannot say, for example, »that the Galilean doctrine of freely falling bodies is true and that Aristotle's teaching, that light bodies strive upward, is false; for the Greek understanding of the essence of body and place and of the relation between the two rests upon a different interpretation of entities and hence conditions a correspondingly different kind of seeing and questioning of natural events« (Heidegger 1977, 117). In the context of my subject the crucial question is: how is reality interpreted and revealed by *Dasein* through virtual reality?

This brings us to the word 'virtual' in the expression 'virtual reality'. The etymology of this term offers an important clue as to why, among other candidates, this particular label for this new technology has stuck. The words 'virtual' and 'virtuality' are derived from the Latin *virtualis*. »Non-existent in classical Latin (although obviously inspired by the word *virtus* there), they are late-medieval neologisms, whose invention became necessary when, partly via Arabic versions of Aristotle's works, his Greek concept of *dynamis* ('potentiality, power, quadrate') had to be transalted into Latin (Hoenen 1947, 326n; Little, Fowler, and Coulson 1978, s.v. 'virtual')« (Binsbergen 1997, 9). After the decline of Aristotelian philosophy these concepts found refuge in the expanding field of physics. Around 1700 these concepts became established concepts in optics in the theory of the 'virtual image': the objects

shown in a mirror image, that do not really exist, but are merely illusory representations, which we apparently observe at the end of the refracted light beams connecting the object, the surface of the mirror, and our eye. A century later, the concepts became established in mechanics in theories about virtual velocity, virtual moment, and virtual work. Here the concept remains close to its Aristotelian origin and refers to entities that are not actually present, but that have the potential to become real.

In the dominant discourse on VR the meaning of 'virtual' is generally oriented towards the optic connotation of the concept. Heim, for example, defines VR as »an event or entity that is real in effect but not in fact«, and he adds: »There is a sense in which any simulation makes something seem real that in fact is not. The Virtuality game combines head-tracking device, glove, and computer animation to create the 'effect' on our senses of 'entities' moving at us that are 'not in fact real'« (Heim 1993, 109-110). Heim's remark makes clear that we cannot conceive of VR as a mere illusion. The bodily and mental sensations we experience in a flight simulator can hardly be distinguished from those experienced during a real flight.⁷ Likewise, the virtual communities such as *Alphaworld* that are currently emerging on the Internet, are real communities in the sense that they enable the inhabitants to commune and to communicate (Watson 1997). Loving or hating someone in VR is no less real than loving or hating someone in real life (RL). Of course one might object that a love affair with an avatar, a virtual crash in a flight simulator or a virtual murder in a game like *Dactyl Nightmare*TM, is quite different from a real love affair, a real crash and a real murder. This is true, of course. But it does not mean that virtual world and communities are sheer fictions. They have a reality of their own. What distinguishes VR from older forms of representation such as painting or film is that they not so much

⁷ It is often claimed that VR is a disembodied experience (see e.g. Rheingold 1991, 15-6). Heim even claims that VR is a realisation of Plato's dream to escape from the prison of the body: »Cyberspace is Platonism as a working product. The cybnaut seated before us, strapped into sensory-input devices, appears to be, and is indeed, lost to this world. Suspended in computer space, the cybnaut leaves the prison of the body and emerges in a world of digital sensation« (Heim 1993, 89). The example of the flight simulator already shows that this is not the case. Although it is true that the virtual body or avatar that we possess in a VR has an immaterial character, the very function of the VR equipment is to stimulate the senses of our *real* body. In fact, the virtual embodiment is both digital and material. According to Randall Walser, the essential difference and advantage of VR over film, plays and television is the very fact that, unlike the latter, *cyberspace embodies* (cited in: \Rheingold, 1991 #2147, 286). It is this embodiment that ensures that VR experiences do not just take place merely in the mind, but are 'felt' as well (Cooper 1997, 98). In this respect, VR experiences are real experiences.

refer to a real world beyond the representation, but constitute another type of Being-in-the-World. Describing and analyzing these characteristics of *Dasein*'s Being-in-a-virtual-World, as well as elucidating the way it is connected to *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-real-World, is the very task of the ontology of VR I am trying to break the ground for.⁸

Perhaps I can illuminate the contours of this ontology a little more by pointing at a striking similarity and a no less striking difference between the ontology I am aiming at and the deconstruction of representation by post-structuralists such as Baudrillard, Derrida and Lyotard. Their argument that in postmodern culture sign systems no longer refer to a reality, to a certain extent illuminates the virtuality of VR. When Baudrillard with regard to the present state of representation writes: »Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal« (Baudrillard 1984, 253), then I completely agree that VR is hyperreal in the sense that it is not (necessarily) referring to an origin that precedes the simulated world. However, this is not to say that it is without reality. Baudrillard here, perhaps motivated by a kind of ontological nostalgia, seems to persist in the hierarchically valued opposition between reality and illusion that characterizes traditional ontology from Plato on. Unlike Baudrillard, we should not conceive of VR as a form of disappearance of reality, but rather as a disclosure of *another* mode of reality. I think Jaron Lanier, one of the founding fathers of VR, is aiming at this very issue when he calls VR a *postsymbolic* mode of communication. Simon Perry rightly objects that Lanier overlooks the fact that a teacup in VR is still a representation (Penny 1994, 207-8), nevertheless he does not get the point Lanier is trying to make: the fact that for *Dasein* in cyberspace the virtual teacup is not primarily a representation of something else, but a thing that is part of his concernfully Being-in-a-virtual-World. William W. Armstrong also seems to overlook this availableness (*Zuhandenheit*) of virtual beings when he argues in his Heidegger inspired analysis of the relationship between Place and Being in cyberspace: »It is true, the computer functions as a location and as such has opened up a region, a space if you will. But it is a space where there are no things, no more locations to be opened, no real relations to be opened up and brought forth in a presencing, but merely

⁸ Of course in Being-in-a-virtual-World not only the *world*, but also the characteristics of *Dasein* differ from those of *Dasein* that is in-a-real-world. Examples include indeterminate or arbitrary physique, gender and ethnicity magical powers, teleportation ability and the ability to reincarnate after a virtual death (MacKinnon 1997, 223f.). However, as already noticed, here I exclusively focus on the the impact of VR on the worldliness of the world.

images, thoughts of and references to locations left behind» (Armstrong 1994, 41).

In order to grasp more profoundly the virtuality of *Dasein*'s concernfully Being-in-a-virtual-World we should take up the second meaning of the word 'virtual' mentioned above, having the connotation of potentiality.⁹ In my concise exposition of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, I pointed to the fact that *Dasein* should not be regarded as an occurrent being, but as a *Seinkönnen*, a potentiality to be. We might say that in VR this potentiality of *Dasein* is transferred in a radical way – more radical than in everyday life – to the beings it encounters in its world. Within a virtual reality, beings are programmable according to a project by *Dasein*. One could object here, that *Dasein* entering a virtual world is not necessarily the programmer of this world. This is true. It might be useful to distinguish between what, following a distinction made by Michael Joyce with regard to hypertext, we could call *exploratory* and *constructive* VR (Joyce 1995, 39-59). In the first case, for example in the aforementioned game *Dactyl Nightmare*TM, we can navigate and interact within a virtual world, but only according to possibilities pre-established by the makers. In a constructive VR such as *Alphaworld*, however, *Dasein* becomes the programmer of his own world. Here we see a remarkable reversal of the situation in traditional ontology. Whereas in this ontology (human) Being was conceived of as if it were an occurrent being, now beings are conceived of as if they have a projective character.¹⁰ This is not only true for beings programmed within VR, but it also affects the Being of natural beings. These also increasingly become seen as programmable entities. In genetic manipulation, for example, living organisms are conceived of as programmable entities as well. Whereas mechanistic technology, as described by the later Heidegger, is characterized by control and use of beings, informationistic technology even intervenes in the creation of beings. It transforms the world into a field of virtual possibilities (De Mul forthcoming).

Does this mean that VR is the ultimate climax of modernistic will to control? In a sense it is. VR, as a computer generated environment, *literally* is the ultimate outcome of modern calculative thinking. Chester therefore

⁹ Mark Nunes, referring to Bergson, also points at this connotation in his analysis of the virtuality of the Internet: »We may need to rethink the virtual not in the commercial sense of 'more real than real', but in Bergson's sense: the condition of possibility that occurs the moment before the emergence of the actual« (Nunes 1997, 175).

¹⁰ The development of artificial intelligence and artificial life will perhaps lead to the point where non-human beings really will have a projective status – intentionality – themselves (cf. Okrent 1996; Penny 1995).

is justified in claiming that digital domains are the ultimate expression of modern technology's tendency to make the real available as *standing reserve* (Chester 1997). However, we should not forget that *Dasein* in cyberspace is not a Fichtean-like absolute I that creates and controls his world. Though the virtual body may have superhuman powers, as long as *Dasein*'s real body is part of the material world, it remains a thrown, and therefore finite Being.¹¹ Moreover, *Dasein* is also always already thrown in the virtual worlds it inhabits. This implies that the projects of *Dasein* in these worlds are no less confronted with all kinds of opposition of human and non-human other beings than in off line reality. Not only because VR is a shared world constituted by a multitude of often opposing projects, but also because the programmed worlds get their own weight and own sorts of chance and fate. And the more fundamentally *Dasein* intervenes in his world, the more fundamental is the chance that confronts him. *Dasein* remains a thrown project (*geworfenes Entwurf*), however the emphasis has changed from a *thrown* project to a thrown *project*.¹²

However, this nuance does not contradict the fact that this transformation is a radical one. Vilem Flusser states that with information technologies »we begin to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of an alleged reality. The slavish attitude, with which we, as a subject, approach objective reality in order to master it, has to give in to a new attitude, in which we intervene in the fields of possibilities in- and outside us, in order to intentionally realize some of these possibilities. From this perspective, the new technology means that we are starting to raise ourselves from a subjectivity into a projectivity. We are facing a second birth of mankind, a second *homo erectus*. And this *homo erectus*, who plays with chance, in order to intentionally transform it into necessity, may be called *homo ludens*« (Flusser 1992a, 25).

¹¹ Another important characteristic of informationistic technology, which I cannot deal with here, is that man becomes its ultimate raw material (cf. Heidegger 1967). Electronic implants and genetic engineering have begun to transform man into a transhuman or even posthuman being, whose ontological structure may be quite different from human *Dasein* (cf. Moravec 1988).

¹² I would like to thank Awee Prins for this formulation, as well for various other useful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Art

As play and art are closely connected (cf. Gadamer 1986, 107-174), Flusser's statement brings me to the last part of my paper, in which I will come back to the question raised in the introduction: the implications of VR for the arts. How do artworks that make use of VR technology disclose World?

In order to answer this question we have to keep in mind that traditional aesthetics is strongly influenced by the ontological tradition criticized by Heidegger. In the Platonist tradition art was primarily conceived of as a form of *mimesis* of a second order. Whereas Being was conceived as a collection of highest timeless beings (the Ideas), and the beings in the empirical world as imperfect copies of these ideas, the work of art »stands at third remove from reality«, thus offering »images far removed from the truth« (Plato 1974, 597e-605b). However, within the Platonic tradition a gradual transformation of the mimetic conception of art took place. In the work of Plotinus (*Enneads*, V, viii, 1), for example, it is claimed that works of art are not so much a representation of natural objects, but an immediate representation of the Ideas themselves. Consequently, the artist was no longer conceived of as an inferior craftsman, but as a person whose activities might be compared to those of the philosopher. From the Renaissance on, the artist has been increasingly attributed godlike qualities. Leonardo da Vinci, for example, self-confidently claimed that the artist in his work *re-creates* the living work of God. In the modern, secularised world, especially from the age of Romanticism on, the artist even took the place left by God as an originator of entirely new worlds (De Mul 1999a). This development is obvious in the development of modern art, which shows a transformation from *mimesis*, which is still dominant in impressionism, to *poiesis*. In the various avant-garde movements in twentieth-century art this resulted in a complete break with *mimesis* and realism. By means of artistic techniques such as montage, modern art »does not reproduce the real, but constructs an object (its lexical field includes the terms 'assemble, build, join, unite, add, combine, link, construct, organise [...]') or rather, mounts a process [...] in order to intervene in the world, not to reflect but to change reality« (Ulmer, 1983, 86). Although Heidegger has criticised the manifest anthropocentrism and subjectivism in modern aesthetics, his conception of art as developed in *The Origin of Art* shows an essential affinity with this romantic-modernist conception of art. Although he puts the role of the artist in perspective, in his description of the Greek temple we saw that for him too the work of art does not portray a world, but founds one.

Seen from this perspective we may say that so far VR is the ultimate outcome of this development, because in VR worlds are originated that gather people and offer them a place to live in. Especially in *constructive* VR, this technology realizes an important motive of the artistic avantgardes to transform the observer of the work into a participant. Whereas even most modern works of art remain occurent beings in the sense that they are the fixation of a projection, in constructive VR the observer really participates in the founding of World. Such virtual worlds are the *Gesamtkunstwerke* Wagner was dreaming about (cf. Heim 1993, 124f.).

Considered from this perspective, the development of art in the twentieth century shows a remarkable similarity with recent developments in the sciences. Information technology based sciences such as artificial life also reflect a transformation from *mimesis* to *poiesis*. As Claus Emmeche states it in his monography on artificial life: »Artificial life must be seen as a sign of the emergence of a new set of postmodern sciences, postmodern because they have renounced or strongly downgraded the challenge of providing us with a truthful image of one real world, and instead have taken on the mission of exploring the possibilities and impossibilities of virtual worlds. It is a case of modal sciences, passing freely between necessity and possibility. Science becomes the art of the possible because the interesting questions are no longer how the world is, but how it could be, and how we can most effectively create other universes – given this or that set of computational resources« (Emmeche 1991). Conversely, one might argue that art becomes a scientific project: »When we admit that science is a form of art, then we do not humiliate science, on the contrary, it becomes the paradigm for all other arts. It becomes clear that all kinds of art only become reality, that is: produce their realities, when they strip off their empirical skin and come close to the theoretical exactness of science. [...] Because of digitalization, all forms of art become exact scientific disciplines and can no longer be distinguished from science« (Flusser 1992b, 29-30).

As suggested in my introduction, VR in this sense indeed reunites art and technology which, since Greek culture, have gone their separate ways. Here, I will not discuss the question as to whether the development described should be considered an advantage or not. My aim has been to throw some light on this development from a philosophical perspective. Before we can judge the desirability of Being-in-a-virtual-World, we first have to understand the phenomenon. Ontologies, of course, always have de-ontological implications. But in our attempt to elucidate these implications, we have to try to avoid both uncritical embracing and pessimistic rejection of VR. VR is neither a holy grail nor »an assault on reality« (Slouka 1995). This is not to

say, however, that VR is a neutral technology. Like all technologies, VR discloses the world in its own way and as such it offers us a whole range of new possibilities and new dangers, pleasures undreamed of before and frustrations unforeseen even in our futuristic nightmares. We might also expect that some of the greatest art in the next century will be based on VR technology, and that at the same time this technology will be used for the most stultifying kitsch. We can only hope that our philosophical reflections on this technology will help us to distinguish between the two.

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Joseph Margolis
All the Turns in »Aestheticizing« Life

I

I find that I must begin at a great distance from the question of aestheticizing ordinary life. Bear with me, the gap closes of its own accord.

Modernity – or, better, that late phase of modernity, our own time at the close of the century, sometimes dubbed postmodernity – is a time of the greatest crisis and self-doubt among the cultures of the modern West. Certainly, it manifests itself already in the late nineteenth century in Nietzsche's improbable pronouncement, concocted in a Schopenhauerean dream, in *The Birth of Tragedy*: that is, the ensorcelled Oedipal warning about the meaning of the meaninglessness of life that plays itself out from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *The Gay Science* to *The Genealogy of Morals*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, down to the posthumous *The Will to Power*. In all of this, Nietzsche deepens his original inquiry – beyond all rational resolution – regarding the condition for »promoting [what he calls] *the faith in life*.«¹ Whatever succeeds in this way extends and transforms the account of tragedy (as much on the comic side as the tragic). But what, more ominously, Nietzsche claims to detect through his various genealogies or deconstructions of morality, is this: »What will not be built any more henceforth, and *cannot* be built anymore, is [he says] – a society in the old sense of that word: to build that, everything is lacking, above all the material. *All of us are no longer material for a society*: this is a truth for which the time has come. It is a matter of indifference to me [he adds] that at present the most myopic, perhaps most honest, but at any rate noisiest human type that we have today, our good socialists, believe, hope, dream, and above all shout and write almost the opposite.«²

This is the setting for the reading (advanced not many years ago by Alexander Nehamas) in which Nietzsche is said to aestheticize morality, to turn to the aestheticism of his own life shaped as a work of art against the

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), Bk. I, §1 (p. 74).

² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Bk. V, §356 (p. 304).

futility of all the usual forms of politics and morality – perhaps even a hopeful exemplar for the rest of us.³

What Nietzsche means here – I dare suppose – is that the human preoccupation with our own words and theories, which hold to their deeper life-affirming function chiefly in the greatest of the arts, is now perhaps permanently risked (as the example of the liberal, rational, and literal-minded socialists confirm). The aestheticizing of life, in Nietzsche's most original sense, transformed from Schopenhauer's, repairs as well as possible the rift that the theorizing mentality deepens at our peril.⁴ We draw away, through language, through cultural tradition, through our preoccupation with actual history, from the sources of instinctual animal affirmation. Art in its best moments reconciles the hubris of, say, linguistic communication – a late evolutionary development in any case – with the deeper adequacy of instinctual life, the original societal sources that Nietzsche claims can never be recovered at our peculiar stage of development. Seen thus, »aestheticizing« signifies our bringing our lives to art (as best we can) in the spirit in which art brings life to its instinctual affirmation.

But, if so, then Nehamas is very subtly off the mark when, comparing Nietzsche with Proust (with whatever caveats), he claims that »Nietzsche came to see perfect self-sufficiency [something like the Proustian recovery and coherent integration of every detail in the unending recovery of a single life] as a proper test for the perfect life [an individual life as a work of art] at least partly because his thinking so often concerned literary models.«⁵ This is actually Nehamas's gloss on Nietzsche's recommendation that »we should learn from artists while being wiser than they are in other matters. For with them the subtle power [as in Proust, according to Nehamas's reading] usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins: but we want to be the poets of our life – first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.«⁶

Nehamas links the endlessness of the literary recovery of the details of a life (the Proustian theme) with the doctrine of the eternal return. But Nietzsche means, as the context of the passage cited makes clear, to urge that we work to recover the »beauty« of life in the face of the distancing danger that things are not beautiful at all (that is, life-enhancing) either in themselves or through the specialized perspectives of our languaged skills.

³ See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); particularly, Introduction.

⁴ I find this explained in one of the most remarkably up-to-date passages of Nietzsche's, in *The Gay Science*, Bk. V, §354.

⁵ Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*, pp. 194-195; see, also, p. 164.

⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Bk. IV, §299 (pp. 239-240).

For precisely this reason, Richard Rorty, relying perhaps too much on Nehamas, offers the following diagnosis of Nietzsche – hence of aestheticizing life: »For Proust and Nietzsche... there is *nothing* more powerful or important than self-redescription. They are not trying to surmount time and chance, but to use them.... The greatest task of the ironist [Nietzsche in particular, though Nietzsche is not quite the liberal that ironists like Rorty tend to be] is [Rorty informs us] the one Coleridge recommended to the great and original poet: to create the taste by which he will be judged. But the judge the ironist has in mind is himself. He wants to be able to sum up his life in his own terms.«⁷ The importance of these mistaken readings (of Nietzsche) is that they help to explain the growing tendency in our own time – possibly part of a natural declension from Nietzsche's very different conviction – to view »aestheticizing« as entrenching the propriety of individual autonomy, either the democratized or the would-be meritocratic authority for the meaning and validity of one's own life, the enlargement of the official privacy of each life (ironic and liberal in that sense at least), and the self-indulgence with which we deem ourselves entitled to pronounce our own lives »works of art.« I have no doubt that that too is part of the meaning of the aestheticizing of ordinary life. But surely it is a corruption of Nietzsche's original theme.

It is true enough that Nietzsche holds that no life is justified that cannot meet the test of the »eternal return.« But the point of that »test« – which is, of course, no test at all – is that success is entirely instinctual, not human at all, and that morality and tradition succeed only where they engage such incomprehensible energies. There's absolutely no room for optimism or reassurance there.⁸ Certainly nothing to cheer us on regarding »Nietzsche's [supposed] effort to create an artwork out of himself,«⁹ possibly something more convincing than Walter Pater's donnish pagan intensity or the effete energies of the Yellow Book or even the more charming dandyism of Wilde and Baudelaire; certainly nothing that would lead us to the kindly, democratic, consumerist aestheticism of John Dewey, in *Art and Experience*,¹⁰

⁷ Richard Rorty, »Self-creating and Affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger,« *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 97–99.

⁸ Compare Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*, pp. 6–7.

⁹ Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*, p. 8.

¹⁰ See John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (Philadelphia: Minton, Balch, 1934); also, Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997). Shusterman attempts to redeem the Deweyan conception: »Pragmatism, as I conceive it after Dewey, [he says,] offers a distinctive way of defending the aesthetic model of philosophical life against these troubling questions [that is, questions that burden us with the defense of morality as opposed to 'lifestyles'] by

which, I may add, is not terribly distant from Rorty's treatment of Nietzsche's aestheticism, under the shadow of his own treatment of Dewey's liberalism. The essential difference between Nietzsche and his successors – whether Heidegger or Rorty or Nehamas – is simply that, for the latter, aestheticizing is invariably optimistic, forward-looking, and self-justifying, whereas, for Nietzsche, such considerations are entirely irrelevant. The current debate is entirely skewed in the direction of the former, whether inspired by Dewey or Adorno or Wittgenstein or, indeed, Rorty.

Are all these different currents really the same? No, it seems not. Aestheticism, or the aestheticization of life, if we may speak of Nietzsche thus, somehow prepared the way for a very strange series of incredible displacements, mainly in Germany, that redirected Nietzsche's themes into the brilliantly intuited nonsense fashioned by Ernst Jünger, Adolf Hitler, and Martin Heidegger, and that signified there a profound cry (regardless of its monstrous possibilities and irrelevancies) against the perceived vulgarity, glibness, vacuity, spreading power, acquisitiveness, anarchism, lack of nobility and heroism of the bourgeois market world that – to be sure – has now pretty well won hands down.

Aestheticism in that sense, as much in Nietzsche as in Wilde – and, crazily, in Jünger – is a protest against the self-congratulatory moralities of the West. It is also, therefore, a self-congratulatory morality of its own, what we now call aestheticizing. But it is only in Nietzsche that the metaphysical appeal to the instinct for life (curiously cobbled by Bernard Shaw) confirms the futility of any would-be rationally grounded morality and politics of any stripe, *a fortiori* any aestheticized »lifestyles« offered in place of known moralities – or, as the apotheosis of such moralities, in the familiar manner modeled by Pater or Jünger or endorsed by Dewey or proposed by Nehamas (interpreting Nietzsche) or, more pleasantly, by Richard Shusterman (interpreting Dewey) or Wolfgang Iser, or self-deceptively proclaimed by Heidegger (in his most Hölderlinesque moments).¹¹

These are very different ways of coopting Nietzsche: some congenial to our sensibilities, some utterly impossible to defend. But the important point remains: (i) that Nietzsche's use of the notion (aestheticism, life as a work of art) presupposes the futility of ever completely legitimating our

undermining the traditional, stifling oppositions on which they are based»; hence, their exposé is supposed to lead to Shusterman's endorsement of »the aestheticization of ethics« pp. 5-6. See, also, Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992).

¹¹ See Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), Division One.

moral and political norms, for instance against both Kant and Hegel; and (ii) that nearly all post-Nietzschean uses of Nietzsche's alleged aestheticism restore the eligibility of what Nietzsche expressly denies. The question of what we should now mean by the aestheticization of life hangs in the balance.

When, for instance, Nietzsche declares, in *The Birth of Tragedy* – a theme he never relinquished but only transformed: »the entire comedy of art is neither performed for our betterment or education, nor are we the true authors of this art world. On the contrary, we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections of the true author [the Will], and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art – for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified – while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that which soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented.«¹²

As I read this, Nietzsche is affirming (in his arch way) that our lives, manifesting the »lifestyles« that collect a viable society, are for that reason an »aesthetic phenomenon« justified »eternally« but *not* in any human way. Nietzsche's aestheticism, even the literary shaping of his own life, is no more than the explanation of the irrelevance, as far as the Will to Power is concerned, of the would-be rational defense of any personal or societal lifestyle, including any devoted to making that same lesson clear and convincing through the irony of its own success. That is what is missing in Nehamas and Rorty – and what is freed from its moorings, naively but generously in Dewey, and also very cleverly but falsely in Heidegger.

There is no sense in which Nietzsche can be made to provide a criterial ground for choosing any one morality or politics over any other or, indeed, a ground for any deliberate aestheticism or aestheticization of ordinary life. I don't mean by that that it is impossible to reconcile Nietzsche's final reading of the Will to Power with the quotidian problems of justifying a way of life, but they are not linearly connected in any way.

More than that, when you separate aestheticism from Nietzsche's profound myth, you are left with nothing more than Dewey's consumerism, Jünger's madness, Wilde's dandyism, Heidegger's grandiosity, Rorty's wilful anarchy, and similar exotica. Stripped of that connection, the aestheticization of life is anything we please, somehow relieved – by a supposed authenticity mere moralities cannot claim – of any need for explicit validation.

Once you have this picture before you, you realize that, *for us*, for mere mortal humans attempting to justify one ideology or tradition or morality

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §5, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1977, cited by Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*.

or lifestyle over another, it doesn't matter, initially, whether *we* believe »aestheticizing« morality is or is not an improvement over resisting any intended practical change. The contest takes the familiar form it always has; or (better) *if we could* improve the rigor of moral argument, we should have to do so across the board – that is, to include aestheticized judgments as well. There's no way to coopt Nietzsche's use of the expression »aesthetic phenomenon« (or its intended doctrine) to gain a dialectical advantage in choosing, for instance, between Dewey and Jünger – if you can imagine that ever making sense!

The idea is preposterous. Not only would such a choice invoke two radically different notions of aestheticizing life – for which, then, we would need a meta-aestheticizing rule and, for that, a meta-meta-rule – but the truth is: it makes no more sense to speak of correctly choosing aestheticized lifestyles than of making pedestrian moral choices. We cannot even fathom any principles or ordered distinctions between the moral and the aesthetic – *a fortiori*, between their respective grounds or criteria.¹³

My own view is that the whole business is a terrible muddle. I have never seen a convincing account of the disjunction between moral and aesthetic values or, I may as well say, any convincing account of the distinct extensions of »moral« and »aesthetic« values that would bear in any way on the precision or objectivity of pertinent judgments. I take the Kantian model to be a complete disaster, to have almost no bearing on either moral matters or matters regarding the quality of art or the sense in which aesthetic and artistic values differ or may be reconciled or graded. I have no confidence in universal norms of any of these sorts, except, trivially, in the sense of consistency of usage. I don't believe there are any obvious criteria for making a life a »work of art« in the normative sense Nehamas draws from Nietzsche, or in the romantic sense of ennobling experience that Schiller draws from Kant,¹⁴ or even in the naive sense – hardly the equivalent of Roland Barthes's little joke – the »consummatory experience,« the lesser *jouissance* Dewey promises all of us.¹⁵

I don't see anything ennobling about art *tout court*, unless contact with anything human is ennobling. I don't see that art or morality is ever universally compelling (where the claim is not vacuous) or ever sufficiently uniform to encourage us to search for underlying universal values – perhaps,

¹³ See J. O. Urmson, »What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?« *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. XXXI (1957).

¹⁴ See Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

¹⁵ See Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Ch. 8.

then, for specifically democratic or anti-democratic values. I take all of that to be a fake. *If* we really lacked grounds for an objective moral debate between competing visions, we couldn't possibly expect to gain a better argument by drifting to aesthetic or artistic grounds: I don't even know what that would mean. There is no legible direction in art or aesthetic values.

I don't believe that Nietzsche's splendid criticisms of traditional moralities ever required his own grand doctrine of the Will to Power, or are for that reason particularly weak in any dialectically important sense. The only reason aestheticism or aestheticization cuts no moral ice and affords no distinctive lifestyle is simply that where it is relevant it has always been relevant – even if, under other labels and for every conceivable cause. If you mean, by »aestheticizing,« using or directing art in the service of democratizing our society more than it has been, or strengthening a fascist society, then your moral and political objectives will surely take precedence over the aesthetic and artistic; and, in any case, changes in the one will go hand in hand with the other. There is no convincing privileging in either direction, and there are no particular values that are assured, or known to be worth saving, by turning from the putatively moral or political to the artistic or the aesthetic – that is, in any sense beyond the sense in which we have no wish to impoverish the culture to which we belong.

II

I have a very different reading of Nietzsche's aestheticism to offer. I mean a reading that is not merely bookish, a reading that bears rather on the real-world circumstances of moral and political life and does not pretend to snatch a conceptual privilege from any source. For, for one thing, the solution to the problem of the meaning of life is, actually, logically trivial (but not unimportant for that reason, and not assuredly sufficient for anyone who finds the question unnerving); *and*, for another, Nietzsche was plainly aware of that sense of the matter, since it's already embedded in his own account of Greek tragedy.

The doctrine runs as follows: life has no meaning apart from the entrenched traditions of one's own culture, where the question arises and is met *at* the level of instinct that Nietzsche himself invokes – but *not*, there, in recognizably human terms. That's all! It is the same doctrine that takes the form of the challenge of the »eternal return,« relative to which *any* cultural practice that survives over time and change counts as the successful aestheticization of ordinary life.

There are no differential human values at this level of instinctual life; hence, there are no differential values apt for assessing the functional adequacy of aestheticized or cultural life. »Whatever has *value* in our world [Nietzsche declares] now does not have value in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present – and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it.«¹⁶ If you take this literally, as Nietzsche apparently intends it to be, then the normative grounds on which moral, political, artistic, aesthetic, and similar *commitments and judgments* are regularly assessed have nothing to do in any pointed way with the function of aestheticization, except in the negative sense that no such appraisals have any relevance for life if they are not pertinently life-affirming. The famous wisdom of Silenus, for instance, makes sense as a countermove only against those who *affirm* that life and nature *have* intrinsic value.

Nietzsche is instructing us here about the inherent *deficiency* of all practical reasoning and judgment: it rests on »grounds« that cannot be converted into strict norms and, relative to that functionality in nature, no merely human norms could ever convincingly disqualify competing »aestheticizations« (read: diverging cultures or diverging histories) that similarly survive.

What Nietzsche obscures by this deliberate extravagance is the important point that the validation of moral and political and aesthetic arguments presupposes the life-enhancing viability such arguments cannot possibly provide; hence, that arguments about the right direction of life are, necessarily, rhetorically defective but not humanly irrelevant for that reason. That is also the lesson of the exemplary Greek tragedies, for aestheticization concerns the reasons for our loyalty to particular lifestyles, traditions, paradigmatic lives that we find compelling by our lights. To say that Nietzsche made a work of art of his own life is to say little more than that his philosophical objections to traditional moralities and ideologies cannot now be denied. We admit that we are taken with the relevance of his arguments, as we might be by the charm of an unexpected poem. Nietzsche is explicit enough about all this: »Gradually, man has become a fantastic animal,« he says, »that has to fulfill one more condition of existence than any other animal: man has to believe, to know, from time to time *why* he exists: his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life – without faith in *reason in life*.«¹⁷

If I understand this correctly, then, since any deliberately pursued mode of life, Nietzsche's life, say, viewed as an exemplar, or Nietzsche's own exemplar of Attic life construed in terms of Greek tragedy (that is, an entire

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Bk. IV, §301 (p. 242).

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Bk. I, §1 (p. 75).

society's tradition), counts as the aestheticization of life, there is no point to moral or political dispute that fails to come to terms with the protean nature of such »aesthetic« values; and no claimant can hope to vindicate the exclusive right of any single exemplar or state the conditions under which it has any differential right at all. In Nietzsche's terms, the inherent deficiency of practical legitimation answers to, and is made good in, the Will to Power. Nietzsche casts the idea of an approved life in terms of an ulteriorly inspired form of self-deception; in the human world, we debate the merits of alternative lives at a certain displaced level at which we demand a convincing rationale, entangling ourselves thereby in the imagined sufficiency and objectivity (hence, also, the exclusionary power) of our fine arguments.

I don't find this particularly alien to the conditions under which Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations*, speaks of the human *Lebensform*: except that Nietzsche favors the lesson of the threat of meaninglessness and Wittgenstein, the slimmer thesis that all argument must ultimately be grounded, not in propositions, but in our form of life.¹⁸ The two doctrines go hand in hand. That is, the idea that theory is itself a form of practice signifies that human reasoning is largely ad hoc, occasional, contextually disciplined, logically informal, and incompletable in principle – in ways that go contrary to all the standard presumptions of systematic theory (closure, foundations, explanatory inclusiveness, and bivalence). That is certainly close to the heart of what Nietzsche means by aestheticism: something very far removed from all those other specimen views ranging, in however heterodox a way, from Schiller's to Adorno's to Rorty's.

What needs to be especially remarked is the entirely subordinate nature of distinctions drawn between the moral, the political, the artistic, and the aesthetic. The principal clue to all the variant taxa is that the judgments in question *are* all practical, all grounded in a viable tradition – a sense that is common, I suggest, to Nietzsche and Wittgenstein in an unexpected way. I don't mean to concede by that that there are theoretical judgments that have an entirely different cognitive source from practical judgments. On the contrary, the interesting possibility is that all judgments are practical (or grounded in the practical) in the same way. That is certainly a radical idea, but it is also thoroughly Nietzschean. For the moment, let me say that this small adjustment yields two benefits: for one, it opposes prioritizing the moral over the aesthetic or artistic, or vice versa, and it disallows any privileging of the validity of practical judgments in any way; and, for a second, by admitting the inherent deficiency of every »rational« effort to legitimate

¹⁸ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), for instance I, §§241-242, 479-481.

moralties or lifestyles, it concedes the inescapable role of the entire span of historically divergent traditions, which, accordingly, cannot fail to be »equal« in the eyes of the Will to Power.

The literal meaning of this last concession – to convert its lesson into terms that might reasonably belong to Wittgenstein's slimmer thesis – is simply that there are indefinitely many societal lifestyles to honor: no one choice could ever convincingly preclude the eligibility of the others, on grounds of divergence alone; and since no single lifestyle can expect to be exclusionary, practical arguments cannot adhere to an uncompromising bivalence or any principled privilege. Aestheticism signifies, in Nietzsche, a pagan respect for every powerful manifestation of human life. Some may see in it an implicit democracy, but that would betray the deeper doctrine: something akin to substituting Parsifal for Oedipus.

III

All the foregoing is true enough. But the persistence of the aestheticizing move in our own late age has pretty well abandoned Nietzsche's sterner doctrine. It is now, I think, a kind of opportunism, conceptually released from all pretensions of modernist legitimation. Even in Heidegger, supreme philosophical opportunist that he was, the question of legitimation seems to have persisted. You find it, for instance, after the *Kehre*, when Heidegger is bent on recovering the themes of his early lectures on Hölderlin (1934-35), as in »The Question concerning Technology« (1953) and related papers, where Heidegger offers an ingenious subversion of Nietzsche's more innocent doctrine, where he aestheticizes the final destinal calling of the German *Volk*!¹⁹ Extraordinary!

I don't doubt that Heidegger's final ontology – the one in which, *per* Hölderlin, the poet, like the *Führer* and, like Heidegger himself, is said to be gifted enough to receive the saving self-disclosure of Being that may yet reverse the entire Nazi blunder – is, by far, the most extreme form of the aestheticization of life that our end-of-century can boast. Nevertheless, its political opportunism is still soberly cast in terms of a kind of realism that, however mysterious and outrageous, is abandoned in turn by the post-war aestheticisms of the victorious West.

You see this in its most fantastic form in Rorty, if the juxtaposition will

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, »The Question concerning Technology« (trans. William Lovitt), in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). See, also, Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, Chs. 7-8.

not offend you. I can only plead that Rorty directly addresses the question in assessing Heidegger himself. Effectively, he dismisses Heidegger's *doctrine* by a sort of psychoanalysis, makes the entire tale of Heidegger's last version of aestheticization no more than a self-deceptive mask for his true ironism – according to the formula of ironism already cited. Which is to say, Rorty replaces Heidegger's aestheticization by his own more candidly opportunistic version: he returns us in a bolder way to the assertive, self-justifying, private or autonomous, even liberal, act of any of us by which we simply declare our lives to be a work of art. That is surely the last irony of all the turns of aestheticism.

»Dasein',« Rorty avers, »was, so to say, Heidegger's name for the ironist,« that is, himself. »But, in his later period, [he warns,] this word is replaced by 'Europe' or 'the West' – the personification of the place where Being played out a destiny which ended in ironism.«²⁰ Rorty thinks of Heidegger as »the greatest theoretical imagination of his time (outside the natural sciences).« But he failed »where Proust succeeded«; for, following Proust, Rorty finds that »novels are a safer medium than [philosophical] theory« for the aestheticization of private life.²¹

That is, Rorty returns us to something like Nehamas's equally commodified reading of Nietzsche. Heidegger somehow believed that, beginning with the project of *Being and Time*, he could remake himself as the sage of the West, by isolating the essential *words* – yes, the words – by which (by analogy with Hölderlin and even Nietzsche, but surpassing Nietzsche), we might vouchsafe the right receptive relationship to Being. There you have Rorty's gloss on that fateful line from *Being and Time*: »The ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the *force of the most elementary words* in which Dasein expresses itself, and to keep the common understanding from leveling them off to that unintelligibility which functions... as a source of pseudo-problems.«²²

»Heidegger,« Rorty claims, »had set himself the [impossible] problem of how to surpass, place, and set aside all past [philosophical] theory without oneself theorizing.« He thought he could replace explicit theory by poetic »'hints and gestures'« (Heidegger's own characterization) »distinct from the 'signs and chiffres' of metaphysics.«²³ But he failed, because he failed to see

²⁰ Rorty, »Self-creation and Affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger,« p. 113.

²¹ Rorty, »Self-creation and Affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger,« pp. 107, 118.

²² Rorty, »Self-creation and Affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger,« p. 112. The line is from Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), §44 (p. 262).

²³ Rorty, »Self-creation and Affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger,« pp. 112, 115.

that the right form of aestheticization required abandoning even that higher metaphysics, opting more frankly for literature and »conversation.« In short, Rorty suggests, Heidegger was really an »ironist« in Rorty's own sense but simply failed to recognize the fact.

This is a remarkable claim on Rorty's part, given the importance of the line from *Being and Time*. Heidegger had explicitly warned – in the very same passage – that »we must avoid uninhibited word-mysticism«; and, in offering this »definition« of »truth« and the associated account of »Being« and »the logos,« he adds that »we have not *shaken off* the tradition, but we have appropriated it *primordially*.«²⁴ I should say that this was not (yet) an aestheticization, in Heidegger's mind, but it surely counts as an anticipation of his eventual replacement of Nietzsche's version. But let that pass. It is closer to the truth to say that Rorty construes Heidegger and Dewey and Wittgenstein, his self-designated mentors, in ways congenial to his own variant of aestheticism, that is, closer to a liberal irony. On that reading, aestheticism is the *Geist* of history that brings Nietzsche home to bourgeois markets.

I cannot forebear, therefore, citing the following passage from Rorty's essay, »Private Irony and Liberal Hope,« because it may be the most succinct statement we are likely to find of Rorty's conception of what it is to aestheticize one's life, hence also a statement of his most focused reading of moral and political issues in the aestheticist manner; and because I very much doubt that you would believe a mere paraphrase that suggested that Rorty was playing out a liberal reading of Nietzsche's and Heidegger's very different aestheticisms. Well, see what you make of this:

We ironists treat these people [Hegel, Heine, Kierkegaard, Blake, Freud, D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Nietzsche, Proust, Lionel Trilling] not as anonymous channels for truth but as abbreviations for a certain final vocabulary and for the sorts of beliefs and desires typical of its users We treat the names of such people as the names of the heroes of their own books. We do not bother to distinguish Swift from *indignatio*, Hegel from *Geist*, Nietzsche from Zarathustra, Marcel Proust from Marcel the Narrator, or Trilling from *The Liberal Imagination*. We do not care whether these writers managed to live up to their own self-images. What we want to know is whether to adopt those images – to re-create ourselves, in whole or in part, in these people's image. We go about answering this question by experimenting with the vocabularies which these people concocted. We redescribe ourselves, our situation, our past, in those terms and compare the results with alternative redescriptions which are the vocabularies of alternative figures. We ironists hope, by this continual redescription, to make the best selves for ourselves that we can.²⁵

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 262.

There is a danger here – which I would not willingly accuse Rorty of neglecting. Nevertheless, the plainly intended congruity between his own words and his ironist interpretation of Heidegger's words about »elementary words,« cited just above, raises the question how, if »theory« is to be altogether abandoned, should we ever be able to justify the exposé of Heidegger himself, or Paul de Man for that matter, who (in another sense of »irony«) insisted on an inseparable linkage between metaphysics and poetry (against the evidence of his own life and against the view of Harold Bloom, whom Rorty follows here²⁶)?

What is it that keeps Rorty's aestheticism from yielding to self-congratulatory fictions that can now play themselves out – in a fantasy world of affluence at least – that has no real bearing on the constraints of the public world? Nothing that I can see.

Keep Rorty's words in view therefore:

We revise our own moral identity [he says] by revising our own final vocabulary. Literary criticism does for ironists what the search for universal moral principles is supposed to do for metaphysicians.

For us ironists, nothing can serve as a criticism of a final vocabulary [remember Heidegger!] save another such vocabulary; there is no answer to a redescription save a re-re-redescription. Since there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serves as a criterion of choice between them, criticism is a matter of looking on this picture and on that, not of comparing both pictures with the original.²⁷

The proper, perfectly simple answer to all this is, of course: although there are no final vocabularies, every vocabulary harbors a discipline of responsibility. »Final« must mean – for Rorty – »arbitrary,« free of all responsibility, aestheticized. But if that is the tail-end of aestheticism, as I'm afraid it is, then let's have an end of it. Rorty could not be more explicit: »irony is of little public use Ironists should reconcile themselves to a private-public split within their final vocabularies, to the fact that resolution of doubts about one's final vocabulary has nothing in particular to do with attempts to save other people from pain and humiliation.«²⁸ Rorty has made commodities out of Nietzsche and Heidegger; he is also of course entirely comfortable with hawking his own private ironism. But we ourselves are caught between the honest recognition of endlessly varied forms of viable

²⁵ See Richard Rorty, »Private Irony and Liberal Hope,« *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pp. 79-80.

²⁶ See Richard Rorty, »The Contingency of Selfhood,« *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 25nn2-3.

²⁷ Rorty, »Private Irony and Liberal Hope,« p. 80.

²⁸ Rorty, »Self-creation and Affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger,« p. 120.

life and the impossibility of accepting every alternative to our own. How can aestheticizing alter that?

Hardly anyone whom Rorty admires or takes to be his mentor – certainly not Heidegger or Dewey or Wittgenstein – had the least temptation to accept anything like a »private-public split.« Perhaps one finds it in Proust or Nabokov, but almost nowhere else: certainly *not* in Derrida or Foucault or de Man or Bloom for instance. The *private*, in any pertinent »ethical« sense, is a »space« set aside for public reasons, not a disjoint sector of life in which a »final« vocabulary separated from whatever holds in the public sector rightly (perhaps arbitrarily) obtains. Whatever else is true, the disjunction demands a defense, but the idea is finally incoherent. For if art is, as it is, part of a public culture, then Rorty's »private« self-discipline is little more than a pose that has nothing to do with defensible distinctions of any sort.

No. The final truth about aestheticism, or the aestheticization of everyday life, is simply that, if it has a message, it is a message of cultural generosity or a democracy of ideas (if saying that will not mislead you), perhaps a reminder of neglected or marginalized resources. I am not as sanguine for instance as Richard Shusterman about the possibilities of an aestheticism of rap, but I see no reason to exclude it.²⁹ I also grant the point, therefore, of Wolfgang Iser's tempered plea for extending our aesthetic concerns beyond art and traditional aesthetics to encompass the whole span of experience. But if you follow its logic, you see that it views the »aesthetic« as a way of defining the entire possible field of inquiry rather than as a criterion for assessing any elements that may be found in it.³⁰ Iser follows Adorno more than Schiller here, that is, in endorsing our transcending the aesthetic by finding the aesthetic in the whole of global experience and reality rather than in training up our sensibility and reason to a new unheard-of height.³¹ The theme strikes me as conceptually therapeutic rather than as politically corrective – perhaps also, then, at least distantly Nietzschean. If so, then I find the same idea very widely favored and present in many guises.³² I have no quarrel with it.

Also, then, aesthetic »self-enrichment and »perfection,« whether in Rorty's subversively democratic sense or in Shusterman's more optimistic

²⁹ See Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, Ch. 8, and Shusterman's generally congenial summary, in Ch. 9, of what he takes to be the lesson of aestheticization.

³⁰ See Wolfgang Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics*, trans. Andrew Inkpin (London: Sage, 1997), Ch. 4.

³¹ Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics*, pp. 65-71.

³² For example, I find it in F. R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), particularly pp. 16-18. Ankersmit expressly prefers Machiavelli to Schiller here.

sense, strikes me as as difficult to refuse as apple pie (whether eaten in secrecy or at the dinner table). Both are versions of a form of consumerism that either refuses to spell out, or sees no need to spell out, how ethical matters might be affected by admitting aestheticism's concerns. I am as willing as the next philosopher to reject, for reasons, the standard forms of »modernist« philosophies, extending to ethics and politics. But I cannot see how, apart from a plea for cultural openness, the doctrine of the »aesthetic life« cuts any ethical ice at all: how or why, in particular, »aesthetic considerations are or should be,« as Shusterman insists, »crucial and ultimately perhaps paramount in determining how we choose to lead or shape our lives and how we assess what a good life is.«

I'm afraid I don't really see how that actually »fleshes out Wittgenstein's ambiguous but well-known dictum that ethics and aesthetics are one by erecting the aesthetic as the proper ethical ideal, the preferred model and criterion of assessment for the good life.«³³ Wittgenstein, you remember, explicitly meant his proposition to apply to the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. That is of course precisely *not* what either Rorty or Shusterman have in mind. But, beyond that, *if*, on the supposed argument, the aesthetic *should be* the »model and criterion« of the good life, then we have a right to ask what the distinction had formerly been between the aesthetic and the ethical and how it would now be improved; and that would surely bring us back to the age-old questions that were to have been superseded. Lacking such a rationale, I cannot see how to escape the judgment that, now, at the end of the century, the aestheticization of everyday life can be anything but philosophical opportunism or anarchical or democratic consumerism. But, if so, I must admit that neither of these two pies suits me as well as apple pie.

IV

There's much more to the matter than can be discerned by laying out all the odd twists and turns of seeming theory along the lines collected. I have no doubt that a good deal of the aestheticizing issue is entirely straightforward. But it is also an eccentric form of political statement and, in some instances, for instance those involving Heidegger and Rorty, it is very difficult not to suppose that the aestheticizing formula may be interpreted

³³ Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, p. 237. The reference to Wittgenstein is to proposition 6.421 of the *Tractatus*, which makes an appearance in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, ed. B. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), p. 83e (7.10.16).

as a kind of Aesopian pronouncement. Quite frankly, in our own time, the aestheticizing issue is not unlike the dispute between modernism and postmodernism, that is, more a symptom of a deflected worry or concern than a legible dispute that is explicitly what it appears to be on its face.

The aestheticizing issue seems to have congealed in two principal ways: one, by opportunistically reversing Nietzsche's thesis about the meaninglessness of the meaning of life; the other, by opportunistically distorting Kant's intuition (in the Third *Critique*), that is, that the aesthetic may promote and enrich the realization of our moral concerns, now, however, by disorganizing the hitherto valid distinction between the two. If you listen closely to all the principal voices already collected, you cannot fail to find that, despite enormous differences, Jünger, Heidegger, Nehamas, and Rorty propose quite arbitrary, idiosyncratic, surprisingly upbeat visions of life as art, whether proto-fascist or extreme laissez-faire liberal, that gymnastically convert Nietzsche's utter contempt for self-congratulatory moralities into newer forms of self-congratulation. The pronouncements of these worthies are noticeably unconstrained by any would-be schema of objective assessment. That is the source of their charm: evidently we are blessed, as Jünger and Heidegger suppose, with high revelations that eclipse the merely mundane choices of the bourgeois world or, as Nehamas and Rorty suppose, we are entitled to affirm straightforwardly the autonomous near-anarchy of the private lives we choose to pursue. In either case, there are no independent legitimative constraints to invoke – beyond our *dicta*: that is, reading Nietzsche as seer or postmodernist, athletically or indulgently. It's in this sense that I take »aestheticizing« to be a political statement that either accuses capitalism and communism of moral exhaustion or exploits the advantages of affluent privacy within the capitalist protectorate.

Rorty is perhaps the most inventive of the »post-Nietzschean« and »post-Kantian« champions of aestheticizing, for Rorty manages to join Heidegger and Dewey in the liberal and democratic spirit he calls »irony.«³⁴ The Kantian thread is far less explicit than the Nietzschean; it is in any case mediated, in the liberal-democratic spirit, by theorists such as Schiller and Adorno, as may be seen in the analyses and generous proposals offered by Shusterman and Welsch. Here, benignly, conceptual arbitrariness appears as the affirmation of political equality and inclusiveness: rap music and environmental concerns, for instance, testify to the eclipse of elitist values. In a perfectly obvious sense, the liberal cast of postmodernism draws strength from Dewey's *Art and Experience*, which, in effect, is a democratized cousin of Schiller's vision of aesthetic education.

³⁴ See Rorty, »Private Irony and Liberal Hope.«

Dewey, however, is no postmodernist. Nor is Adorno, of course. Both, in different ways, mean to preserve the relevance of continuing to link the moral and the aesthetic, all the while subverting the strong compartmentalization of objective (or at least universalized) judgment, according to Kant. The demarcation between the moral and the aesthetic dissolves in Dewey and Adorno, but neither denies the prospects of objective practical judgment. The subversive possibilities appear most saliently in Nietzsche, of course, running from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *The Gay Science* to *The Will to Power*. Nietzsche's theme collects the artifactual, even self-deceptive (life-enhancing) nature of moral and aesthetic concerns. In Jünger and Heidegger, it turns imperiously prophetic and destinal; in Adorno and Dewey, it turns egalitarian, perhaps more critically in Adorno than in Dewey (though one must remember Adorno's misreading of jazz). In Nehamas and Shusterman and Welsch, it becomes benignly tolerant: Proustian, in Nehamas, not yet democratic; almost Whitmanesque, in Shusterman and Welsch.

In Rorty, the democratic theme takes a distinctly postmodernist turn – which, politically, means that it veers off in a conserving, if not conservative, direction in the name of an unspecified »patriotism« said to be more of the Left than of the Right.³⁵ That may even go some distance toward explaining Rorty's yoking Heidegger and Wittgenstein and Dewey, no one of whom is a proper postmodernist, in the name of aestheticizing life; in fact, each opposes anything like a Kantian rationale of practical judgment. I suspect that Rorty is genuinely postmodernist and the most prophetic of this company: he has a »philosophical« conviction of how to go on and has indeed prepared the ground for a liberalized – perhaps, better, a democratized – analogue (if you can imagine it) of Heidegger's *Volk* vision, now no longer ironic but merely patriotic.³⁶

This helps to mark the slim sense in which the aestheticization of ordinary life is instinctively meant to reorient our political sensibilities. Postmodernism seems to relieve us of the need for legitimation; we yield in

³⁵ See Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). See, particularly, »The Inspirational Work of Great Works of Literature.«

³⁶ Rorty actually invokes Hölderlin's inspirational role in a way that suggests that the democratically minded might use Hölderlin as well as Heidegger at his most benignly fascist moments: see *Achieving Our Country*, pp. 139-140. But that is of course the crazy quilt consequence of Rorty's separating »hope« from »understanding«; see pp. 11, 13, 30-31. See also, for a sense of the Soviet analogue of Nazi aestheticization, Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

the direction of our habituated impulses and are pleased to know that acting thus is self-certifying (revealed or privately autonomous) or simply no longer in need of the would-be objective scruple of the philosophically naive past. But that is a delusion – a dangerous oversimplification – that cannot be satisfactorily opposed by any linking of the moral and the aesthetic that does not recognize that legitimation cannot be more than (but is at least) a constructed projection from our own society's practices.

The aestheticizing theme is ultimately a piece of political opportunism that senses that we find ourselves, at the present time, somewhere between the repudiation of moral and political privilege and the bewilderment of skepticism and conceptual anarchy. What we face is the recovery of critical judgment under the condition of changing history – in effect, the restoration of a problem that had already dawned nearly two hundred years ago. Either aestheticizing bids us abandon the need for legitimation by way of refocusing the public impulses of the »people« (whether in Heidegger's way or Rorty's) or assures us without argument that the aestheticizing impulse is reliably generous in the best democratic sense (as with Shusterman and Welsch). I find myself unwilling to trust either tendency and believe, rather, that if there is a disciplined debate that may be mounted, we will find that we have reclaimed the question of moral or ethical direction (however altered from the Kantian reading), which would mean outflanking both the revelatory and the postmodernist options once again – without falling back to modernist assurances.

Lev Kreft
History and Everyday Life

In times of modernism, one of the most accentuated, used and abused possible functions of art was its ability to produce meaning, give sense and promote social values. In a way, since art has been functionalized before modernism to give the metaphysical world some perceptive existence for a religious purpose, in modern times art was expected to produce persuasive and mobilising images of the historical dimension of unending progress, emancipation and hope. This led to some of the divisions that were presumably overcome by the post-modern approach, such as the division between art in mass culture and art as an expression of truth, or the distinction between high elitist art and low popular art. Some philosophers specifically stressed the difference between the art which has become lost in the already existing reality, and the art which opens new perspectives of advancing human progress.¹ Kant introduced in his third *Critique* the difference between human happiness and human culture as the two ends (*causa finalis*) of nature, with this distinction being useful for art as well. We may also conclude that in modernism human happiness was associated with everyday life as its *Lust*, while human culture depends on higher and sublime processes of history as its driving force and enthusiasm. This feature of the distinctive and opposed qualities of history and everyday life was acknowledged by those artists who subdued their art to history, and therefore proclaimed that love, even in its non-romantic avant-garde image, and lyricism as such, have to be abandoned for the sake of the art of revolutionary enthusiasm. The case of Mayakovsky and his poetic expression of this necessary shift is well known. If we envisage this feature from the side of the public, we should also remember that Lenin said that during revolution, in his occasional and rare spare time, he could not allow himself to enjoy the

¹ Besides the well-known case of Adorno and his insistence on truth as an essential characteristic of art, there is also Marcuse who wrote in 1977: »The *nomos* which art obeys is not that of the established reality principle, but of its negation. But mere negation would be abstract, the 'bad' utopia. The utopia in great art is never the simple negation of the reality principle, but its transcending preservation (*Aufhebung*) in which past and present cast their shadow on fulfilment. The authentic utopia is grounded in recollection.« (Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension. Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Beacon Press, Boston 1978, p. 73.)

better part of his artistic favourites because their works made him too soft for making the revolution.

For a long period of time it was believed that the business of the artist and art is to promote history, and that all the other dimensions of art are of lower importance and value. In the history of painting we can find a typical example of such a view. I have in mind Leon Battista Alberti who believed that he invented the correct way of representing Nature. As Cecil Grayson characterised the aim of this through the window of representational »realism«: »It does not follow from this methodological realism that the spectator should see a scene of 'real life'. The ideal Albertian painting will have as its subject what he calls a 'historia', inspired most probably by the reading of literature...«² Here, 'historia' is still more or less a story, and what is new is Alberti's »insistence on the 'historia' as *the* object of painting, and on the choice of the subject, its organisation and execution, as the greatest achievement of the artist.«³ 'Historia' is still not a History, but it became that later, after the famous conferences of the French Royal Academy,⁴ and reached its apogee in David's paintings of the French revolution and Napoleon. Still, in his praise of the painting, in what was at the time the well-known literary fashion of *lauda*, Alberti already knows that the skill of painting history has something to do with the divine power which elevates objects, actions and persons from everyday life to eternity. This dimension is shown at its best at the end of his essay: »This is all I had to say about painting in this book. If it is such as to be of some use and convenience to painters, I would especially ask them as a reward for my labours to paint my portrait in their 'historiae', and thereby proclaim to posterity that I was a student of this art and that they are mindful of and grateful for this favour.«⁵ The difference between history and everyday life is not a property or nature of objects, events or persons. It is the difference of importance and praise we attribute to them, and the actually used gesture of attribution could be that of artistic touch.

Dissatisfactions with the outcome of historical processes, especially with

² Cecil Grayson: »Introduction to *The Art of Painting*«, in: Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, Ed. by Cecil Grayson, Phaidon, London 1972, p. 13.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁴ The development of historical painting with all the necessary texts from this process is well shown in a recent and still unfinished presentation of history of different *genres in painting*, where historical *genre* is presented in its first *volume* (*Eine Geschichte der klassischen Bilggattungen*, Vol. 1, *Historienmalerei*, Eds. Thomas W. Gaethgens and Uwe Flechner, Reiner, Berlin 1990).

⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, Phaidon, London 1972, pp. 105-107.

the results of revolutionary changes which afterward appeared as great expectations betrayed and great illusions lost,⁶ brought to the surface new visions of the historical function of art, one of these also being to invade, occupy and colonise everyday life as a decisive terrain for the victory of beauty over the ugliness of industrial production and urbanisation, and for uncovering the aesthetic dimension of meaning, sense and hope. This did not mean that everyday life had been adopted, recognised and inaugurated as such. It was promoted instead as a decisive battlefield for historical goals and ends. Art accepted this arena of combat, sharing a belief that the historical change, redemption and salvation have to begin and be won here and not on the grandiose historical scenes. This tendency is especially present in artistic movements from the end of the 19th century on, with *aestheticism* and *avant-garde* being their typical representatives. The difference between the usual aestheticization projects such as those found in John Ruskin, William Morris or our Jo_e PleÖnik, and *avant-garde* programmes which critically followed them, was the *avant-garde* idea that Art as a modernist institution had to be destroyed, its idea of beauty abandoned, and its usual manner of dealing with history and everyday life overthrown before it could help to create new conditions of everyday life. These supposedly new conditions include (a) new universal languages that only art can bring to life; (b) the subjugation of art to modern technical means, industrial discipline and useful purposes as its new criteria instead of old larpourlartistic and aestheticist criteria; (c) revolutionary propaganda as the main task of artistic engagement, together with such trivial, but nevertheless difficult civilisational steps as learning how to use a toothbrush; (d) the opening of new spiritual dimensions on the way of humankind to attain perfection, etc. Then, as in later period of the 20th century, everyday life became an important category and field of research in philosophy (Husserl, Heidegger, Lefebvre, Heller

⁶ Again, Jacques-Louis David is the best example of both enthusiasm and its aftermath. He was a radical follower of Jacobinism and an enthusiastic admirer of Robespierre, and exclaimed on July 26, 1794, a moment before the fall of Jacobins to Robespierre who threatened the Convention that he would commit suicide if he did not succeed in his historical mission: »If you drink hemlock I will drink it with you!« The next day, David escaped from Paris and thus escaped certain death as one of the most exposed supporters of a totalitarian regime (as we would characterise it today). In May 1795, when accused of having been a follower of Robespierre's bloody dictatorship, he replied: »Since this period, which has opened my eyes, I have maintained a reserve and circumspection in my conduct to the point of timidity. Learning from a harrowing experience to mistrust the appearances of patriotism, freedom, and good faith, I have broken every connection with the men whose company I kept before my detention.« (Both quoted in: Warren Roberts, *Jacques-Louis David. Revolutionary Artist*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London 1989, p. 94).

and others), sociology (Schütz, Berger, Luckmann, Garfinkel, Goffman, Cicourel and others), history (especially in the French Nouvelle Histoire school and its analyses of the history of everyday life), psychology (beginning with Freud's famous *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagsleben* from 1901) and other disciplines of *studia humanitatis*.⁷

Post-modern conditions, with all their ambiguity, were claimed to be the end of all such historical and artistic projects, beginning with Daniel Bell's proclamation of the end of ideology to Fukuyama's statement that history has come to an end. In philosophical discussions late Lyotard's announcement of the end of great narratives has been used and abused quite frequently. Those who embrace with delight such final conclusions about history and its expired licence, and speak about post-modern conditions in terms of emancipation of art from servitude and of liberation of everyday life from ideology, historical demands and political burdens, are often accused and confronted as reactionaries, commercialised thinkers and intellectuals without an ethical dimension. Still, attempts to introduce public engagement and historical pathos in contemporary art, as in the Kassel *Documenta 8* by Schneckenburger in 1987, were usually not successful, lacked the sublime power of former works and initiated conflicts arising from misunderstandings.⁸

In socialist countries the reception of post-modern issues took place under social conditions of totalitarianism in its last breath. As the dimension of history and of everyday life colonised by history was the battlefield of emancipation, quite a number of artistic means and techniques developed which dealt with the desanctification of history and decolonisation of everyday life. Their origins were in avant-garde art, although not in the part which embraced political revolution and communism, as the already-mentioned

⁷ For a good review of the contemporary meanings of »everyday life« as a theoretical category in the humanities, cf. Mirjana Nastran Ule, *Psychology of Everyday Life (Psihologija vsakdanjega življenja)* (ZPS, Ljubljana 1993).

⁸ In an interview for *Documenta Press* No. 4 (August 1987) Schneckenburger stated: »Strong reactions ('shameless theatricality') were caused by Robert Morris's work of art. A general mood of the end of the world was stated, also concerning Merz and, in any case, Beuys. There were critics who sarcastically spoke of a 'funeral – parody'. Is the necromancy intended? – Manfred Schneckenburger: I have nothing against sarcasm. Concerning Morris, most critics make it too easy for themselves. His pictures are manifestoes of the return of arts to the discourse of the extreme burdens and traumata of our past, anticipating an apocalyptic future. When today artists cease seeing linear patterns of development, but merely a coinciding of beginning and end, then it is here that the best philosophical brains are meeting. Foucault predicts the fall of mankind, and read up on the controversies, starting with Günther Anders or André Glucksmann! Who mentions necromancy, in spite of the so complex and subtle vision by Beuys, can't be in their right mind.«

Mayakovsky, as well as productivists, proletkultists and some others did. Instead, they promoted cosmic anarchism which put revolutionary change on a symbolic and spiritual level and not on the level of material and organisational revolution. Totalitarian art and ideology were exposed and abused without direct confrontations, but by using their methods and imagery in a manipulative way. This kind of art did not offer any immediate parodical sense. Its battle for the unoppressed aesthetic dimension avoided language and forms of direct combat for or against progress in art, as counter-revolutionary art or radical art did before. Russian formalists and Bakhtin understood parody as a struggle between new and old discourse, and saw in parody a means of progress in artistic language. What they did not have in mind was the kind of artistic practice which often allows for ambiguity and speculations.⁹ Other origins of this kind of critical art of the eighties were in *witz*, which is more than just a joke, especially under authoritarian or totalitarian rule when sometimes it is the only means of short and victorious emancipation of everyday life from much bigger and insurmountable forces of history.¹⁰

Witz is a rather different means of struggle for everyday life and against its occupation by history, as parody is, for parody is based on a struggle between the old surpassed language and a new progressive one which eliminates it from discourse. *Witz*, on the contrary, confronts the ruling

⁹ Such speculations occurred in the case of the imagery and methods of the Neue Slowenische Kunst group from Slovenia, for example, where it was not (and for some is not even now) clear what their attitude was to totalitarianism in its fascist, Nazi and communist forms. They themselves proclaimed totalitarian artistic manipulation as the principle which enables art to free itself from totalitarian politics which manipulate art. Their signs taken from Malevich were seen as Nazi signs, as in the case of Malevich's black cross, which was referred to by politicians, the police and the general public as a Nazi swastika.

¹⁰ That *witz* can become a work of art is well known, but proven also by Jaroslav Hašek and his influential and eternal *The Brave Soldier Švejk*. Jokes and anecdotes of the really existing socialism often show their ability to diagnose and not only to alleviate the personal burden, like in those two which explain the basic methods of Leninism in terms of the revolutionary suppression of lust. The first relates that Lenin always had a wife and a mistress, so that the wife thought that he is with his mistress, and the mistress believed him to be with the wife, while he was then free to study, study and study. The second tells of a painting at an annual exhibition on the theme of Lenin's life, sponsored by the great Stalin. There was a painting entitled 'Lenin in Smolni', and Stalin said: »This is very good, I remember seeing him there!« There was another one called 'The Young Lenin', and Stalin said: »It shows how high can a man come if he follows the Party!« But there was also one called 'Lenin in Warsaw', and Stalin said: »I can see Krupska in bed, and a young gardiste with her, but where is Lenin?« »Well, in Warsaw, of course.«

ideology on its own terms with laughter, but does not introduce new or more progressive discourse. The strategy of *witz* is also linked with the confrontation of the sublime, and grandeur with banality and triviality, thus employing images of history and everyday life intertwined in a surprisingly short embrace during which basic properties slide from one side to the other, with history perceived as something banal, trivial and a part of a ritual turned into an empty routine, with everyday life as something profound, meaningful, liberating and sublime.

In the 20th century art had to cope with history and everyday life more than ever before, and invented or repeated more strategies and tactics than ever before. It marched into battles under all possible banners; it escaped from the battlefield with all possible or impossible excuses; it shared and instigated enthusiasm and fanaticism alike, condemning them just a moment after, like *omne animal triste*, it helped to produce an historical meaning successfully or as an obvious failure.¹¹ At the end of a century it announced the final armistice. History became just one of the possible topics, everyday life became just one of the valuable perspectives of reality, while reality together with history and everyday life went through processes of total, global and universal aestheticization and, at the same time, through a process which denied reality its privileged and certain status of measure for other dimensions of possible and impossible worlds.¹² It appears that the expression »virtual« reality is just an unnecessary complication, for all possible realities are more or less virtual, with the exclusion of the utopian reality as the only one completely banned from the group of possible realities, and from poetically interesting worlds as well.

¹¹ As the career of David is typical for historical art from the times of revolution, Picasso's tries to bring it into life again and is typical for 20th century. While his *Guernica* really made history and produced history, his *Korean War* represents a false and empty self-mannerism.

¹² Referring to Leibniz's philosophy of possible worlds, I have in mind especially Baumgarten's aesthetical explanation of the artistic use of utopian and heterocosmic worlds. First, it is important to note that in his view the artist is »*quasi factor sive creator*« and the artwork »*quasi mundus*«, which means that art can be of help in preparing the second birth of the human being, his first birth as *imago Dei* is physical, and his second spiritual (§ LXVIII). In this *quasi mundus* we find fictions, i.e. fictitious entities and their represented objects that are possible or impossible in the existing world, which transforms them into real fictions, and fictions alone. Those fictions which are impossible just in the really existing world are heterocosmical, while those impossible in all possible worlds, the real world included, are utopian; heterocosmical fictions are poetic, while utopian ones are unsuitable for any kind of representing, and cannot be poetic (§ LI). Cf. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, bilingual Latin and Serbo-Croatian edition, ed. by Milan Damjanović, BIGZ, Belgrade 1985, pp. 56-57 & 40-41.

How can an aesthetician as a philosopher determine whether such a framework of art's ideology is the final stage and outcome of a story of history and everyday life in art, and of art as the maker of history and everyday life? It may be that it is a final stage, as in the aestheticization of everyday life which, contrary to all expectations, lacks any higher and sublime meaning and follows no end. It may be that it is a final stage as in a revolution of everyday life which did not produce new and advanced human beings, and is, on the contrary, suspected to be party to totalitarian atrocities. These questions are similar to those treated by Augustine in his four books *On Christian Doctrine* about the interpretation of the Scripture, and introducing the difference between things and signs.¹³ His explanation of what signs are is connected with his idea of history and its meaning, namely, of history as what actually happened (*res gestae*) and of history as a sign for what we can hope for. His problem in *De civitate Dei* we can formulate as: »Is History a kind of Scripture?« An affirmative answer would mean that we can see through the historical process into the essence of things. We might ask ourselves in a similar way: »Does art today show any signs of an epochal meaning, be it in history and/or in everyday life?« Following the example of Augustine, this does not mean that we ask for the moments when History makes its great steps towards liberation and emancipation. Such steps were announced recently as fulfilments of national dreams. We cannot do this, even if we would wish to, because there is no great national art preceding, presenting or following these events, as there had been in the 19th century, and there is no Great Art of History any more, not even of such a fake kind as in the times of Gerassimov.¹⁴ We are also not interested in the art of everyday life which follows the paths of aestheticization or avant-garde revolution. Even if we would wish to do so, the means for these effects, if they could still be possible (and mostly it is said that they cannot be achieved any more), would not be typically artistic. Everyday life is today colonised by cultural products which cannot be differentiated into artistic and non-

¹³ »All instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learnt by means of signs. [...] No one uses words except as signs of something else; and hence it may be understood what I call signs: those things, to wit, which are used to indicate something else... For to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake.« (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2 D Augustine: *City of God, Christian Doctrine*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody 1994, p. 523.)

¹⁴ In reality there were even two Gerassimovs, Alexander and Sergei, constantly praised for their skill of making Lenin's and Stalin's portraits, other scenes from the historical victory of humankind, and scenes from everyday life of the new species called the new Soviet human, the most collective animal of all.

artistic ones, the consequences being that there is no art of everyday life which could be anything more than merely culture.¹⁵

Following Augustine's example from *The City of God* we should examine the special moments in time when history stumbles, falls and collapses, while everyday life is in deep trouble as a result. These are times when historical decisions are reached on the level of everyday life and as a part of everyday life necessities, and when the anarchy of Great History reveals the profound and not at all banal or trivial dimensions of everyday life, for with the fall of History all ritual, habitual and other orderly patterns of the direction and decisions of everyday life lose their power. Such moments were the basis for Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of history, with the help of Péguy's differentiation between periods and epochs. Hence in *Humanism and Terror. An Essay on the Communist Problem* from 1947, he states: »For we too have lived through one of those moments where history is suspended and institutions that are threatened with extinction demand fundamental decisions from men, where the risk is total because their final outcome depends upon a conjuncture not entirely foreseeable. When the collaborator made his decision in 1940 in terms of what he believed to be the inevitable future (we assume he was disinterested) he conflicted with those who did not believe in this future nor wanted it and thereafter between them and him it was a matter of force. When one is living in what Péguy called an historical period, in which political man is content to administer a regime or an established law, one can hope for a history without violence. When one has the misfortune or the luck to live in an epoch, or one of those moments where the traditional ground of a nation or society crumbles and where, for better or worse, man himself must reconstruct human relations, then the liberty of each man is mortal threat to the others and violence reappears.«¹⁶ It is a special feature of our times that one part of the world lives in a period, while the other lives more and more in an epoch, and what was a history of socialist redemption before is now just a struggle to enter from the realm of an epoch into the realm of a simple period.

The fall of Rome in 410, which indirectly inspired Augustine to write his *City of God*, and the fall of the Berlin Wall together with the Soviet empire crumbling and Yugoslavia falling into ruins, may be a far-fetched comparison. Still, we may ask how can art articulate such moments when there is really not ascertained, ready and offered meaning, purpose or end, and how can

¹⁵ Marcuse would most certainly use the expression »one-dimensional« for such a situation of art in everyday life.

¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, Beacon Press, Boston 1969, pp. xvi-xvii.

it manage to produce a meaning, a purpose or an end from its own aesthetic power?

From the historical example of the fall of Rome, we know that it can accomplish this. Besides Augustine's answer, which is well known, it is important to mention that a spiritual and artistic answer was ready even before the fate of Rome was accomplished, by the so-called turn of eyes from the visible to the invisible world.¹⁷

Has the Fall of the Berlin Wall been artistically depicted as a great historical event? Were enthusiastic images of victory over the totalitarian rule organised in epic spectacles? And how was the great liberation and emancipation of everyday life presented? It has all been done in the media, in culture, and not by art. The artistic preparation for the fall has been very involved and important, and now we hear deploring voices from everywhere that art is not on the historical level any more. Evidently, because history has come to an end this does not demonstrate that history has any end (*causa finalis*) at all.

What we can find in art today are signs showing that the interplay between history and everyday life forced individuals to get into trouble, to feel despair and to commit violent atrocities or subject themselves to violence of a transition from a period to an epoch, and from an epoch (sometimes unsuccessfully!) back to a period, i.e. normal life. In post-communist art there is sometimes (through the fall of History and through the problems of everyday life, with the aid of very special artistic strategies and tactics which may produce meaning, sense and purpose even today) a window opening onto transcendent and metaphysical *heterocosmic* worlds, and the world on the other side of this opening becomes accessible for a moment D not from the viewpoint of history, but just from the perspective of everyday life.

¹⁷ In philosophy, this turn has been developed by Tertullian who not only condemned Roman spectacles and wrote rules for the everyday life of a Christian, but concluded his book on the spectacles that the best ones are those which were never seen by any eye, heard by any ear, and do not even live outside the human hearts D those of the struggle between faith and non-faith, those of the final judgement, and others which may be seen only if we turn our eyes inward. (Tertullien, *Les spectacles*, a Latin D French edition, ed. by Marie Turcan, Les Éditions du CERF, Paris 1986, pp. 216-329.) Martin Jay acknowledges this phenomenon as »the visionary tradition D based in part on a theatricalized interpretation of the injunction to imitate God (*imitatio Dei*) and in part on the neo-Platonic search for the colourless »white ecstasy« of divine illumination and finds its repeating tendency in the waning of the Enlightenment's reliance on sight, as »the revival of a neo-Platonic desire for an ideal beauty that could not be perceived with the normal eyes of mundane observation,« while the »third eye« of inspired revelation could still arouse enthusiasm (Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, pp. 39-40 and 106-108.)

A good illustration of this thesis is the Czech film »Kolya«, but we could mention what has now already become a *genre*, i.e. the films concerning the tragedy of the former Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars of today, such as *Underground*, *After Rain*, and even *Nice Villages Burn Nicely*. I stress »Kolya« because it is a summary of all countercultural strategies of the Czech cinema developed from the sixties on. At the same time, it resolutely opens this metaphysical dimension accessible through everyday life experiences, using methods and techniques which enable us to »see through« history and everyday life, and to turn our eyes inward, bringing a metaphysical and an ethical dimension to the surface in times and conditions which are most unfriendly to such an endeavour. Both ways help us to sense the higher meaning and purpose which emerges even in times of the Fall of History and the Chaos of Everyday Life, perhaps even as a last resort on which we may rely upon.

At the time of the fall of history and the collapse of everyday life routine, art grasps its object differently. This difference is similar to the difference between nakedness and nudity.¹⁸ While in modernism history and everyday life were nude, i.e. on display, under post-modern conditions they are just there, without any special reason for display. It is politically incorrect to display history and everyday life objects inspiring enthusiasm, as it is politically incorrect to display naked bodies as objects inspiring lust and still call this art. In post-communist post-modern conditions, with their manifold and multiple transition from a period to an epoch and vice versa, some artworks show successfully how history and everyday life can be shown in their nakedness, forced to reveal themselves, and by doing so open a window to a tiny, delicate and definitely heterocosmic room of meaning, purpose and end which does not serve historical enthusiasm or everyday lust, but transcends both by a force of aesthetic vision.

In post-modern conditions of post-communism, who could ask for more?

¹⁸ The now already classical text on this difference is John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* based on the BBC television series and published by BBC and Penguin Books first in 1972: »To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.« (P. 54 in the 1981 edition.)

Wolfgang Welsch
Sport – Viewed Aesthetically, and Even as Art?

Introductory Remarks

1. Contemporary sport: Just aestheticization, or even the status of art?

„Aestheticization“ – the topic of this symposium – is a complex issue. It requires, above all, differentiation and a close look at the phenomena concerned – instead of rushing to wholesale judgments. Having written broadly about the issue in recent years,¹ I thought it appropriate to present a case study here. I chose sport – contemporary sport, because it obviously represents a striking example of today's aestheticization of the everyday. My intention was to analyze the aestheticized constitution of postmodern sport.

However, when I talked my ideas over with a friend, she asked: Why don't you go further and consider sport to be art? My immediate response was negative. Intuitively it seems clear that sport isn't art. Most people would agree with the idea that contemporary sport is highly aesthetic; but very few – if any – would say that sport is art.

But when I started arguing against sport's potential art status, I found myself – to my surprise – in ongoing trouble. For every argument which came to my mind, I found a better counter-argument. Step by step the conventional arguments turned out to be unconvincing and insufficient. Instead I got more and more convinced that sport can, for very good reasons, be viewed as art. The following considerations are a report and result of these reflections.

My hunch is that the modern transformations of the concept of art in particular allow sport's to be viewed as art, and no longer allow this to be denied. So, in the foreground, the following reflections are about sport, while in the background they pertain to the concept of art.

¹ Cf. in particular my »Aestheticization Processes: Phenomena, Distinctions and Prospects«, in: *Undoing Aesthetics* (London: Sage, 1997), 1-32.

*2. Phenomenal and conceptual transformations –
the possibility and admissability of novel categorizations*

Of course, if the structure and concept of sport, of the aesthetic, of art were invariant, then sport could not be viewed as art – except mistakenly. But then it could not even be considered as aesthetic. For traditionally – and for understandable reasons – it was not. It was considered to be more of an ethical enterprise, with the ethical being understood as being opposed to the aesthetic. So sport's shift to the aesthetic already demonstrates that we are not dealing with invariant structures here. Hence a further shift of sport to the artistic is not impossible in principle. Such an occurrence, however, would presuppose phenomenal as well as conceptual changes – with respect both to sport's constitution and the concept of art.

In the course of history it has often been the case that something originally not labelled as art later came to be considered as such and is in the meantime quite naturally viewed in this way. Artefacts – of occidental or other cultures – which were designed for ritual purposes were later designated as art. When you attend an auction of Indian art at Sotheby's none of these precious objects was originally meant to be art and yet they are quite naturally considered as such today. The concept of art is a flexible – and voracious – one.

So in order to answer fairly the question as to whether sport can be viewed as art, we have to take into account the flexibility of the concepts involved and to analyze whether phenomenal and conceptual changes might justify this claim. In the following I will try to argue for this claim. – A last remark beforehand: in my analysis I will focus on high level sport and take it as a phenomenon incorporating both the athletes' and the spectators' point of view.

I. Sport's Shift from Ethics to Aesthetics

1. Ethics as constituting the traditional framework of sport

Let me start by considering sport's contemporary shift from the ethical to the aesthetic. In earlier times, sport was praised as demonstrating and realizing the domination of the body by the mind and will. Sport was a kind of profane triumph of the metaphysical conception. Man was to be governed by mind and, to do this, had to subjugate the body's weakness and desires. Sport was to discipline the body and to make it fit to support the mind and its ends. In this sense Hegel praised the Greek Olympic games as being demonstrations of freedom in transforming the body into an »organ of the

spirit».² In modern times, sport was praised because of its benefits for self-control or for heightened productivity. The ideological formula read »Sport builds character«. But already in 1971 a sport study found no evidence at all for this claim and recommended »If you want to build character, try something else«.³ Today, faced by athletes like the basketball player Dennis Rodman – who, significantly enough, published a book entitled »Bad As I Wanna Be« – nobody can believe in sport's affinity with ethics any more.⁴

2. Shift to aesthetics

a. Well-known developments

Instead sport has developed striking new affinities with aesthetics. This is obvious from the new style of sport clothing (some athletes, like Carl Lewis, have in the meantime even become professional fashion designers), the increased attention to the aesthetic element in performance (even the alteration of rules today is often motivated by aesthetic considerations), through to the spectators' aesthetic delight – sport having become a show for the amusement of the entertainment society.

b. From the subjugation to the celebration of the body

The most revealing point, however, is the new relationship to the body. Previously, so long as the mind was to be the commanding master and the body the obedient slave, the triumph of an iron will over the body was praised; today nobody would employ this rhetoric any more. Sport has, on the contrary, turned into a celebration of the body.

Not only do we admire the female and male athletes' perfect bodies, the athletes themselves tend to exhibit them. After Linford Christie's victories didn't we always wait for the moment when he lowered his running suit to the waist, revealing his impressive shoulder, chest and stomach muscles? This dotted the i of his victory. And who could fail to have admired Merlene Ottey's grace and beauty – and therefore have regretted that she never won an Olympic gold medal? (But Gail Devers isn't bad either.)

But what is perhaps more important is the following: aesthetic perfection

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in: *Werke* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) vol. 12, 298.

³ Bruce C. Ogive and Thomas A. Tutko, »Sport: If You Want to Build Character, Try Something Else«, *Psychology Today*, October 1971, 61-63.

⁴ Dennis Rodman (with Tim Keown), *Bad As I Wanna Be* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1996).

is not incidental to sporting success, but intrinsic to it. What is decisive for the sporting success, is perfect performance. And it is this feature, above all, which is aesthetically appreciated in sport. We admire the elegance of a high-jumper clearing the bar or a runner's power towards the finish – and this is why we enjoy looking at these bodies during as well as after the event, in order, say, to understand better their achievements or to be surprised that the runner shows so little sign of exertion after having crossed the finish line. In this sense we, as spectators, are right to focus on the body; and athletes are right in seeking perfection of their body and in demonstrating this both when performing and when exhibiting it. In sport the aesthetic and the functional go hand in hand.

c. Parallels with the original project of aesthetics

The new emphasis on the body and sport's shift from the ethical to the aesthetic seems to me to be of great interest – also with respect to the professional aestheticians' reflections. For aesthetics, when first established as a philosophical discipline by Baumgarten, strove for an emancipation of the body and the senses. Of course, this intention was inscribed within an epistemological perspective: it was to improve our sensory capacity for cognition. But under this epistemological cover aesthetics obviously tended to free the body and the senses from old metaphysical constraints. And Baumgarten himself became increasingly aware of (or was increasingly prepared to point out) the far-reaching consequences of his project, which indeed aimed at a radical cultural change, with the body and the senses becoming just as important as intellect and reason.

However, the times, it seems, were not prepared for this. The subsequent transformation of aesthetics into a philosophy of the arts is an indication of this. It reversed the critical impulse of aesthetics, fell back on the metaphysical pattern, and once again declared our sensory capacities to be an organ of the spirit – this time drawing on purported evidence from the arts. Aesthetics became an enterprise of cultural discipline again, which instead of bringing to bear the rights of our sensory capacity, turned against sensory experience and widely made the »war against matter« its (declared or concealed) maxim.⁵

⁵ So Schiller, for instance, in his conception of what he paradoxically named an »aesthetic culture« (Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. R. Snell, Bristol: Thoemmes 1994, here 23rd Letter, 112), called sensory experience a »dreadful foe« which is to be »fought« against (ibid.); he praised the mechanical and fine artist for not hesitating »to do [...] violence« to matter (ibid., 4th Letter, 32), and declared »the real artistic secret of the master« to consist in »his annihilating the material by means of the form« (ibid., 22nd Letter, 106). Similarly, Hegel was to allow the sensory aspects in the work of art to appear only »as surface and semblance of the sensory« (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Ästhetik*, ed. Friedrich Bassenge, 2 vols, Frankfurt/

So what is occurring today in sport's emphasis on the body in a way reinstates the original – and subsequently lost – intention of aesthetics. Another attempt at the emancipation of the body is being made. Contemporary sport is, with respect to the body, clearly an emancipatory rather than a disciplinary enterprise. Foucault's perspective on modernity's disciplinary strategies might apply to modern sport, but it no longer does so to postmodern sport.

d. The erotic element

Today's uncovering of the erotic element in sport, in contrast to its traditional oppression, is another case in point. According to the traditional disciplinary model, sport was associated with asceticism.⁶ As sport was to serve to keep bodily desires in check, its inherent erotic connotations were to be kept quiet too. Today they are allowed to come to the fore. Contemporary sport is one of the spheres where the intrinsic relationship between the aesthetic and the erotic is allowed to manifest itself.

e. Sport and health

A further example for sport's shift from an ethical to an aesthetic perspective is health. For a long time sport was said to enhance health. This was understood as an ethical aim, because a healthy body would, on a metaphysical view, ideally serve our spiritual tasks and would, on a modern view, serve the fulfilment of our working duties and thus match the new ethics of economic efficiency.

But the gap between this ideology which connects sport with health and what's actually happening is more than obvious. Modern high performance

Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt n.d., vol. 1, 48), art bringing forth »from the sensory side, intentionally, only a shadow world of shapes, tones and intuitions« (ibid., 49).

⁶ We should not forget, however, that the English term 'sport' – in contrast, say, to the old Greek term 'gymnastics' – originally had a hedonistic meaning. The word 'sport' originated in the mid fourteenth century and, until the end of the seventeenth century, designated 'pleasant pastime', 'entertainment', 'amusement', 'recreation', 'diversion', 'taking one's own pleasure' (*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, ed. Lesley Brown, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, vol. 2, 2999). In the late sixteenth century, it even had the particular sense of 'lovmaking', designating sexual intercourse viewed as a game (ibid.). In Shakespeare's *Othello*, for example, Jago says when vilifying Desdemona that »the blood is made dull with the act of sport« (II,1,230). »Venus sport« was a common expression at that time. Only later did the concept of sport shift from pleasure to discipline. Nietzsche was, in this respect too, an exception, when he called »sexual love [...] a kind of sport« (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. Herbst 1885 bis Anfang 1889*, in: Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, eds Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, vol. 12, 482 [autumn 1887]).

sport is an enterprise which systematically produces young invalids. Take Marc Girardelli as an example, who with five overall World Cup wins was the most successful skier ever. In the course of his career he underwent knee surgery fourteen times. When he got up in the morning he had to exercise for half an hour in order to be able to walk in a straight line. Already at the height of his success he was officially acknowledged as a 30 percent invalid. Today no high ranking decathlete can realistically hope ever to be completely free of injury when going into a competition and the injury rate of soccer players is known to everyone. High performance sport and health simply don't go together.⁷

But now, it seems, I'm in trouble. Doesn't this tendency to produce invalids contradict my thesis that today's sport is an emancipation and celebration of the body? Doesn't sport rather ignore and destroy the body?

Today's athletes are adopting a different attitude.⁸ They refuse to disregard the body. Mika Myllylä, the Finnish world champion in the 50 km cross-country race in 1997, Olympic champion in the 30 km in 1998 and world champion in the 10, 30 and 50 km in 1999, is a telling example. He practices a new type of training, rejecting the usual scientific training and coaching where a precise plan is established which one then has to follow, no matter how the body feels. He avoids this old-fashioned type of training which is still shaped by the ideology of mastering the body. Myllylä relies instead on his own knowledge and feelings. When he trains he listens to his body and tries to find out what it wants and needs. And he enjoys this new type of training. He even insists that for him »the greatest enjoyment comes from training, not from winning«.⁹ With this method he manages not to be exposed to injuries and to be extremely successful at the same time. This novel type of training respects the body and does away with the old ideology of mastering the body, which in most cases ended up in the Girardelli-trap. Many athletes see Myllylä's (and others') way as a promising model of future training. – The point is very important. Sport is changing one of its basic features. Whilst some people say that in today's sport everything is getting worse, in fact one of sport's most

⁷ Already in 1928/29, Bertolt Brecht had stated: »Great sport begins long after it has ceased to be healthy« (Bertolt Brecht, »Die Krise des Sportes«, in: *Werke*, vol. 21, Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1992, 222-224, here 223).

⁸ In fact, the old claim that high performance sport would improve health has – while this ideology dominated – always been mistaken. When a weight-lifter's heart increased in size through permanent over-exertion, this caused him lifelong problems, and many weight-lifters died significantly prematurely of heart attacks. The former anti-body ideology of sport simply hid this contradiction. As the body was to be dominated for 'higher' goals, its repulsion was just not to be taken seriously.

⁹ Source: <http://www.slu.fi/hiihtoliitto/myllyla.html>.

threatening problems is solved. The new body-focus of sport engenders a new care for the body.

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So in various aspects – from its aesthetic appearance and appreciation through to its emphasis on the body in performance, self-presentation and training – contemporary sport has largely turned aesthetic.¹⁰

II. Modern Changes in the Concept of Art Allowing Sport to be Viewed as Art

But this move to aesthetics represents only the uncontroversial part of my essay. What, however, is highly disputed is that for this reason – or others – sport could be viewed as art.¹¹ So let me turn to this controversial claim which – to my own, initial surprise – I am now going to argue for.

As I said before, the legitimacy – and even the plausibility – of this further-reaching claim depends, first of all, on the concept of art one has. My main point is that during the twentieth century the concept of art has undergone

¹⁰ A valuable case study of sport's aesthetic status is: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, »Die Schönheit des Mannschaftssports: American Football – im Stadion und im Fernsehen«, in: *Medien – Welten – Wirklichkeiten*, eds Gianni Vattimo and Wolfgang Iser (Munich: Fink, 1998), 201-228. Cf. also Gunter Gebauer and Gerd Hortleder, »Die Epoche des Sportsports«, in: *Sport – Eros – Tod*, eds. Gerd Hortleder and Gunter Gebauer (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 60-87.

¹¹ There was already discussion of whether or not sport is art in the 1970s and 1980s. It was triggered by Pierre Frayssinet's investigation *Le Sport parmi les Beaux-Arts* (Paris 1968) and was continued above all in the English speaking world, with authors such as L.A. Reid (1970), P. Ziff (1974), J. Kupfer (1975), David Best (1979, 1980, 1985), S.K. Wertz (1984) and Christopher Cordner (1988) participating. The answer given was for the most part negative: in spite of numerous obvious parallels sport should not ultimately be seen as art. I do not want to go into these arguments in detail, but to note that obviously for sensitive minds a tendency towards sport's potential art status was already taking shape which in the meantime has made its breakthrough. It is just that the reaction then was predominantly academically cautious and conceptually conservative – although many arguments (for instance those of Roberts and Cordner against Best) might have suggested a different outcome (cf. David Best, »The Aesthetic in Sport«, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 14, no. 3, summer 1974, 197-221, reprinted in: *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, eds William J. Morgan and Klaus V. Meier, Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 2nd ed. 1995, 377-389; David Best, »Sport is Not Art«, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, vol. XII, 1985, 25-40; Terence J. Roberts, »Sport, Art, and Particularity: The Best Equivocation«, in: *Philosophic Inquiry in Sport*, 415-424; Christopher Cordner, »Differences Between Sport and Art«, *ibid.*, 425-436).

transformations which open up new chances of sport's being viewed as art. I will discuss four aspects. Later, in the third section of this essay, I will have to explain how contemporary sport actually makes use of these new opportunities.

1. Art, instead of defining the aesthetic, has become an instance of the aesthetic

Firstly, a reversal of the relationship between the artistic and the aesthetic is to be observed. Formerly, the artistic provided the basic definition of the aesthetic. The realm of the aesthetic was certainly broader than that of art, but the concept of art was meant to provide the core concept of the aesthetic. In recent times, however, things have changed. Now art is considered as just one province of the aesthetic – certainly still a particularly important one, but nonetheless just one. While art has lost its privileged definitional status for the aesthetic, this has rather been assumed by *aisthesis*.¹² So the definition of the aesthetic is no longer to be taken from art, rather art's definition is to be established within the framework of the aesthetic: preferably, for instance, conceiving of art as an intensification of the aesthetic.

An obvious consequence of this change is that now everything which is emphatically aesthetic has better chances of counting as art than before. For this reason sport, being a novel and obvious instance of the aesthetic, might well enter the predication sphere of art.

2. Modern art as striving for interpenetrations with life

Many of modern art's variants strive to transcend the art sphere, to achieve interconnections with the sphere of life. The poles of this tendency are marked by attempts to draw elements of the everyday into the artwork (say through collage, montage) on the one hand, or by trying to dissolve the artwork within life on the other hand (think of the Living Theatre or of the claim that good art and design should be unnoticeable and invisible).¹³

¹² I have developed this in more detail in »Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics: For a New Form to the Discipline« and in »Aestheticization Processes: Phenomena, Distinctions and Prospects«, in: *Undoing Aesthetics*, 78-102 and 1-32.

¹³ Cf. *Design ist unsichtbar*, eds Helmuth Gsöllpointner, Angela Hareiter and Laurids Ortner (Vienna: Löcker, 1981). – Remember in this context also the old Schillerean project of art's transformation into the »art of living« (»Lebenskunst«; Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, 15th Letter, 80) and Nietzsche's polemics »against the art of artworks«: this »so-called actual art, that of artworks«, he said, is »merely an

Regrettably enough, modern art's striving for connections with the lifeworld often suffers from utter misunderstanding. After Joseph Beuys, during and after the *documenta VII*, planted seven thousand oaks in Kassel and its surroundings, his devoted followers today undertake to preserve every single one of these oaks and produce extensive documentation of what they indeed see as a very innovative artwork, but which they treat as an absolutely traditional one. What was meant to transform art into life and nature is – in a complete misunderstanding of Beuys's intention by these devotees – being fetched back into the realm of art. Understandably enough, it is above all the art market which still wants art to be a clear-cut concept; this serves to distinguish art and to make it a marketable product. But the marriage between art and market is tenable only at the cost of an ongoing disregard of modern art's own initiatives. Unfortunately, many theoreticians also follow the art market's demands rather than art's impulses; they eagerly try to establish a clear-cut concept of art – whose only purpose today seems to consist in serving the market.¹⁴

Wherever the art world definition of art remains binding, of course, nothing other than the items distributed by the art market has a chance of counting as art. Redistributions between art and sport then simply cannot occur. But if art's impulse to be transformed into life – which is one of the strongest impulses of modern art – is taken seriously, then aesthetic forms beyond the realm of art could be seen as corresponding to art's own initiative, and in this sense be appreciated as instances of a fulfilment of art's intention, as a novel kind of art which modern art's impulse gave birth to. – This is a second line which might allow us to consider contemporary sport as a major new candidate for 'art'.

appendix«, not »the actual«; one should not, as the artworld thinks, fit out a bad life with artworks, but deploy artistic energy directly for the improvement of life (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister. Zweiter Band*, in: Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, 453 f. [1 174]). According to Nietzsche, artworks are legitimate only when also serving an art of life.

¹⁴ And if a theory is ever proposed which effectively questions the concept of art, then this theory can – paradoxically – be highly esteemed among art market people while its content is not taken at all seriously by them. Arthur Danto's indiscernibility thesis would, taken literally, be disastrous for the art market – it states that there is simply no such thing as an 'artwork', hence one cannot sell any. The only artworks, according to Danto, consist of interpretations (as developed by critics and philosophers, and by Arthur Danto in the first place) – so at least books can still be sold.

3. *The tendency towards a fraying of the arts*

A third aspect is modern arts' tendency to merge into one another. Adorno has described this as the fraying of the arts.¹⁵ »The borders between the artistic genres are flowing into one another, more precisely, their demarcation lines are fraying.«¹⁶ »It is as if the artistic genres, by negating their firmly outlined forms, were gnawing away at the concept of art itself.«¹⁷ Adorno interprets this fraying of the arts as a consequence of their attempt to escape their autonomy-centered ideological constitution, an attempt which he calls »the vital element of all actually modern art«.¹⁸

This tendency to neutralize the borders of art – among its genres in the first place, but also between art and the everyday – is, of course, another reason why an entry of non-art into the realm of art becomes possible in principle.

4. *From highbrow to lowbrow –
the advancement of art and aesthetics towards the popular*

The increasing insecurity about the borders of art leads to a fourth point: the revaluation of popular art. The distinction between high and low is increasingly being rejected – by art as well as by its aesthetic reflection. Pop Art was the decisive event in the field of arts, and, with respect to aesthetics, I'd like to remind you of Richard Shusterman's »defense of popular art« and his demonstration »that works of popular art do in fact display the aesthetic values its critics reserve exclusively for high art«.¹⁹ – This opening of the concept of art towards the popular clears a further path for the inclusion of sport, this highly popular aesthetic phenomenon, among the arts.

¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, »Die Kunst und die Künste«, in: Adorno, *Ohne Leitbild: Parva Aesthetica* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 168-192. Cf. also Arthur Danto's more recent description of »contemporary artistic practice«: »It is a practice in which painters no longer hesitate to situate their paintings by means of devices which belong to altogether different media – sculpture, video, film, installation, and the like« (Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, XII).

¹⁶ Adorno, »Die Kunst und die Künste«, 168.

¹⁷ Ibid., 189.

¹⁸ Ibid., 191.

¹⁹ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 171 f. and 200. Shusterman points out in particular »that popular art has those formal qualities thought to distinguish high art as aesthetic: unity and complexity, intertextuality and open-textured polysemy, experimentation and foregrounded attention to medium« (ibid., 200).

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In this second section, I have pointed out four reasons why possibilities arise through the development of the modern concept of art itself for sport to access the notion of art. When, for something to be art, its aesthetic character is more important than a specifically artistic one; when art itself strives for transformation into phenomena of the everyday; when art tends to blur its borders; when, finally, the popular is increasingly being recognized as art – then sport becomes a good new candidate for being viewed as art.

III. Sport as Art

Now let me turn to the decisive question: does sport actually make use of these possibilities? Does it fulfill at least some – and perhaps enough – of art's criteria to be considered art? – From now on I will go through the common objections to sport's potential art status step by step in order to examine critically and refute them.

1. Does sport – by aiming for victory – lack art's requisite character as an end in itself?

One basic objection says that even if contemporary sport exhibits the four shifts mentioned, it can nevertheless not be art because it runs counter to two other basic conditions of art: its symbolic status and its being an end in itself.

This objection is based on the assumption that sport is merely a profane activity aiming at victory. Hence sport falls short of symbolic meaning as well as of being an end in itself. – Let me discuss the various errors inherent in this apparently plausible line of thought.

a. The symbolic status of sport as well as art

Sport is as distant from ordinary life as is art. When Othello smothers Desdemona, this is a symbolic act, the actress will survive. Likewise sport's relationship to life is at most symbolic. Many sports originated from types of aggressive action in ordinary life, but being practised as sport, this remains only as a symbolic background to them. In sport the struggle is »raised to the level of imagination«. ²⁰ Or as Santayana put it: »Sport is a liberal form of war stripped from its compulsions and malignity.« ²¹

²⁰ Cordner, »Differences Between Sport and Art«, 432.

This is why sport, viewed (and sometimes ironically assessed) from life's perspective of necessity, often appears absurd: Why do marathon runners enslave themselves so? Why do sporting marksmen compete with such embitterment when all they're shooting is useless clay pigeons and not real pigeons that one could roast afterwards? Isn't it simply idiotic to constantly drive in a circle at high speed (as Niki Lauda said when retiring from Formula One sport)?

The following point also makes the difference between sport or art on the one hand and life on the other hand evident. If Othello were to carry on smothering someone in normal life, after having left the stage, he would be arrested, as would a linebacker who continued hurling all his weight into brusing tackles away from the football field in the streets. Sport as well as theater take place in particular spaces, separate from the everyday world. What the stage is to theater, the playing field, boxing ring, or the race track are to sport. Art as well as sport are, compared to life, symbolic activities in terms of their structure. – I will explain what comprises the symbolic nature of sport later on.

b. Sport's oeuvre: the performance

But another difference still seems to remain: sport is said to be about winning, while art is about the creation of an artwork.

But let's be careful when talking about a 'work'. Of course, in painting works are produced which have an independent existence after the act of painting. Not so, however, in theater, dance or music – in the performing arts. Nor in sport: when the competition is over, garbage may remain but no work.

Yet there is a different type of work implied in those artistic as well as in sporting performances: the performance itself. That painting produces a work in the sense of an object might make painting's status even dubious instead, for in doing this it does not (as it does in other respects) raise itself beyond the level of a craft to the higher level of art.²¹ Whereas the performing arts and sport do. This even makes them comparable to those activities which, ever since Aristotle, have been considered to be our highest ones, precisely for the

²¹ Ibid., 432.

²² Hence in the past arts like painting and sculpture were pursued under the heading »artes mechanicae«, that is alongside, for instance, agriculture, ironmongery and weaving. Indeed – precisely because what mattered to them was the resultant product and not the process – they were not counted as »artes liberales«. This original classification can still be seen in the reliefs of the Florentine Campanile (representations from around 1340 and 1437-39): architecture, sculpture and painting figure amidst the mechanical arts – below the liberal arts which are represented above them.

reason that their proper work is immanent to the process and not something achieved at the end and remaining as a result, an outcome, a product, a work-entity. Aristotle pointed out the difference between activities producing a work and those which constitute ends in themselves. The acts of seeing, reflecting or thinking have their end in themselves, not beyond, they are fulfilled in themselves.²³ They are distinguished by the immanence of the work – which is nothing but the process itself – in the process. Here we are concerned with activities which are exemplary as ends in themselves.

Sport, just as the performing arts, is of this type. The sporting performance has, above all, its end in itself. In principle it does not serve outer purposes.²⁴ Of course, all self-purposive activities can have outer effects too: thinking can make you a lonely person, musical performance can make you famous, and sport can make you rich. But it would be wrong to declare these secondary effects the primary thing and, so doing, to overlook these activities' inner character as an end in themselves, whose excellence is the condition for these outer effects being able to take place. Of course, all self-purposive activities can have outer effects too – thinking can make you a lonely person, musical performance can make you famous, and sport can make you rich – but the decisive point, which one should in no case omit is that these activities, in the first place, bear their sense in themselves, whatever the additional effects may be.

Bearing this in mind we might be in a position to disprove the objection that sport is about winning whereas the arts are not. If 'winning' means that one tries to do what one does as well as one ever can, then this is common to all these phenomena – to sport as well as to art. If 'winning' implicitly connotes 'money-making', then again this can apply to both of them. The main point, however, is that in sport the aim of winning cannot be reached *directly* but only *through the sporting performance*. It is the superiority of one's sporting performance that leads to victory. So the proper work of the athlete is in any case his or her performance, which then may result in a win.²⁵ In this, it seems to me, sport and art are completely alike.²⁶

²³ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IX 6, 1048 b 18-36.

²⁴ Sport's character as an end in itself is often rendered by emphasizing its play characteristic.

²⁵ A similar structure is typical for mountain climbing. The popular formula »the way is the goal« gives a good account of this. Sure, you want to get to the summit. But don't forget that you also have to get back down afterwards. The satisfaction arises from having done all this well – not just from having reached the top. Ultimately all the challenges of the route including the altitude of the summit are an integral part of the process, of the climber's successful performance.

²⁶ The common objection to contemporary high level sport (in particular to basketball,

And, interestingly enough, many athletes today emphasize the value of performance more than that of winning. Even when they have lost, they can be very happy with their excellent performance. They did their best, and this is satisfying – though it was not enough to win. Sport is more about the best possible performance than about winning. And some athletes go even further. For them pure performance – that of training, which is exempt from competition and victory – brings the greatest enjoyment. As Mika Myllylä said: »Winning brings a feeling of success, it is a reward for a job well done, but the greatest enjoyment comes from training. Competition is not the main thing.«²⁷

*2. Sporting performance: determined too much by its rules
to be counted as art?*

Another objection against sport's potential art status runs as follows: sport lacks creativity. Because it simply runs through fixed schemes within a strict set of rules. Art on the contrary problematizes and transcends rules.

This is true. Art – and modern art in particular – does not simply follow a given set of rules but questions and changes the status of art and develops new paradigms, each of which may establish a peculiar set of rules for art's existence and meaning and for the artwork's construction as well as reception. This characteristic of art, its not being led by rules, was already expressed by the traditional formula of »*Je ne sais quoi*« and clearly comes to the fore through the modern prominence of reflective judgment. Sport, on the contrary, presupposes definitely established rules. As soon as ambiguities arise here – when, for instance, a hammer thrower suddenly wears ankle weights – the rules are added to. Art creates its rules, sport follows rules.

a. Sport does not exhaust itself in following rules

But does this mean that sporting performance does not contain an artlike potential at all? By no means. The performance is regulated, but not *determined* in every aspect by the respective rules. Great memorable competitions are

soccer and other highly-paid sports) that the athletes only run after money is much too simple. Excellent performance is the indispensable condition for whatever may follow from it: a series of wins, earning immense amounts of money, or being overexerted by permanently being the best. And this applies to sport as well as to art. The prospect of additional earnings may make tenors sing more often – but if the level of their performance drops, so too does their reward.

²⁷ Source: <http://www.slu.fi/hiihtoliitto/myllyla.html>.

such because something happened which went beyond the mere fulfilment of rules. If following the rules were everything, all competitions would have to be more or less the same. In actual competition and performance something more enters in: the event and occurrence, drama and contingency, good or bad luck, success or failure, surprise and excitement. These elements make the sporting event a particular and possibly unique one.²⁸ – Taking a closer look at these surplus elements we will be able to discover the main reason for sport's artistic character.

b. Fascination with the event

Let us consider first the obvious parallel with the performing arts. While with painting or poetry what I said before holds (they establish rather than follow rules), theater or music constitute a different case: the actors or players are bound by the preestablished structure of the written play or the piece of music. Yet what makes their performance remarkable is not the rule-governed reproduction of the script or the composition, but the additional element of their performance, one which displays all kinds of personal skills, individual interpretation, and openness to the event they create (while creating it). None of this is straightforwardly determined by the given script or composition. It is these surplus elements which we appreciate and remember most. And whilst true for the performing arts, this is equally true for sport.²⁹

What we appreciate is what transcends the sphere of mere rule-fulfilment. Or rather what supervenes while the rules are being followed: the event's unforeseeable dynamics. Ideally, the rules provide good conditions for an event of this kind. Indeed they are designed and often adjusted in order to allow for the ultimately unforeseeable dynamics of the event. They are boundary conditions for possibly great sporting events. Take soccer as an example. During the last World Cup the rules for the match between Brazil and the Netherlands were certainly the same as for the match between Iran and Germany – but what an enormous difference there was between the unforgettable soccer evening in the first case and the pitiful prodding around in the second! The rules don't make the game. The performance does, it creates the miserable or great event. Just as in the performing arts.

²⁸ And this is all the more remarkable the more memorable the event is. To a certain extent, however, it is to be found in every event.

²⁹ Note also that in the late sixteenth hundred 'sport' could signify 'theatrical performance', 'show', 'play' (*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, ed. Lesley Brown, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, vol. 2, 2999).

3. Sport's semantics: drama without script

But another objection still awaits an answer. What is the sporting event about? Does it carry with it any relevant meaning?

It was often said that while art expresses ideas, feelings, states of mind and therefore has a meaning, sport expresses nothing and therefore has no meaning.³⁰ Sport may, in its event character, be similar to theater, but while a play is about human conflicts or the drama of the *condition humaine*, sport is about nothing but running or throwing or sophisticated movements like the Gienger salto.

This assessment, however, is profoundly mistaken. It is based on a confusion about meaning and aboutness, assuming that only what is explicitly about something can be meaningful. The script of theater is about something, hence theater is meaningful, while sport lacks a script, hence it is meaningless – this is the line of reasoning here. Yet this misses the point insofar as artistic meaning is not necessarily and exclusively constituted by aboutness, but – even in its essence – by the artistic event itself. And this applies equally to sport. Considering the potential meaningfulness of sport one does not have to look for a script – there is indeed none – but for the typicality of the event.

Sport can display all the dramatic traits of human existence. In this lies its symbolic dimension. Think of a 10 000 meter race. You can witness the tactical battle between the opponents, the leading group's break away, the leader's coming unstuck or the tragedy of a Sonya O'Sullivan, the risk of taking the outer lane on the last curve, the dramatic closing spurt and the luck of a runner who is suddenly able to break through on the inner lane as it becomes free and wins. Or think of the unforgettable moment when, for the first time, in a 400m race a runner tried to win Olympic Gold by thrusting himself over the finish line.

The crucial point is that *all this is created uniquely by the performance and the event itself* – it does not follow from the implementation of a script. When

³⁰ This view, advocated for instance by David Best (»The Aesthetic in Sport«), is criticized by Christopher Cordner (»Differences Between Sport and Art«). Best claims that while »any art form, properly so-called, must at least allow for the possibility of the expression of a conception of life issues, such as contemporary moral, social and political problems«, the sporting performer does not »have the possibility of expressing through his particular medium his view of life situations« (386). To this Cordner objects that while »the representational arts seem to do so [...] the situation is different with the nonrepresentational arts«. Hence it would be better to say that »works of art manifest or enact or realize life-values« and are in themselves »most deeply meaningful or value-laden« (429). In view of this, however, »sports quite clearly can have meaning in a very similar way« (430).

we witness something dramatic, this – in the case of sport – is due to nothing but the event itself. The actual occurrence cannot be anticipated, the athletes' performance is creative in the highest sense. There was no script. Sport is drama without a script. It creates its own drama.³¹

In this respect sport appears more artistic still than many of the arts – more so, for example, than all the performing arts as these are based on a script, choreography or a composition. In sport, however, the drama is due to the event alone. The freedom and event character of sport's production of meaning is eminently artistic.

Sporting events act out most basic features of the human condition, and the way they do this is marvellously self-creative. In so doing sport is sport semantically intense and intrinsically artistic. In this respect I see every reason to view sport as art.³²

4. Identification: the spectators' fascination with sport

My analysis focuses on the event and the spectacle of sport. The spectators, in my view, are an integral part of the event. But why do we admire athletic performances at all? Shouldn't we be envious instead – because we, the non-athletes, will never achieve this kind of perfection? How can the contemporary fascination with sport be explained?³³

One essential point is that we take the athletes' performance to be not totally beyond our scope. We even take it to be ours in a way. There is a feeling

³¹ This might, however, provoke another objection against sport's potential status as art. One might say that art requires repeatability, hence sport can, because of the uniqueness of the sporting event, not be art. But again modern art does away with the argument. For it no longer subscribes to a general repeatability thesis. Happenings were and performances often are single events. Afterwards one can witness them only through photos or videotapes – just as in the case of sporting events too.

³² It appears notable that Hegel linked the origin of Greek art with Greek sport: »The Greeks first made beautiful forms of themselves before they expressed such objectively in marble and in paintings. The harmless competition in *games*, in which each shows what he is, is very old« (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 297). Hegel is of the opinion that Greek sport preceded and prepared Greek art.

³³ That there is such fascination is obvious: today more than sixty percent of the population in western countries watch sport on a regular basis; the last soccer World Cup was attended by almost three million and watched on TV by thirty-seven billion the world over. – I have attempted an explanation in more detail in the paper »Just what is it that makes today's sport so appealing?« (Stanford University, Athletic Department, Colloquium »If You Want to Build Character Try Something Else: Ethics and Sports in 1997 and Beyond«, 16 May 1997).

of »*mea res agitur*« – like in theater where when we see kings or people of excellence we don't think they are of an ontologically different kind, but rather take them to be fellow human beings whose destiny confronts us with human potentials that are in principle relevant to our being and lives too. Athletes are perceived as human beings – even if we consider them to be somehow superhuman. It would be quite different if we were to see beings from a different planet. Sport is not science fiction. It's real and human. Something connected with human character is going on.

The athletes demonstrate a potential of the *human body as such* which is certainly factually unattainable for most of us, but is not in principle beyond, so to speak, the idea of our body. The athletes realize an outstanding potentiality of our kind of body. They are performing for us and instead of us. As they are actors of the human being, we can and do identify with them.

Nothing is simply beyond us – neither the bodies nor the activities nor the emotions –, everything is familiar to a certain extent. It's a fellow human being who is performing, suffering and winning or losing out there.³⁴ This makes the sporting event a shared event and the drama one which we too experience. From this it follows that the structure of sport comprises both athletes and spectators.³⁵ We are fascinated by the realization of an ideal

³⁴ It's not only the athlete's body which is within our comprehension as physical beings, but the activities he performs are also largely familiar to us. This is obviously the case with cycling, soccer, basketball, swimming, skating, car racing and the like – most of us have at least at some time in their life tried the respective activity or one similar to it, no matter how modest the level. And indirectly it is the case even if we haven't much experience with these kinds of sport, or none at all as perhaps with fencing or pole vault or the javelin. We are at least to some extent familiar with the motoric patterns relevant to these activities from our daily bodily experience, and if we aren't, as in the case of pole vault, we can still – by a sort of bodily empathy – imagine and even feel what's going on there. We always have at least some initial access to the *pattern* of activity, and this is enough to get in touch with it, whereas, on the other hand, it reinforces the distance between our own capacities and the outstanding event we are watching and are fascinated by. – The same holds for the emotional processes we witness and which are often so dramatic. We understand what concentration before the start is, or what it means during a long distance race to hold a good position waiting one's chance, and finally, when the second-placed runner attacks and takes the lead towards the end of the last curve, our heart starts beating with his. Or during a tennis match we not only admire the wonderful shots but also have some perception of the players' mental ups and downs and might be able to predict just by watching the body language of a player before and during his serve whether or not it will be good.

³⁵ Cf. Corder's remark: »[...] it is arguable that our concept of sport, perhaps unlike that of our ancestors, is in part a concept of that which is to be seen and evaluated from a spectator's point of view« (Corder, »Differences Between Sport and Art«, 426).

potentiality of the human being, one factually unavailable to us but actualized in the sporting event; in this sense we experience the event as being representative for us and enjoy and participate in the drama displayed.

5. Celebration of contingency

Contingency is another main point in sport's dramatic character and appreciation. Sport is not only the celebration of physical perfection, but also of contingency. This element may be difficult to describe – partly because contingency has never received adequate attention in our culture, which has tried instead to ignore or overcome contingency, so that adequate concepts are lacking – yet contingency is one of the most evident and appreciated aspects in sporting events.

A competition can take the course one expected. The superior athlete wins, perhaps even achieves a new world record, and this too may have been expected and supported – in long-distance runs for example by hiring »pacemakers«. So the time attained was great – but not the event, because nothing unpredictable happened. It just confirmed expectations, did not create a dynamics of its own, no contingency came in. Despite being a record-breaking run, *as an event* it was pretty dull.

How different if something unpredictable happens – if there is a real fight, if the result is uncertain during a race, if, finally, a new star is born; or when, in a Formula One race, the outcome is permanently incalculable – a slight lapse in attention, or a competitor's crazy driving when being overtaken, or sudden rain showers can change everything. In such cases the event creates its own course, and contingency is permanently in play. And we appreciate such a pure event, with the permanent emergence of possibilities and its self-organizational character more than a predictable result.

Or take soccer as example. Certainly, the skill and perfection of outstanding players' actions is part of its fascination. But we also expect the whole game to be exciting and – if we're lucky – can be fascinated by the way the players react at every moment to the course and experience the game has provided so far. Things are most fascinating when it's permanently touch and go, with both the game as a whole and almost every single action. Whether a 50-meter dream pass is in fact this, or a failure, can depend on 10 centimeters or a player's outstanding reaction. What can bring one team the decisive goal might also open up an excellent counter chance for its opponents. And when the pass is made, you have no precise idea what it will result in. Success and failure here lie unbelievably close to one another. Soccer, to me, seems to be

so fascinating because it is subject in the most intense way to contingency. It is a celebration of contingency. (And it's probably for this reason that many scholars and intellectuals like it – it demonstrates to them the insuperability of what in their professional work they try to outdo: contingency.)

But doesn't precisely this prominence of contingency hinder the declaration that sport be art? Isn't art a paradigmatic attempt to overcome contingency, with one of the first criteria of an accomplished artwork being that you cannot change an iota without destroying its perfection and extraordinary effect? Well, traditionally this opinion was held. Modern art, however, is (in some schools at least) characterized by a turn to contingency. Think of Marcel Duchamp who introduced contingency in many ways into art and, when his »Great Glass« (which he had declared »definitively unfinished«) was broken during transportation, called this »the happy completion of the piece« and made the cracks prominent elements of its final rearrangement.³⁶ Or think of John Cage, with whom the emancipation of musical contingency took place – with respect to sounds as well as to notation. The welcoming of contingency is part of modern art's aforementioned struggle against its traditional constitution. – Therefore the celebration of contingency which takes place in sport can certainly not be an argument against sport's potentially having an artistic status.

6. Intermediate summary

To wrap things up: I have gone through several constituents of the modern concept of art and discussed various traits of contemporary sport. Some of the new conceptual elements of art (the prominence of the aesthetic, art's striving for connections with the everyday world, the fraying of art forms, and the revaluation of popular art) proved favorable from the start for viewing sport as art; and the elements which at first glance denied such admission

³⁶ I am referring to the original piece, today located in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. There are, in the meantime, some break-free reproductions around in various museums. In my view they reflect the art world's resistance to the step made by Duchamp. One still prefers the illusion of necessity over the acceptance of contingency. Consider also that the break lines of the original piece not only correspond to the mechanical features of the work (marvellously so from the left to the middle in the lower part), but add a new semantic layer to the work; it now displays the breakdown of the mechanical attitude (and this as a consequence of a mechanical event itself) rather than the sophisticated usage of this attitude; we now witness the vulnerability and the overcoming of this ideal (which, decades later, took place in the cultural area in general).

(symbolic status and self-purposiveness, meaningfulness, striving for necessity instead of contingency), turned out on closer inspection to be either quite fulfillable by sport, or elements of a concept of art that has been surpassed by the development of art itself.

Perhaps sport does lack some traits constitutive to some kinds of art – but so do other kinds of art too. Painting and sculpture produce object-like works, the performing arts don't. Their type of work is different. And so is sport's. And if there are some traits of arts which sport lacks altogether this too does not necessarily mean that sport cannot be art. For the concept of art is a complex and open one. Nothing must, in order to be art, fulfill *all* the aspects which can be responsible for calling *something* art. A series of traits – differing partly from one genre to the next – is sufficient.³⁷ And sport meets a variety of those traits – and obviously important ones at that.³⁸ Therefore it seems highly plausible to me to view today's sport as art.

7. Contemporary sport: a postmodern art for everyone

Finally, sport has a big advantage over what is usually considered art: it is understandable and enjoyable for practically everyone. To be fascinated with sport you don't need a diploma – whereas for the enjoyment of modern, difficult art you apparently do. Of course, even in the case of sport some knowledge is required: you need to know, or to find out, the rules, and the more you are acquainted with a type of sport the more you will be able to

³⁷ With this, I am of course relying on Wittgenstein's concept of »family resemblances« which in my view constitutes one of the biggest breakthroughs in conceptual matters.

³⁸ Additionally, the question of kitsch might serve as a test case. In the realm of the arts kitsch is typically possible. So are there instances of kitsch in sport? My hunch is that above all the sports which directly strive to be aesthetic are in danger of producing events which for an educated sensibility come close to kitsch. Take ribbon gymnastics as an example. The playfulness, which stems not from bodily exertion but from interplay with a fancy toy, borders – to say the least – on kitsch. Or imagine a skier who only tried to ski beautifully and not efficiently: some might admire him, others would certainly recognize and despise this as kitsch. What was so marvellous with Ingemar Stenmark was that in his case aesthetic appeal and efficiency resulted from the same movements; further developments, in slalom for example, however hindered such congruence: once you were allowed to ski over, instead of around, the slalom posts (as has been the case since the introduction of flexible poles), your descent can still be impressive in its efficiency but no longer for its beauty. – If my guess is somehow correct, then – interestingly enough and seemingly paradoxically – the apparently 'aesthetic' sports would largely be exposed to the kitsch trap, whereas the 'purposive' ones would be good candidates for 'art'.

enjoy the competition.³⁹ Modern art, however, is – despite the protestations of our art pedagogians – hardly accessible to everyone.

Whereas sport – for obvious reasons – is popular, art is – for equally good reasons – elitist. Many artists are aware of this and suffer from not having the support of the crowd, they share Paul Klee's complaint »no people carries us«. ⁴⁰ From the other side, Arnold Gehlen gave the corresponding diagnosis: »We have all learnt to live alongside today's art.«⁴¹ – But most of us have learnt to live with sport and to enjoy it.

Contemporary sport – in contrast to modern art – matches the *sensus communis*. It is art for everyone. It probably is *the* popular art of today. It is certainly the most social art form. The huge increase of public interest in sport is an indication of this.⁴² Where art, by becoming difficult and a matter for experts, has turned away from common taste, sport fills the gap. It offers the extraordinary and yet understandable event. And with sport things are so obvious. In the case of sport you don't have to ask yourself critically whether what you enjoy is indeed art and whether your pleasure is legitimate or just mistaken because in fact you are a philistine who usually mistakes kitsch for art.

8. Sport as a neglected topic of aesthetics

My interest here is not to promote sport. Rather I would like to point out its artlike traits in order to show what a valuable topic it could be for aesthetics. Sport is usually neglected by the discipline; one just sees sport's aesthetic traits and judges these to be simply obvious and not an interesting

³⁹ And, of course, there are degrees of competence in viewing sport; not every spectator is a good spectator.

⁴⁰ Paul Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, ed. Jörg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 3rd edition 1971), 95.

⁴¹ Arnold Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder* (Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 2nd edition 1965), 221.

⁴² Already in 1928 John Dewey noted »that the spread of sports and games is one of the characteristic features of existing social life« (John Dewey, »What Are the Russian Schools Doing?«, in: John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 3: 1927-1928, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press 1984, 224-232, here 225). In 1931 he commented with respect to newspapers: »Politics may appear on the first page and on the editorial page of newspapers, but the sport pages occupy more space, and the average reader turns to these pages with an eagerness which contrasts with the languid way in which he reads the political news and skips the editorials« (John Dewey, »Is There Hope for Politics?«, in: John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 6: 1931-1932, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press 1985, 182-189, here 182).

matter. The pleasure in sport is considered to be lowbrow or mass pleasure – one not worthy of positive consideration by aesthetics. But by neglecting the artlike character of sport we also fail to understand why it is so fascinating for a large public. In fact, the very fascination with sport derives from aspects which, in a different form, we are used to experiencing and admiring in the arts. Recognition of this is what I would like to promote. In sport elementary aspects of the human condition are at stake and are acted out – in a very direct and at the same time symbolically intense manner.

9. Art-art versus sport-art

With all this I am of course not saying that sport *replaces* art, or that it could or should do so. I am arguing only that it fulfills functions of art for a broader audience no longer reached by art.

And I'd like to suggest complementarity. Art, in my view, should remain difficult, elitist, and experimental. In other words: it should not succumb to popular taste. I don't see its future prosperity in competing with the abundant satisfactions which the demands of an entertainment and amusement society experience through current design, everyday aestheticization – and postmodern sport. Where art chooses to take this direction, it is at a disadvantage anyway and, more importantly, falls short of its genuine task. Unyielding art on the one side and arts of entertainment on the other side could be useful and appreciable in a complementary way. A distribution and differentiation of this kind would, in my view, constitute not the worst outcome of the modern transformation of the artistic.

Or, to be more outspoken on this point: after all the efforts of modern art to escape its golden cage of autonomy, to turn to life and to acknowledge and make us appreciate the aesthetic outside of art – a tendency which obviously furthers aestheticization of the everyday and which provides strong arguments for my assessment of sport as art – it might be time to reinforce the distinction between art in the proper sense and aestheticization of the everyday.⁴³ Avant garde art, revolting against art's autonomy and aesthetically sacramenting the everyday, has done its job. Its victory is obvious and has no need of any further proof. Art could return to its different task once again – one closer to its older

⁴³ Cf. my criticism – on aesthetic grounds – of many phenomena of aestheticization in »Aestheticization Processes: Phenomena, Distinctions and Prospects« (*Undoing Aesthetics*, 1-32). My formula for those failures is: hyper-aestheticization breaks into anaestheticization (cf. also my »Ästhetik und Anästhetik«, in: *Ästhetisches Denken*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990, 5th ed. 1998, 9-40).

aims, with the opposition to current aestheticization now being one of its constituents.⁴⁴ Sport best fills in for the everyday longings of art. But it cannot substitute for Schönberg, Pollock or Godard. Art's exception is to occur in a different way from sport's.⁴⁵

10. Conclusion

Ultimately my intention was not to decide the question as to whether sport *is* art or not. This would, in my view, be phrasing the question too essentialistically. What I tried instead was to offer some reasons why – in today's conditions of art as well as of sport – many people find it highly plausible to call sport an art.

My hunch is that all objections against this are out of step with the modern understanding of art as brought forward by art itself. When, towards the end, I suggested complementarity between art and sport, I did not mean to question sport's status as art. Sport is *one* kind of art. Art (in the usual sense) is another one. That is all.

⁴⁴ Cf., as a case study on this, my »Contemporary Art in Public Space: A Feast for the Eyes or an Annoyance?«, in: *Undoing Aesthetics*, 118-122.

⁴⁵ Likewise Adorno's remark that »art that runs away from illusion, seeking refuge in play, actually ends up in a class with sports« (T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, 148) did not mean to ignore modern art's contributions to an aesthetic revaluation of the everyday, but to emphasize that, notwithstanding all this, the proper task of art should not be lost.

Bohdan Dziemidok

Artistic Expression of National Cultural Identity

The turn of the 20th and the 21st century is a very interesting period. On the one hand, there is a growth of internationalist tendencies, which make us look for common values and universal culture, and on the other hand, the centrifugal tendencies lead to the revival of new forms of nationalism and national and religious conflicts.

Integrative tendencies are an unquestioned fact of every aspect of societal life: economic (emergence of the world market, rise of international exchange and cooperation, modernization of technology, popularization of Western patterns of consumption, great development of transport and means of communication, etc.), political (expansion of liberal democracy, creation of an united Europe), and in culture, which succumbs to a tendency to create global and universal mass culture (mass media, tourism, fashion, show business, etc.). It turns out, however, that neither international commerce, nor the blossoming systems of communication and transport, provide us with the common feeling of identity or belonging. At the same time the need for those does not cease to exist. As a result, »people rediscover or create a new historical identity«, since they feel uprooted and »need new sources of identity and new forms of stable community, new systems of moral imperatives, which could give them a sense of a meaningful and purposeful life« (Huntington, 1997, pp. 132, 133).

One of the most important forms of collective and cultural identity still turns out to be the national one. The prophecies of the end of the era of nations have not come true.

»The strength of national sentiments – writes Jerzy Szacki – even if changeable in time and diverse in space, does not show any symptoms of clear decline, (...) the era of nations keeps lasting and nothing predicts it will end soon« (1997, p. 58).

In 1882, Isaiah Berlin called nationalism »the neglected power«, having at the same time supposed that »nationalism can dominate the last part of our century to such a degree, that no movement or revolution will have any chances of success unless allied with it« (1982, p. 206).

In the eighties, Berlin's convictions might have seemed exaggerated. Some claimed that nationalism would either become a merely historical term

or would function on the peripheries of the 'civilized' world – somewhere in the third or fourth world, and definitely would play no part in the unified communities of Europe. Truly, during the Cold War, international conflicts were mainly of an ideological flavor and many observers thought the situation to be unlikely to change quickly. However, the end of the Cold War brought a radical change of situation. One of the main reasons (but not the only one) for that, was the collapse of multinational states like the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, and binational ones like Czechoslovakia. The problems of nationalism, xenophobia, ethnic conflicts, national identity, autonomy, and national culture became the center of attention in the social sciences. This happened not only because of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe and in the East, but also due to the growing separatisms or claims for cultural autonomy in Belgium, Spain, Canada and Great Britain. »With the end of the Cold War – writes Will Kymlicka – the demands of the ethnic and the national groups have taken over the center stage of political life both domestically and internationally« (1995, p. 193). The same author in another paper underlines that »a striking fact of 20th century history is tenacity with which ethno-national groups have maintained their distinct identity, institutions, and desire for self-government« (1995, p. 164).

Before one can begin dealing with the question of artistic expression of national cultural identity, one has to deal with several fundamentals. What is »identity«, what is »nation« and »nationalism«, and, finally, what is »collective identity«.

The issues of nation, national culture, international coexistence, national conflicts, nationalism, patriotism and national identity are still crucial and complex. The complexity is to a large degree caused by the lack of clarity of the terms themselves (national identity, nationalism, patriotism) which greatly adds to the difficulty of the academic discourse. For the purpose of this paper, some working distinctions between those terms are made below.

I believe that an attempt to identify the term 'nationalism' should be our point of departure. Ernest Gellner, an outstanding expert in the field, coined a well-known and popular definition of nationalism. According to him, »nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent« (1983, p. 1). This definition seems to be, on the one hand, too narrow for it does not cover some forms of nationalism (*e.g.* cultural nationalism); and, on the other hand, too broad, since it follows that all supporters of nation-states would be nationalists, regardless of the fact that some of them are opposed to nationalism as an ideology.

Consequently, it can be argued that Gellner's definition is insufficient.

It seems that the definition of nationalism should be descriptive, and as axiologically neutral as possible. Such an approach would allow us to avoid the impoverished vision of nationalism as only aggressive, expansionist and xenophobic. This narrow, clearly pejorative understanding of nationalism is, for example, very popular in the Polish language. The meaning of this term should be broad enough to cover all its most distinguished forms. Its definition should integrate not only ethnic nationalism (also called 'ethno-nationalism'), but also civic as well as (political) nationalism (present both in liberal democracies and in autocracies), cultural nationalism (the necessity to distinguish this particular form of nationalism is mainly argued for by the Canadian philosophers W. Kymilcka, 1995, and K. Nielsen). It should also reflect the differences between imperialistic and liberationist nationalism, as well as between aggressive, »hot« (in its exclusive and inclusive, expansionist form) and banal nationalism (see M. Billig), specific for the developed nation-states of the West (*e.g.* USA or UK).

Andrzej Walicki approaches nationalism as an ideology »centered around the concept of nation, promoting national ties, national identity, national consciousness and nation-state« (1997, p. 32).

Also Isaiah Berlin thinks that »'nationalism' is not only a state of mind but also a self-conscious doctrine« (1991, p. 206). Nationalism »is an elevation of values of unity and self-determination of a nation to the position of the highest good« (1991, p. 202).

A similar definition of nationalism can be found in the book by Peter Alter: »Nationalism exists everywhere, where individuals feel belonging above all to the nation and where sentimental ties and loyalty to a nation trump all other bonds and loyalties« (1983, p. 9, see J. Szacki, p. 27).

The quoted definitions of nationalism are formulated in such a manner, that the term 'nationalism' can be substituted by that of 'patriotism'. Still, most authors believe that it is rational and right to distinguish the two related terms. I would like to analyze three out of many venues to draw the line between them. The simplest approach is the one declaring »patriotism as a feeling and nationalism as a doctrine« (see J. Jedlicki, 1997). This simple distinction does not get us far, since even if nationalism is mostly treated as an ideology or a doctrine, we still can speak about nationalistic feelings or behaviors which do not construe an ideology. Patriotism is indeed very often seen as love of the homeland and the nation or »strong emotional ties with the nation« (M. Waldenberg 1992, pp. 18-24). Antonina Kłosowska defines patriotism as a »strong, emotional attachment with one's own ethnic group« (1996, p. 16). Morris Janovitz distinguishes patriotism from xenophobia and

hatred for foreigners as »the persistence of love or attachment to a country« (1983, p. 194).

Patriotism understood in such a way is opposed to nationalism in a narrow sense. Consequently, patriotism is seen as a synonym for love of homeland or nation but lacking aggressive sentiments towards other countries or nations. At the same time nationalism represents primordial aggression, irrational exclusion, xenophobia, and fanaticism. This picture of patriotism and nationalism as two different sentiments or states of mind cannot be seen as satisfactory. As A. Kłosowska and M. Billig rightly point out, in practice it is hardly possible to distinguish one from another. There is a popular tendency to call one's own nationalism 'patriotism' and to treat the patriotism of others as 'nationalism'. »The problem is how to distinguish in practice these two allegedly very different states of mind. One cannot merely ask potential patriots whether they either love or hate foreigners. Even the most extreme of nationalists will claim the patriotic motivation for themselves« (M. Billig, 1997, p. 57).

The third method of telling nationalism and patriotism apart is suggested by Andrzej Walicki and Charles Taylor. As opposed to nationalism connected with »nation«, patriotism is linked to the concept of »patria« defined politically, i.e. »without reference to a prepolitical identity«. Patriotism is »a strong sense of identification with polity«; it is »a strong citizen identification« (C. Taylor, 1997, p. 253).

Walicki sees patriotism as »a territorial concept which can be separate from nationality« (1997, p. 34).

Both authors claim that patriotism understood in such a way was present in both the American and the French Revolution. »The concept of Frenchman (...) was shaped under the influence of territorial and state identity« (A. Walicki, 1997, p. 34). This profile of patriotism is/was present in binational states like Czechoslovakia or multinational ones like the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and the USA. As a result, if patriotism is merely a political/territorial phenomenon, »nationalism can provide fuel for patriotism, can be one basis for patriotism but not the only one« (C. Taylor, 1997, p. 253). This situation makes them difficult to distinguish from one another, however, although this distinction should be clearly made, »if we want to understand our history« (C. Taylor, 1997, p. 253).

A similar understanding of patriotism is shown by Will Kymlicka, who thinks that »we should distinguish patriotism, the feeling of allegiance to state, from national identity, the sense of membership in a national group« (p. 13). The necessity to distinguish those concepts justifies the relation between patriotism and national identity of the Swiss. Kymlicka says with respect to

Switzerland: »National groups feel allegiance to the larger state only because the larger state recognizes and respects their distinct national existence« (1995, p. 13).

All three approaches towards the divisive line between patriotism and nationalism can be argued for and against. The latter one, however, seems to be most precise.

As is well known, the concept of identity has two important meanings: one is »remaining the same« (sameness) and the other differentiation (distinctiveness) from other subjects of individual or collective identity. Neither can be overlooked in reflecting on national cultural identity. There is no »we« without »they«. Some authors (e. g., F. Barth and Z. Bokszański) are even of the opinion that it is not the tenacity of national tradition or culture, nor the collective memory and a feeling of commonality of fate, but precisely the borderlines between »us« and »them« which are the most important for collective identity.

In contemporary theories of the nation and nationalism, alongside the anthropological and cultural constructions of nation and national identity (B. Anderson, J. Armstrong, A. Kłosowska, W. Kymlicka, Y. Tamir and others) there is also a political or »civic« way of defining a nation (its origin and functioning) and nationalism (E. Gellner, L. Greenfeld, E. Hobsbawm, M. Ignatieff and others). In both these approaches what is stressed, however, is the importance (although different) of culture (variously understood by different thinkers) in shaping the nation and national identity. The national cultural identity is usually treated as a very important form of collective identity because of its tenacity and axiological essentiality.

The question of collective identity is an equally controversial and vexing problem. This is so because it is neither quite clear who, and in what sense, is the subject of the collective identity, nor what is the role of the subjective and the objective indicators of that identity.

It would be interesting to propose some fresh answers to these questions, but as I need to get to the question of artistic expression of national identity, I will base my fundamental distinctions on the findings of other authors.

The problem of a culturally defined national identity is one of the most crucial (urgent and controversial) issues discussed today within the domain of social sciences. The notion of »national identity« should be distinguished not only from the notion of »patriotism«, but also from that of »nationalism«. Even staunch adherence to a given national identity does not necessarily lead to nationalism. After all, it follows from the sociological research carried out by Antonina Kłosowska and her associates that, »individual cases prove

that there is no necessary connection between strong, assertive national identification and ethnocentric nationalism» (1996, p. 468).

Research carried out by scores of sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, historians and social psychologists demonstrates that national identity is one of the most important and most stable forms of collective identity. Most research workers believe today that ethnic identity and national identity are rooted in culture which serves as the main bond within a group. Some authors go so far as to use interchangeably in some contexts the notions of »national identity« and »cultural identity«, since any national or ethnic identity could be largely reduced to cultural identity. For example, according to Kłoskowska, both ethnic and national groups are »corporate bodies in the form of communities determined by the relative identity and relative separateness of their cultural traits« (1996, p. 36), since »a common national culture constitutes a stronger, more tenacious and more effective determinant of social bonds than a common government« (1996, p. 27). The persistence of national culture endows the national community with a sense of continuity which is a prominent element of any identity.

Literature on this and related issues abounds in different, although often convergent, justifications of the special status of national identity. For example, Walicki notes that »the nation [...] possesses a powerful, historically shaped collective identity, encompassing both past and future generations, which is constantly bolstered even while it is being contested, and finds expression in the shared perception of a communion of anxieties, of a shared responsibility for the past and the future« (1997, p. 45).

Other factors which highlight the importance of national identity are discussed by Kai Nielsen, who states that it is »indeed a very important identity, an identity essential for many people to give meaning to their lives, vital for their sense of self-respect, essential for their sense of belonging and security – all things of fundamental value to human beings« (1996-97, p. 43).

An interesting vindication of the importance of national and cultural identity for individual human beings may be found in the works of W. Kymlicka and the Israeli researcher, Yael Tamir, who emphatically state that an individual cannot function outside his/her cultural context. It therefore follows that his/her autonomous decisions must depend on the cultural context. The instrumental value of national identity is largely based on the above observation. The cultural-national background plays a crucial role in the shaping of human axiological vistas and orientations, guiding individuals in their choice of appropriate conceptions of good, lifestyles, preferences and interests. And in particular, in shaping »their self-esteem demand on their ties with a lively and well respected community« (1998, p. 111).

But it is in the work of Kymlicka that one may find the most comprehensive appraisal of the value of national and cultural identity. I will limit myself to a presentation of only two of her main arguments. First and foremost, it is this identity which is particularly important from the point of view of an individual's personal freedom. For freedom cannot be simply reduced to the possibility of having a choice. Actually, freedom involves making a thoughtful, sensible choice out of »various options«. It is thanks to their allegiance to their national culture that »people have access to a range of meaningful options« (1995, p. 83), if only because allegiance to a culture and »familiarity with a culture« determines the limits of human knowledge and imagination. Broadly understood societal culture, which »tends to be a national culture [...] provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both the public and the private sphere« (1995, p. 76). Secondly, »cultural identity provides an anchor for people's self-identification and the safety of effortless secure belonging« (1995, p. 98). The point is that identification ensured by national identity »is based on belonging, not accomplishment« and such form of identification, independent of an individual's personal accomplishments, »is more secure, less liable to be threatened« (1995, p. 89).

Some contemporary authors, writing on national identity, claim that inevitable modernization processes and the liberalization of social life must result in the diminishment of inherited national identity, which today increasingly often becomes a matter of free choice. In this context some authors mention individuals who, opting for a cosmopolitan identity, try to find happiness precisely in the possibility of functioning between different cultures and making use of their divergent values, and who, not feeling any need for being firmly rooted in one culture, change their national identity at will (cf. J. Weldron).

W. Kymlicka and A. Walicki disagree with such views and defend the importance and persistence of national identity, which in their opinion may not be a question of free choice. First of all, the processes underlying national identity changes are of a highly individual and idiosyncratic character. They function over long time periods and are often difficult and even painful for the persons concerned, a fact which can be verified by any Czech who tried to become a Frenchman, or any Pole who wanted to be an Englishman, or a Vietnamese who would like to become Japanese. Secondly, it is not necessarily true that modernization of the world and liberalization of social life must inevitably endanger national identity. In some countries of the West (e.g. Canada, Belgium or Great Britain), »far from displacing national

identity, liberalization has in fact gone hand in hand with an increased sense of nationhood« (W. Kymlicka, 1995, p. 88). The pro-autonomy aspirations of the Flemish, the Scots and the Quebecois constitute more than adequate evidence for this suggestion. The fact that »culture became tolerant and pluralistic has, in no way, diminished the persuasiveness or intensity of people's desire to live and to work in their own country« (*ibid.*, p. 89).

Claiming that modernization does not constitute a threat to the persistence of national culture and national identity, Kymlicka nevertheless completely agrees with Samuel Huntington, in spite of the obvious differences between their views, on such issues as multiculturalism, the role of immigration and ethnic minorities in America.

One of the main motives of Huntington's seminal book was his constantly voiced opposition to the conception of the globalization of culture and Westernization of the world. In his opinion, Western civilization is not a universal civilizational model, and Westernization is not a necessary precondition for modernization. Even if the inevitable advent of modernization does destroy old authorities and communities, thereby uprooting people, this is not necessarily concomitant with the loss of the need for a separate identity. It often turns out that people need »new sources of identity, new forms of stable communities and new systems of moral norms, which would provide them with a sense of life and meaningfulness« (1997; p. 132). Modernization is not to be equated with Westernization, and at times it may even oppose it. The adoption by non-Western societies of »Western democratic institutions rouses nativist and anti-Western political movements« (1997; p. 127).

It follows from Social Identity Theory that »people determine their identity on the basis of who they are not [...] on the basis of what makes them different from others« (S. Huntington, p. 85). In the usual circumstances in this capacity they rely on stereotypes, both those describing members of their own community and those of others. »To achieve this positive identity, groups will tend to compare themselves positively with contrasting outgroups, and they seek dimensions of comparison on which they feel they fare well. For instance, nations will produce flattering stereotypes of themselves, and demeaning stereotypes of those other nations with which they compare themselves. The dimensions on which they pride their own qualities will be accorded importance. The flattering stereotypes, held by the ingroup about itself, and the unflattering ones about outgroups, will maintain the positive self-identity, which is necessary for the group's continuing existence« (M. Billig, p. 66).

Thus it is absolutely impossible to avoid national stereotypes in the

determination, articulation and consolidation of national identity. But if this is true, then there is only one small step from the defense of national identity to nationalistic xenophobia. The existence of national stereotypes is a universal and inevitable phenomenon. »One might conceivably argue,« notes American anthropologist Allan Dundes, »whether or not there is such a thing as national character [...] but there can be absolutely no question that there is such a thing as national stereotypes« (1983, p. 250). The same author, a renowned expert on folklore, writes further: »Folklore provides one of the principal sources for articulation and communication of stereotypes. An individual may gain his first impression of a national or ethnic or religious or racial group by hearing traditional jokes or expressions referring to the alleged personality characteristics of that group« (1983, pp. 250-51).

Today folklore no longer plays the important role it used to have in the past, but there exists a quasi-folklore in the form of mass culture which popularizes its own national stereotypes (usually xenophobic) to an extent quite comparable with that of traditional folklore. But what is even worse, it is not only folklore and mass culture but also official culture and authentic high art which contributes to the consolidation of national stereotypes. It is beyond the slightest doubt that national literatures have considerably contributed to the shaping of national identities. The classical example in Poland are the novels of Henryk Sienkiewicz, particularly his *Trilogy* and *Teutonic Knights*. A similar role was played by Walter Scott, Alexander Dumas, Lev Tolstoy, Alois Jirasek or Mor Jókai. They all glorified the magnificent past of their nations, and did not shun stereotypes in their literary missions. The first part of Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy* is absolutely cluttered with positive and negative national stereotypes, a fact which the Ukrainians were quite justified to criticize, pointing out both the glorification of Polish knights and the simplified, obviously negative image of the Cossacks. However, Sienkiewicz's Cossacks are almost angels compared to the Polish gentry as represented in Gogol's *Taras Bulba*. We may of course say that Sienkiewicz is »a first-class second-rate writer«, but we would certainly not venture a similar remark about Tolstoy. And yet we will also find out that in *War and Peace* negative characters are almost exclusively foreigners, while Russians epitomize all virtues. The same might be said about the works of Mikhail Bulgakov. Negative characters are invariably foreigners (Poles, Jews, Ukrainians), while Russians are always presented in a positive light.

I think that in our times, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, art in a broad sense (comprising both 'high' and 'low' art) can, and indeed does play a very important role vis-à-vis reviving aggressive nationalism and a real need to preserve national identities.

The problems of reviving or strengthening national identities and of the phenomenon of reviving authentic and radical nationalisms that, unfortunately, often accompany it, are – as evidenced by the number of publications on this subject – the object of much contemporary research conducted by historians, philosophers, sociologists and political scientists. These important current problems only to a slight extent attract the interest of aestheticians and other art students, though art has been and still is efficiently used in these two related but so different matters.

The argument about the future shape of Europe concerns, among others, the issue whether this will be a commonwealth of citizens, or a commonwealth of nation-states, each of them preserving its distinctive autonomous culture. It is hard to tell what the final results of the unification process will be. At the moment, though, the opinion that the lesser stress put on national identity, the more European the entity becomes, does not stand the confrontation with reality.

There is no doubt that in many European countries one can presently observe a visible revival of nationalistic ideologies. This revival may be a result, among others, of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and regaining of independence by such countries as Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Armenia, Georgia, Belorussia, Moldavia and Ukraine; the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and the regaining of greater autonomy by Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Romania. In all the countries which have recently gained autonomy the issue of national identity became paramount. In different countries the situation does not seem to be the same. It is different in countries with a strong national identity and a long history of independent statehood (e.g. Poland or Hungary), and different in countries which have a history of national statehood but which were subject to Russification over the last 50-70 years (e.g. Armenia, Lithuania, and Ukraine). Still different is the situation in the countries lacking a history of past statehood (e.g. Belorussia, Moldavia and Slovakia). In some of these countries the national identity has to be rebuilt and strengthened (e.g. Ukraine), in others it has to be built from the scratch (e.g. Belorussia or Moldavia).

Taking this into account, artists, scholars, journalists and other creators of culture may and should play an important role. They have to discover how to contribute to the rebirth of their national culture and identity, and how to support the validation of true national values without falling, at the same time, into radical nationalism and isolationism.

If we abandon the vague idea of *Volkgeist* which, according to Herder, can be found in national culture and collective behavior, then one may say

that national identity is a specific form of collective identity« and that the factor constituting this identity is, first of all, the existence of national culture and collective historical memory. »National identity – writes Leszek Kolakowski – requires *historical memory*. [...] The thing is that no nation can exist without being conscious of the fact that its present existence is an extension of the existence in the past, and that the further back these real or imagined memories reach, the better grounded its national identity is. Apart from historical knowledge, the past is also stored in various symbols, means of self-expression, in old buildings, temples and graves« (1995, p. 49).

It follows, then, that the historical memory is consolidated by monuments of the national culture. »The national culture is a repository, *inter alia*, of classificatory systems. It allows 'us' to define ourselves in opposition to 'them', understood as those beyond the boundaries of the nation« (P. Schlesinger, 1991, p. 174).

The importance of historical memory is also stressed by Michael Billig. According to him, »national identity is not only something natural to possess, but also something natural to remember. This remembering, nevertheless, involves a forgetting, or rather there is a complex dialectic of remembering and forgetting« (1997, p. 37). »Every nation must have its history, its own collective memory. This remembering is simultaneously a collective forgetting: the nation which celebrates its antiquity, forgets its historical recency. Moreover, nations forget the violence which brought them into existence« (p. 38).

The importance of the role of national culture for preserving national identity is consequently stressed by Antonina Kłosowska (see A. Kłosowska, 1996).

The formation, retention and reconstruction of national identity is not a single act, but a continuous process. In some historical periods the formation of national identity was a part of the nationalistic program. »However, once the political boundaries of the nation-state have been achieved, a national identity, with all the accompanying mythico-cultural apparatus, may be in place and is not necessarily identical with nationalism as such.« (P. Schlesinger, 1991, p. 168)

One can easily notice that at the turn of the 20th and the 21st century also the disciplines of philosophy and aesthetics face new important scholarly challenges. How can one find common denominators and combine the universalizing tendencies with the wealth of regional and national cultures? How can one preserve the variety and identity of national cultures without giving up integration and a search for a better mutual understanding and closer ties between nations?

As is well known, art broadly understood is often treated as a source of knowledge about cultures different from our own. Indeed, art in general (and literature and film in particular) can be employed as a very effective («objective» and suggestive) form of presentation of another culture: of a different system of values, different attitudes and different mentality. In this respect, art can be a very useful and helpful means of mutual understanding between people of different cultures. On the other hand, however, it can also be used very effectively to achieve the opposite objective: namely, the presentation of a one-sided, tendentious – shortly, false – picture of a different culture and of the representatives of a different system of values. Thus, instead of enhancing understanding, it becomes a source of misunderstanding, cultural prejudices and hostility.

I am interested in the question of how and when such a distortion is possible in the case of a novel or a film which at the same time is aesthetically valuable. This again raises the need to answer the following question: what is the mutual relationship between the cognitive, the aesthetic and the artistic values of a work of art and its ideological function? Is there any dependence or some other kind of regular link between the cognitive, the aesthetic and the artistic values of a work of art and its ideological and political effectiveness? Is it possible to make a work of art which presents an alien culture in a false, one-sided way, but at the same time does it so suggestively that to the majority of beholders the work in question may seem aesthetically and cognitively valuable?

I have no doubts that in such artistic domains as, for example, literature and the cinema, there exists a mutual connection between the cognitive aspects of a work and its artistic value, i.e. possible cognitive values of a literary or cinematic work enhance its artistic value. There is also a relation between the work's aesthetic attractiveness and the effectiveness of its ideological function, i.e. the higher the aesthetic clarity and suggestiveness of a work, the greater is its ideological impact.

The relationship between the truthfulness of the message carried by the work and its artistic status and ideological effectiveness is much more complex. This is so because the knowledge which we derive from the arts is, in comparison to scientific knowledge, less systematic, less profound and specific, not always equally well founded and as thoroughly verifiable and, as a rule, much more ambiguous. Consequently, it is much more difficult to separate the truth from the falsehood in a work or art. Hence art may very efficiently misinform us and very convincingly and suggestively present various false and groundless historical and political claims, interpretations and evaluations. It seems quite probable that in many national cultures one

could identify artworks which have played a significant role in shaping this nation's consciousness and identity, which are placed in the pantheon of national culture despite the fact that the picture of history or society they contain is, according to historians or sociologists, very one-sided, tendentious or evidently false. Hence one could risk the claim that even in those arts in which the cognitive values are very important – because they contribute to the value of the work itself (like in, e.g., literature or the cinema) – the cognitive (e.g., historical) falsity does not always disqualify the work of art *qua* work of art, provided that the work is distinguished by its formal perfectness and is not without some philosophical or psychological cognitive value.

In our discussion I propose, however, to concentrate on still other, equally fundamental and difficult questions which will highlight further aspects of the questions of national identity, collective consciousness, etc. These questions will deal with the role of art and artistic expression in shaping (structuring, sustaining, changing, etc.) the collective identity of nationals. Here I will try to specify the following problems:

1. What is the specificity, importance and value of national identity, not only with respect to a nation and a country but with respect to an individual, too?
2. Is it possible to combine one's loyalty to national values with national openness and, additionally, with axiological and cultural pluralism?
3. Is it possible to have a double or even triple cultural identity? Can one simultaneously feel Bavarian, German and European or Kashubian, Polish and European?
4. Can one speak of regional (subnational) and supranational cultural identities? Is there, for instance, on the one hand, a Moravian or Silesian cultural identity and, on the other, a Central European, European, Latin-American, Slavonic or Islamic identity?
5. What are the relationships between one's national identity and the symbolic culture, and especially with its broadly understood artistic means of communication (proper not only to high art but also, to some extent, to mass media)? Can various forms of artistic expression only express (reveal and bring forth) and preserve, or also shape and even construct someone's national identity?
6. What is the relationship between national values and artistic values? I ask here not only whether art can strengthen a national culture, popularize a set of national values and strengthen one's national loyalty, but also whether the national values may enrich art, and especially, whether in the situation of the emergence of a global culture and market economy

(which has also left its imprint on art) the national character condemns art to parochialism and provincialism. Is it true that, in order to endow a piece of art with universal values and ensure for it an existence on the international art market, one has to necessarily mineralize its national provenance, its ethnic coloring and dress it up in a cosmopolitan way? And, finally, is it true that in all arts and on all their levels the situation is exactly the same?

I hope that a thorough discussion of the above questions can throw more light on the role of the arts in shaping the national (collective) identities of peoples.

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Arto Haapala
Aesthetics, Ethics, and the Meaning of Place

I

There are many reasons for distinguishing aesthetics and ethics from each other, but the most obvious ones are probably historical. The tradition stemming from Baumgarten and Kant largely understood aesthetics in the original Greek sense of the word: *aisthanomai*, to perceive or sense. Aesthetics is primarily a matter of the senses, especially the 'higher senses', seeing and hearing. Ethics is concerned with principles distinguishing morally acceptable actions from immoral ones, or setting standards for a good life. Aesthetics deals with matters that are somehow more vague and indefinite than ethical problems, and aesthetics is, indeed, based on something less reliable and permanent – the senses – compared to ethics where reason and rational justifications seem to have a greater role. This has contributed, no doubt, to the evaluation and ranking of them in philosophy: aesthetics has been seen as the least important field, coming well behind the more sophisticated and well-grounded fields of epistemology and ethics. These distinctions and their validity have been questioned,¹ and there have been numerous arguments and attempts to establish, for example, the cognitive function of art, Hans-Georg Gadamer's being one of the most well-known.² However, the ways we think about aesthetics and ethics are still strongly marked by this tradition.

I do not want to question the rationale of these divisions; I do think that we need a distinction between aesthetic and ethical issues to make more sense of our world. In this paper I consider an area crucial to our understanding of ourselves and our position in the world where the distinction becomes not only problematic but disappears altogether. In our everyday dealings with the surroundings we have made our own we are within a sphere that exemplifies how both aesthetic and ethical issues overlap

¹ See Wolfgang Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), translated by Andrew Inkpin, 60-102.

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), second, revised edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 81-100.

to a significant degree. All this comes together in the concept of place. Place understood in the sense of a person's meaningful and significant location brings together aesthetics and ethics. When living in a place – or more existentially, when living a place – we are rooted to our surroundings in such a way that both our aesthetic and moral judgements are determined by the deep ties that we have developed. It is because of this existential foundation that the distinction between aesthetic and ethical aspects of life tends to disappear. In certain areas of life, but not in all, beauty and goodness come together.

I shall first delineate a short existential account of the concepts of 'place' and 'world' or 'life world'. I call my account 'existential' because I am interested in the structures of the life world, and the life world is determined by human existence and its structures. The 'existentials'³ of human existence are also the structures of our life world. The hermeneutic circle of human and world, or human and history, means that we as human beings are also determined by the world.⁴ The interweaving of human and world is one of my starting points, and it creates the ontological foundation for my understanding of aesthetics, ethics and their role in human existence.

My emphasis will be in environmental issues in a broad sense. I am interested in the human environment, including art, the built environment, and to some extent the natural environment. I shall discuss some consequences of my account for our understanding of the human environment, but I shall not go into issues such as ecology, conservation and restoration.

II

Let me begin with the concepts of 'culture' and 'tradition'. These are crucial terms in understanding what is meant by world or by life world. Historicity and tradition are grounding ideas in hermeneutics and figure prominently in Gadamer's thinking. For Heidegger, the hermeneutic circle was existential in nature in the sense that the human way of being, existence, was characterised by a 'fore-understanding' of Being in general.⁵ To grasp

³ Martin Heidegger introduces the notion of the 'existential', '*ein Existenzial*' to distinguish his ideas from Kantian categories. Macquarrie and Robinson translate the term as 'existentials' (pl. 'existentialia'), *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 70 and 79, but this is somewhat clumsy. See *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1979), 44 and 54.

⁴ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 424-449; Gadamer, *op. cit.*, 254-264.

⁵ See Heidegger, *op. cit.*, 358-364; Gadamer, *op. cit.*, 265-271.

Being in general we must study human existence, and this is what Heidegger does in *Being and Time*. For Gadamer, the question is more 'mundane': the role of historicity in understanding in the humanities, and the importance of tradition in human life. Gadamer criticizes the Enlightenment for neglecting the role of history and for operating with the concept of pure, non-historical reason, and he goes so far as to make morals also relative to a tradition:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us – and not just what is clearly grounded – always has power over our attitudes and behaviour. ... The real force of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reasons. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity. And in fact it is to romanticism that we owe this correction of the Enlightenment: that tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes.⁶

I shall not take a stance on the question of whether all moral principles are based only on tradition or whether they have a more fundamental justification, be it rational or otherwise. But when we come to aesthetic problems, then, I think, we are firmly on a historical foundation. Our aesthetic culture – our practices within the arts as well as judgements concerning the aesthetic value of our environment – has gained its present form during the course of history. There would not be any aesthetic culture without its tradition, and if its tradition had been different, our aesthetic culture would also be different. Our aesthetic culture is structured in certain ways and quite complex, with a number of contrasting tendencies.

It is also *time* that makes a cultural practice possible and guarantees its existence. The longer a tradition is, the stronger it is. A tradition always has the tendency to multiply itself by producing objects and events of the same kind and creating new practices around itself. This means that the structures are further strengthened and their existence is taken more and more for granted. Here, 'the test of time' means that time justifies the existence of certain practices as well as objects and events that go with it; there are no timeless criteria which would constitute the test and through which different objects and events would have to pass. There is no logic beyond time that would provide an explanation and a rationale for the present state of affairs.

Once there is a tradition its structures are always the basis for new things to come. But in the development of the Western art world, there can occur

⁶ Gadamer, *ibid.*, 280-281.

strands at certain times in history which go very much against of the tradition. This is what many avant-garde movements have done. A general theory cannot explain why these sorts of developments take place, or why many other different kinds of developments take place. We have to refer to particular circumstances – economic, religious, social – and to particular individuals living and making decisions in these circumstances.

The Heideggerian ideas of the relatedness of Being in general and human existence could be applied to clarify the relationship between cultural structures and an individual living within them. The *Sein*, being, in our *Dasein*, there-being, is formed by the different cultural structures into which we are born. One of the 'sites' (*das Da*) which we inhabit is the aesthetic culture. The way we exist in our aesthetic culture, that is, what we as human beings in the existential sense are as far as aesthetic matters are concerned, is set by constituents of that culture. We have an 'aesthetic nature' of a certain kind because we were 'thrown into'⁷ an aesthetic culture of a certain kind. One of the existentials of our existence is the 'aesthetic existential'. In a Heideggerian manner we could also investigate the nature of our aesthetic culture through a study of our 'aesthetic existential'; and *vice versa* by exploring the aesthetic culture we throw light on ourselves as entities existing in this culture.⁸

I have been talking about 'aesthetic culture'. I understand the word 'culture' as synonymous with the word 'world', so, we can use the expression, 'aesthetic world'. This raises further Heideggerian points. Heidegger writes about the world and its relation to entities within it as follows:

The world itself is not an entity within-the-world; and yet it is so determinative for such entities that only in so far as 'there is' a world can they be encountered and show themselves, in their Being, as entities which have been discovered. But in what way 'is there' a world? If *Dasein* is ontically constituted by Being-in-the-World, and if an understanding of the Being of its Self belongs just as essentially to its Being ... then does not *Dasein* have an understanding of the world – a pre-ontological understanding, which indeed can and does get along without explicit ontological insights? With those entities which are

⁷ In *Being and Time* Heidegger defines 'thrownness': »This characteristic of *Dasein*'s Being – this 'that it is' – is veiled in its 'whence' and 'whither', yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the 'thrownness' of this entity into its 'there'; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the 'there'.« (174)

⁸ This reciprocity has important consequences for many traditional problems in aesthetics, for example interpretation; see Arto Haapala, »Interpretation, Context, and the Ethics of Interpretation – An Essay in Existential Aesthetics«, in *Interpretation and Its Boundaries* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1999), edited by Arto Haapala and Ossi Naukkarinen, 162-176.

encountered within-the-world – that is to say, with their character as within-the-world – does not something like the world show itself for the concerned Being-in-the-world?⁹

Humans as entities existing in the world are constituted by being-in-the-aesthetic-world. And in so far as we have been acquainted with the aesthetic world, we have also developed a pre-ontological understanding of its structures. As we are dealing with or taking care of the entities existing in the aesthetic world – works of art, buildings, design objects, natural objects and landscapes – we are at the same time necessarily taking care of the aesthetic world, although the world itself is not an object or event in the same sense as entities within-the-world. The aesthetic world is indeed the precondition of any aesthetic object and event, but at the same time the world would not exist without its objects. The world makes individual things possible, and it can exist and manifest itself only through these entities. This is also true for the strand of human existence I have called the ‘aesthetic existential’: there is a mutual dependence between this aspect of human being and the aesthetic world.

I have so far deliberately avoided the expression ‘art world’, and used instead the broader expression ‘aesthetic world’. Worlds of art – music, visual arts, literature, film, theatre, etc. – are paradigmatic examples of the aesthetic world. Many of our aesthetic practises have been established in one art form or another, and the practices vary depending on the era and the art form. Visual arts in the Middle Ages were very different compared to now. The observations I have made of the aesthetic world apply to the art world as well. But I would like to broaden the scope because my concerns in this essay are mainly about non-artistic objects. However, I do not deny the significance and influence of art on our aesthetic culture as a whole.

III

I have now established the foundation of our aesthetic culture, and shown some of the complicated relations there are between the aesthetic world, aesthetic objects and human existence. Let me now turn to the concept of place. The concept has become common and popular in recent analysis of the human environment. It is worth noting that Heidegger’s writings on ‘dwelling’ have inspired numerous writers.¹⁰ Rather than going into a

⁹ Heidegger, *op. cit.*, 102.

¹⁰ See Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 17-18, 37-41; Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place – Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-*

discussion of the concept of place, let me simply stipulate a meaning for the term. This will allow me to clarify its relationship to the aesthetic world and our experience of aesthetic objects. This will in turn provide a path to considering how aesthetic and ethics coincide in this context.

When writing this essay at my office I have a place. I occupy a place in the straight forward physical sense: I am sitting in my chair, which is in my office, which is in a building, etc. But I am not interested in the Cartesian sense – as Heidegger calls it – of an object and its place in the world.¹¹ I do not want to define place in terms of a fixed space so that a certain space or spaces would be necessary for my place. I have a place in the more sophisticated sense of the word. I have a place in the sense that I have a relationship to humans, to different things and events around me. My place is meaningful and significant for me because I have construed different kinds of relations to entities surrounding me. I have familiarised myself with the immediate surroundings of my office. Most of the things inside the office are ‘ready-to-hand’ – they are there for me so that I can use them. The computer, telephone and all the books and papers are familiar to me, within my reach, and I see them as entities which exist for my purposes.¹² But also the view from the window, the corridor behind my office door, the different routes I take to the office, the lecture halls in which I teach, these also constitute my place. I create a place for myself within the structures of a cultural world by connecting different sorts of ties to different sorts of entities. My place has more or less permanent features to which I return almost every day, like my home and my office.

In the existential sense that I want to define it, place is, thus, the former-significant-and-meaningful-collection-of-entities. I am using the word ‘entity’ broadly to cover not only physical things, but also all kinds of cultural objects and events, such as different organisations and institutions, cultural practices and conventions, but also other human beings who are defined by their relations to entities which are significant and meaningful to them. World is the historically structured foundation that gives us entities with meaning and value; place is a selection of different culturally meaningful entities that are significant for particular individuals because of their actions, interests, or anything that has an influence on their evaluations and decisions.

World (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 109-145. I have analysed the concept of place in more detail in my ‘On the Aesthetics of the Everyday – Familiarity, Strangeness and the Meaning of Place’, forthcoming in *Philosophy and Geography*, Vol. IV: *Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, 1999.

IV

Now we have a view to the basic ontological structure of the world and humans within it in terms of aesthetic world and place. Where does the relationship between aesthetics and ethics come in? The idea of aesthetic culture already raises the basic issues in aesthetics, such as aesthetic value. Let me look at the status of aesthetic values within the aesthetic world and proceed in this way to the more general problems of values and evaluation.

Our aesthetic culture is deeply marked by values; the structures defining our aesthetic existential and from which all aesthetic objects are born are value-laden. The role of values is manifested very clearly in pieces that are regarded as classics – a classic is by definition valuable in some respect. In the arts in particular, classics are defined within a period or style. J.S. Bach's pieces are classics within the corpus of baroque music; Tolstoy's novels are classics within the canon of Russian literature. The criteria of goodness in Bach's music and in Tolstoy's novels differ understandably to a great extent already because music and literature appeal to different aspects of our existence, music more often to our emotions, literature to our cognitive faculties. To be a real classic, the piece must go beyond its original context; Bach is clearly not limited to the Baroque, but to the whole tradition of Western music. As Gadamer puts it:

...when we call something classical, there is a consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and that is independent of all circumstances of time – a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present.¹³

I shall, however, concentrate here on the more personal side of our aesthetic evaluations. Joseph Margolis has made a distinction between 'appreciative judgments' and 'findings'. When talking about 'findings' there is a widely accepted set of norms to which one refers in justifying a claim, whereas in appreciative judgments personal preferences, or 'taste' as he calls it, have a role to play. He writes:

... findings obtain where some set of the actual properties of an object are, on a theory, taken to be sufficient for the ascription of a certain value; the informality with which such properties may be specified does not affect the logical status of findings. But appreciative judgments obtain where, precisely, the actual (the minimally describable) properties of an object are 'filtered' through the personal tastes and

¹¹Heidegger, *ibid.*, 122-134.

¹²This is Heidegger's 'Umsicht', *Sein und Zeit*, 69; in English translation, 'circumspection', *Being and Time*, 98.

¹³Gadamer, *op. cit.*, 288.

sensibilities of the agent of judging; there, no set of the actual properties of an object are sufficient to justify the ascription of the relevant value. Hence, on an appropriate theory, we say that an object *has* a certain value (findings) or one is justified only in *ascribing* a certain value to that object (appreciative judgments).¹⁴

I am interested in appreciative judgments rather than findings. A finding is a judgment about a constitutive feature within the aesthetic world – like »Bach's 'Matthew Passion' has great artistic (or aesthetic) merit« – an appreciative judgment says more about the speaker – »Finnish landscapes in the winter are very calming and beautiful«. But both findings and appreciative judgments play a role in aesthetics; in Margolis's view »appreciative matters dominate ... in the aesthetic domain«.¹⁵

What is it that makes some aesthetic objects more significant for us than others? Why is it that certain works speak to us more than others? There are cases in which we acknowledge the value of a piece, it may even be a classic, and still we cannot enjoy it. This does not have to be a case of 'aesthetic acrasia', i.e. that we cannot enjoy the aesthetic value of a piece because of some kind of personal defect in us. I want to look at cases where we are able to create a particularly deep relation to an aesthetic object. These kinds of bonds are, I think, often based in particular characteristics of our place.

I can develop a taste for certain kinds of art by systematically studying a particular style and getting more and more familiar with the features that constitute it. Or I may develop a taste unknowingly, for example when living in a particular environment, be it rural or urban, and I may start to appreciate that particular environment or that kind of milieu more generally. I might begin to feel attached to particular kinds of aesthetic objects. Because of my place and the 'horizon' that is created by it, I have an affinity with certain kinds of aesthetic objects. Some of these affinities are based on very fundamental human existentials: to be a man or to be a woman clearly shapes different kinds of affinities. These primary divisions are, however, made more complicated by numerous other factors that define human existence – all the cultural aspects that are essential for the human way of being, as well as the personal aspects of individuals living and acting in a culture.

Place is, indeed, the horizon that determines our perceptions and preferences. Gadamer defines 'horizon' in this way:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of 'situation' by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence the essential concept of situation is the

¹⁴ Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1989), 223-224.

¹⁵ Margolis, *ibid.*, 224.

concept of 'horizon'. The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of the narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening of new horizons, and so forth.¹⁶

Our places and horizons are by no means fixed, on the contrary, the existential and historicist conception of human existence I have developed is very explicit about the possibility of change. But it is also an existential fact that the range of choices diminishes in the course of time – my existence is by now much more determined than twenty years ago. It is this construal of one's existence that limits our choices and decides our preferences.

The connection between a place and aesthetics is, however, more complicated than that. There is a tendency to feel affinity to something familiar that is part of one's own existence, but one of the striving forces behind different developments in Western art is the search for something new. In the visual arts this tendency has been very clear, and it reveals the other side to aesthetics – the values innovativeness and strangeness. In the contemporary arts, the uncanny and the shocking have played a significant role. By contrast, in everyday surroundings strangeness has had a significantly minor role, not only in the aesthetics of natural environments but also in urban settings. Although one can point out singular examples of striking buildings and built areas, as well as spectacular natural scenes, it is still true to say, that generally speaking strangeness does not have such importance in environmental aesthetics.

In the 'aesthetics of place' I am putting emphasis on those aspects of aesthetics where familiarity rather than strangeness dominate. My place is dear to me because it is part of my existence. All features of one's place do not have to be beautiful in any strong or definite sense of the word, but there is a tendency to value them positively. The relation between a person and entities constituting his or her place is an affectionate one; when we are in constant contact with our surroundings and have created our very own personal ties to it, it becomes something to which we cannot have an indifferent attitude. Our place is too close to us for us to have any distance from it.

As I have tried to show above, this closeness is ontological in nature: is not something independent from us but precisely the personal in our existence. This means that there can be tensions and contradictions between a person's aesthetic preferences and more generally accepted aesthetic standards. A suburban area can be very dear to somebody who has lived

¹⁶Gadamer, *op. cit.*, 302.

there during his or her childhood even though an outsider would estimate its aesthetic value to be very low. We gain satisfaction through a kind of comforting security: the aesthetic pleasure of place is based on the fact that we know it so well; it is something we can trust; it is not threatening; it does question our preferences, values or indeed, existence.

Even the ugly aspects of one's place – ugly again by some culturally defined standards – gain some aesthetic value. They may contribute to the stability and comfort that is essential in place. An old pair of shoes may be repulsive to someone who does not know their history and has not used them. For the owner, they are both familiar and comfortable, and it is in this that their aesthetic value lies. This does not mean, however, that we prefer no changes to our surroundings. We may well be willing to allow even major modifications if the surroundings are aesthetically, socially, or in some other respects defective. The point I am making is that being part of a place imbues every entity with value for a person.

This value can be understood also in ethical terms: my place defines my way of existing and any change in the place has some consequences for my existence. Let me take an extreme example to illustrate these moral implications. It is morally wrong to move people from an area without a compelling reason. A compelling reason could be, for example, that there is something poisonous in the area that constitutes a health hazard to people living there. There could be other compelling reasons, but for my argument it is not necessary to define as what constitutes a compelling reason.

It is clear that there are reasons which are not compelling from the point of view of those living there. To force people to move because of their race or age, is, generally speaking, morally wrong, although there might be singular cases and contexts in which even such actions could be justified. With recent shocking cases of ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, it becomes obvious that the arguments used by all parties of the conflict are of the form that a particular area is an essential part of a nation's identity. The reference is to larger cultural structures that then serve as a ground for the constitution of individual places, and in this way are also parts of places. So there is a very deep existential and moral dimension in the concept of place.

V

The existential, the moral, and the aesthetic aspects are intertwined together in complicated ways. My judgments about my place are not objective, but necessarily 'biased'. My place has aesthetic value simply

because I am existentially tied to it, and through this existential connection I am attached to it emotionally too. It has ethical value because it is at the heart of my existence and a changing of it would affect my existence. Entities in my place are, in a way, part of me, and so I tend to see them as beautiful and worth preserving. Once again I have to stress that this is a tendency, not a general rule. We can each point out things constituting our place that we would rather replace with something else. It might be a building style we do not like, or it might be something more abstract, like an institution or a custom that goes against our nature.

Let me finally draw some conclusions regarding judgments about the environment. If my existential analysis is on the right track, there seem to be two very different sorts of value judgments. When I am talking about my closest environment, about something that constitutes my place, my judgments are derived from my very own existential constituents, and accordingly they are very much about myself. They do not say much about the environment as such, but rather about a possible way of life. For a New Yorker the city of New York is the familiar surrounding which exemplifies numerous positive qualities: it is rich and exciting, maybe sometimes even cosy and homely. For an outsider New York may appear as threatening and hostile. These judgments stem from very different grounds, different ways of life constituting different horizons. They are both genuine and in their own contexts acceptable verdicts. But because of their incompatible points of departure, they cannot be placed on same scale. They address different places. This is Margolis's appreciative judgment: taking pleasure from matching one's way of life with the surroundings or displeasure from the lack of such matching.

But our value judgments about the environment are not always subjective in this sense. There are culturally accepted values the validity of which is not dependent on any individual preferences. Classics are paradigmatic examples of this, and there are classics in all fields of culture. Also, many natural scenes have gained the status of a classic, for example Niagara Falls or the Rocky Mountains. Classics exemplify certain values and they maintain these values. Value judgments in this sense are in a cultural sphere. Cultural entities exist within a culture, and this goes for cultural values too. Someone may not like Bach's music, but this does not deny its cultural value. To do the latter would only show ignorance of our music culture.

Both cultural values and our personal preferences, both world and place, are rooted in our existence. They determine what we are and how we view things around. This also means that goodness and beauty go hand in hand: the way I am in the world is both an ethical and aesthetic issue.

The determining grounds and character of my place are of utmost importance for me in every sense of the word because these are matters that constitute what, as a human being, I finally am. Place is not an imperative, it is rather an exemplification of certain choices and decisions that a particular human being has made, and that further constitute this particular individual as a human being. These are the origins of human existence as a cultural entity and as an individual with distinctive features distinguishing him or her from other humans.

René Passeron
Esthétique et poïétique

Ce n'est pas seulement pour remercier le professeur Aleš Erjavec d'avoir donné une place à la poïétique, à l'intérieur d'un Congrès d'Esthétique qu'il a si bien organisé, que je vais ouvrir mon intervention par un éloge de l'esthétique, c'est pour mieux faire ressortir, en fin de compte, l'opposition de l'esthétique et de la poïétique. Et cet éloge de l'esthétique n'aura pas besoin de s'attarder sur la définition d'une spécialité scientifique et philosophique si souvent définie dans sa diversité, de l'Abbé du Bos à Baumgarten et Kant, de Hegel à Croce et Monroe Beardsley, de Marx à Lusaka et Adorno, de Robert Wischer à Victor Basch, de Taine à Charles Lalo, de Platon à Jouffroy, pour aboutir à Thomas Munro, Arthur Danto, George Dickie, Mikel Dufrenne, Etienne Souriau et leurs élèves, plus tant d'amateurs d'art, tant de critiques férus de théories, tant d'amateurs de beauté, y compris les esthéticiennes de profession et les chirurgiens que l'on dit esthétiques. Souriau tenait à la fois que l'esthétique s'occupe spécifiquement des formes et qu'elle est un «arbre» aux branches touffues. Sur ce dernier point, comment ne pas lui donner raison ?

I

Toutes les définitions de l'esthétique, depuis les plus larges, celles qui en font plus qu'une «philosophie de l'art», une philosophie générale et une métaphysique des affects, dans tous les domaines du sensible, jusqu'aux plus étroites, comme celles qui la limitent à la sociologie du goût, voire à la psycho-physiologie expérimentale des organes des sens, toutes ces définitions me conviennent, dès lors qu'elles ont pour centre d'intérêt l'*aisthesis*.

Qu'est-ce que l'*aisthesis*, en effet, sinon une sensation qui ne s'en tient pas aux plaisirs de l'*hédonè*, mais dialectiquement suscite la pensée, enrichit la psyché et donne à chacun sa vision du monde. N'est-ce pas là une extension considérable ? Et je souligne que toute chose, naturelle ou culturelle, artistique ou scientifique, corporelle ou spirituelle, peut déclencher en nous des sensations émotionnelles, dignes de s'intégrer à une méditation esthétique. Contre les réducteurs qui limiteraient l'esthétique à

des commentaires sur l'art, Lalo par exemple, considérant comme «anesthétique» toute émotion venue de la nature, je trouve que la nature est parfois si belle qu'elle désespère l'artiste, au point qu'un peu de sensibilité à la lumière du réel vous enlèvera toute prétention paysagiste, fût-elle soutenue par le génie d'un Turner ou d'un Claude Monet. Contre les théoriciens qui réduisent l'esthétique à une élaboration philosophique de la «rationalité de l'art» – cette rationalité, à les entendre, n'ayant pas plus de raison que l'art n'a d'unité possible – je tiens que l'esthétique vivante se joue du carcan que ses catégories conceptuelles ont composé avec tant de finesse, toute catégorie devant, à mes yeux, subir les outrages de l'ambiguïté. Régenter l'art par un ordre philosophique est encore plus incertain que régenter la science, l'économie ou la morale. Gardons à l'esthétique sa précieuse méditation sur le qualitatif, pour qu'elle éclaire les grandes structures du ressentir : l'admiration, la haine, l'amour, l'espoir, le deuil, tous sentiments qui donnent un sens à la vie et conditionnent si souvent la conduite créatrice, objet topique de la poïétique... Contre les formalistes (même s'ils se défendent d'en être, comme Souriau) je conteste qu'on puisse ramener l'esthétique, afin que soit dépassée l'opposition entre art et nature, à une science philosophique des formes. D'abord parce que nombre de richesses informelles sont des aliments de la sensibilité esthétique, secondement, parce que forme et contenu ne sont pas toujours distinguables, et qu'enfin, tant de formes n'ont rien à voir avec l'esthétique. Le formel et les formalités juridiques, mathématiques, logiques, logistiques, morales, éthiques et déontologiques ont leur spécificité irréductible. Car, si j'accepte parfaitement que l'affectivité se glisse partout, au point qu'on puisse même parler du primat de l'affectivité dans une philosophie des *a priori*, je refuse que l'on confonde les formes qui, par elles-mêmes, sont émouvantes et expressives, avec les formalités administratives ou fiscales, dont je vois mal qu'elles puissent susciter une vision du monde. À moins, bien sûr, qu'elles ne se répercutent dans la vie quotidienne pour lui apporter des traits dérisoires ou comiques, ou tragiques, comme Kafka...

Contre Étienne Souriau, qui appelle encore esthétique l'étude des activités instauratrices, avec Mikel Dufrenne, pour qui «l'objet de l'esthétique, c'est d'abord l'irrésistible et magnifique présence du sensible»¹, avec Bachelard, qui dépasse la réflexion esthétisante vers une méditation sur l'imagination matérielle, avec André Breton, pour qui «la beauté convulsive sera érotique-voilée, explosante-fixe, magique-circonstancielle,

¹ Mikel Dufrenne, *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*, Paris, PUF, 1953, 2 vol., t. II, p. 127.

ou ne sera pas»², et tient que «seul le merveilleux est beau», je puis proclamer que l'esthétique a pour objet de conscience et de réflexion tout l'univers qui vient à nous par les sens, les sentiments, le langage affectif, bref, la totalité du monde reçu par le *dasein*, aux trois niveaux de sa situation, personnelle, historique et fondamentale. Et ceux qui se méfient de l'esthétique, les surréalistes notamment, auront intériorisé cette conscience du monde, pour en faire, dans les fantasmes de l'amour (Breton) et le tragique de la cruauté (Artaud), le «modèle intérieur» où leur conduite créatrice, moins automatique qu'on ne le dit, sera directement racinée.

II

Or, dans la vaste perspective de son éveil à la totalité, la conscience esthétique sait distinguer assez vite ce qui relève de la nature – ce ciel – et ce qui relève de la culture – cette langue –, voire de l'art, ce palais. Et c'est là que va s'amorcer un rétrécissement progressif, non pas de l'esthétique elle-même, mais de l'objet offert par la conscience à une étude spécialisée. Le monde des œuvres se démarque du monde naturel. Et les sciences dites humaines vont se développer à l'extérieur des sciences de la nature : elles sont en majorité des sciences de l'œuvres en tant que produit de l'activité humaine. Et, parmi tout ce que les hommes ont produit dans leur histoire, il est possible de discerner ce que Valéry appelait «les œuvres de l'esprit», et parmi elles, domaine encore plus restreint, malgré tant de chefs-d'œuvre inscrit au patrimoine de l'humanité, les œuvres d'art. Et, dans ce cercle des arts, chaque domaine particulier, de l'architecture à la chanson, et des arts sacrés aux arts d'agrément.

Se développent alors des disciplines qui se défendent d'appartenir à l'esthétique et se consacrent, avec une froideur clinique, à l'anatomie interne de chaque corpus historique de création, à la structure propre à chaque œuvre, à la sémiotique possible de ses éléments, à ses effets rhétoriques et à sa stylistique, comme à l'herméneutique nécessaire à ses interprétations. Il s'agit des sciences de l'art et, plus largement des sciences de toute œuvre en tout domaine. Ainsi, la «psychologie comparative historique» d'Ignace Meyerson étend son objet à tous les secteurs institutionnels des créations possibles. Cette méthode objective a pour principe de ne pas faire intervenir les goûts esthétiques, ou les croyances religieuses, de l'historien et ne s'intéresse aux valeurs, esthétiques ou autres, qu'en ceci qu'elles sont elles-mêmes des œuvres.

² André Breton, *L'amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard, 1937, p. 26.

En marge des disciplines scientifiques et universitaires, on aura remarqué l'activité intense de tout un monde d'essayistes allant chercher dans les arts des exemples utiles à leurs démonstrations : Foucault, Deleuze, Barthes, Derrida ou Lacan, etc., ne sont nullement portés à se ranger sous une bannière esthétique. Force est de constater que leur succès a contribué à un certain discrédit de l'esthétique tentaculaire. Si l'on maintient que celle-ci englobe les sciences de l'art, il faudra m'expliquer pourquoi les autorités universitaires – Souriau en tête – ont jugé bon, quand on a baptisé l'*Institut d'esthétique* de l'Université de Paris I d'ajouter à son intitulé *et des sciences de l'art*. était-ce tautologie ? Que non... J'ai dirigé pendant plusieurs années cet Institut et je puis témoigner que les différentes équipes qui le constituaient ont su rigoureusement s'appliquer à des recherches autonomes, ayant leurs méthodes particulières, et sachant très bien se trouver des noms propres, comme la *poétique* de Todorov, la *psychologie de la culture* de Francès³, cette psychologie devenant expérimentale avec Yvonne Bernard et François Molnar, – tandis que l'esthétique dite générale restait une réflexion à tendance historiciste sur les formes de l'art dans leurs rapports avec les formes de l'esprit.

III

Un pas de plus s'imposait. De l'analyse interne et structurale de œuvre, l'une de nos équipes est passée à la question de son origine. Avec Liliane Brion et le copieux ouvrage sur *L'année 1913, les formes esthétiques en Europe à la veille de la première guerre mondiale*⁴, cette équipe s'appelait encore «Groupe de recherches esthétiques du CNRS». Quand j'ai proposé que celui-ci s'attache à l'étude de ce que Valéry, dans son cours au Collège de France, en 1937, avait appelé la *poiétique*, ce groupe a pris l'intitulé «Groupe de recherche en philosophie de l'art et de la création»... Le mot était liché. Création ! Comment des chercheurs scientifiques osaient-ils prononcer ce mot théologique, obscur, interdit de discours par le positivisme («Rien ne se crée»), le structuralisme, la sociologie néo-durkheimienne et la bonne pensée dite dominante des cénacles universitaires ? Les différentes sortes d'esthéticiens et les essayistes sérieux ne prononçaient ce gros-mot que du bout des lèvres, pour en confisquer l'étude, diluée dans des considérations existentielles, phénoménologiques, socio-historiques, psychologiques et

³ Sous la dir. de Robert Francès, *Psychologie de l'art et de la culture*, Paris, PUF, 1979.

⁴ Sous la dir. de Liliane Brion, *L'année 1913. Les formes esthétiques à la veille de la première guerre mondiale*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1971, 3 vol.

sémiologiques, lui préférant le mot vague de production, ou celui d'instauration, voire une étrange *esthetica pratica*, sans lendemain... Qu'on ouvre le *Vocabulaire d'esthétique*⁵ : le mot création y est noyé dans le brouillard d'une non-définition...

Pourtant, ce mot revenait à la mode dans la vie sociale et commerciale. La Haute-couture faisait défiler ses «créations». Les premières au théâtre devenaient des «créations mondiales». Le maître du parti, Paul Ricard, prônait «un volume de passion et cinq volumes de création». Une journaliste parlait d'une «partie de création époustouflante»... Il devenait urgent de clarifier ce terme.

La poïétique s'en est chargée. Entre 1975 et 1982 sont parus les cinq tomes de la série *Recherches poïétiques*⁶. Puis, à l'occasion du premier colloque international de poïétique, en 1989, a été fondée la Société Internationale de Poïétique (SIP). Deux rencontres internationales ont lieu ensuite, à Carthage et à Aix-en-Provence. C'est maintenant dans la revue *Recherches poïétiques*⁷ publiée par la SIP et l'Université de Valenciennes – le numéro 7 vient de sortir – qu'il faut suivre le développement de cette discipline.

Remarquons que son sujet est des plus étroits. Platon, dans *Le Sophiste*⁸ distingue à l'intérieur de la *téchnè* deux domaines, celui de la débrouillardise du pêcheur à la ligne, la *ktétikè téchnè*, et celui du véritable créateur, la *poïetikè téchnè*. Dans l'art, la poïétique n'étudie que la seule conduite créatrice... Passant de l'esthétique, dont l'objet est immense, à la poïétique, occupée uniquement de la conduite humaine en ce qu'elle a de créateur, nous sommes non seulement remontés d'un objet large à un objet resserré, mais, par une mutation aux conséquences considérables, de la philosophie de la sensibilité à celle de l'action. Certes, la sensibilité n'est pas absente des conduites créatrices, mais elle n'en est pas l'élément topique. L'artiste, par exemple, n'est pas forcément plus sensible que n'importe qui, mais il est de ceux qui passent à l'acte. D'ailleurs, la poïétique s'occupe moins des affects

⁵ Sous la dir. d'Etienne et Anne Souriau, *Vocabulaire d'esthétique*, Paris, PUF, 1990, p. 522.

⁶ Sous la dir. de René Passeron, *Recherches poïétiques* :

t. I, *La poïétique*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1975.

t. II, *Le Matériau*, *ibid*, 1976.

t. III, *La création collective*, Paris, Clancier-Guénaud, 1981.

t. IV, *Création et répétition*, *ibid*, 1982.

t. V, *La Présentation*, Paris, éd. du CNRS, 1985.

⁷ *Recherches poïétiques*, revue de la Société internationale de Poïétique et de l'Université de Valenciennes, Paris, ae2cg éd., deux numéros par an depuis 1994. Vient de paraître le n°7.

⁸ Platon, *Le Sophiste*, 219 d, repris en 268 a.

de l'artiste que des linéaments dynamiques, volontaires et involontaires, qui le lient à œuvre en train. Bref, son objet est la *poiësis* qui affronte le créateur à son projet, et non l'*aisthesis* qu'il peut éprouver dans son action, ou susciter par elle. Et c'est là que les membres du groupe qui étaient non seulement des docteurs ou des doctorants, mais aussi des artistes, comme les musiciens Bosseur et Tamba, le peintre Richard Conte, le metteur en scène Chabert, spécialiste de Beckett, etc. ont été amenés à donner du mot création une définition précise⁹ : dans le cadre général de la conduite productrice, l'activité créatrice se démarque par trois différentes spécifiques – 1) elle élabore un objet unique (même s'il est destiné à une multiplication ultérieure), – 2) elle donne l'existence à un pseudo-sujet (avec œuvre en train, nous avons des relations de dialogue), – 3) œuvre compromet son auteur dès le commencement d'exécution, aussi bien dans le succès social que dans le refus et la censure.

Il est clair qu'une telle définition s'applique non seulement à l'art, mais aussi à tous les secteurs où l'homme se fait constructeur. L'objet de la poïétique est certes restreint – la conduite créatrice – mais le champ d'investigation où une telle conduite peut être repérée est à nouveau un champ étendu, celui de l'anthropologie historique dans toutes ses diversités. Une fois réservée la part d'une *ktétikè téchnè*, habileté qui n'est pas sans relations, certes, avec la création proprement dite, sont donc concernés les religions, les mœurs, le droit, la politique, les techniques de tous ordre, la médecine, les sciences même et la philosophie. La *téchnè*, dans son ensemble, peut susciter par elle-même une admiration esthétique. Mais celle-ci reste extérieure à une conduite dont elle ne prend pas la responsabilité. L'objet esthétique, dans le domaine de l'art, et ailleurs, est précisément le sentiment que les autres (sans parler de la nature) nous inspirent. Comme philosophie de la critique d'art, l'esthétique tente de justifier les émotions de l'*aisthesis*. En deçà des prolongements sociaux, voire mondains, de la critique, c'est dans le recueillement de l'atelier et dans le for intérieur du créateur que la conduite créatrice devient l'objet spécifique de la poïétique.

IV

Avant d'aggraver, par quelques remarques finales, l'opposition que je vois entre esthétique et poïétique, notons certains aspects des résultats déjà obtenus et des recherches engagées par la poïétique.

⁹ Cf. René Passeron, *La naissance d'Icare, éléments de poïétique générale*, Paris, ac2cg éd., p. 26 sq.

- 1) Entre le sujet attelé à l'ouvrage et le but qu'il poursuit, les linéaments dont j'ai parlé sont en partie matériels, et la poïétique dialectique a été amenée à montrer que dans tous les arts, y compris ceux qui ont pour matériau le langage, ou le corps, sans parler de la *Geschichte* elle-même, ce matériau, dont Dubuffet notait qu'il «regimbe», agit lui-même, à l'instar du créateur, sur le devenir de l'œuvre en gestation. Ce qu'Aristote appelait la «cause matérielle» de l'œuvre n'est en rien passive, et l'œuvre sera le produit ambigu d'un combat entre la subjectivité de l'artiste et les nécessités techniques du matériau.
- 2) Le sujet créateur n'est pas toujours un individu, mais peut très bien être une entité collective, soit par collaboration volontaire de quelques-uns, soit par l'effet d'une création continuée, comme celle d'une langue vivante, que chaque génération modifie en la parlant, ce qu'on appelle «langue naturelle» étant à l'évidence une œuvre. Ainsi en va-t-il des grandes institutions et des civilisations dont l'histoire nous décrit les particularités et l'évolution.
- 3) La conduite créatrice ne saurait être répétitive, mais la nouveauté n'est pas forcément un critère de la création. De certaines répétitions, dans l'ordre des gestes techniques notamment, on peut dire avec Gilles Deleuze, qu'elles «font la différence». Et le concept de différence, cher à Derrida, ne prend consistance qu'au prix d'un double mouvement : celui d'une *génésis* programmée par la nature et celui qui intègre cette *génésis* à une *poiésis* plus ou moins volontaire et d'ordre culturel, dont le caractère principal, en dépit des projets du créateur, est d'être imprévisible.
- 4) Pour la poïétique, la présentation d'une personne, d'une information ou d'une réalité quelconque – rite social bien connu – est l'acte d'un présentateur. Et l'art, en toutes spécialités, est une conduite présentatrice instaurant l'œuvre comme présence à l'autre. Au point que nous sommes parvenus à une définition de l'art, même quand il se cache dans des opérations qui lui sont étrangères, comme la présentation du fait même de présenter.
- 5) La pathologie mentale¹⁰ a tout intérêt à distinguer création et expression: les aphasiques par exemple sont capables de s'exprimer par d'autres moyens que la langue parlée, alors que l'activité créatrice relève d'une synthèse cérébrale aussi complexe que la synthèse personnelle. L'acte créateur ne souffrant guère les déficits graves à ce niveau, la poïétique peut contribuer à leur diagnostic.

¹⁰ Cf. René Passeron, «Poïétique et pathologie», in *Psychologie médicale*, t. XII, n° 10, sept. 1980, p. 2209.

- 6) À l'échelle de l'histoire des civilisations, la distinction entre *Historie*, qui est un récit évidemment composé par un auteur, et *Geschichte* nous a permis de poser la question de savoir ce qui, dans la *Geschichte* même, dépend d'une volonté créatrice et organisatrice, qu'on ne saurait réduire au fonctionnement plus ou moins déterministe d'une «physique sociale». Notre réponse nous a amenés à une proposition éthique de grande importance : les hommes étant partiellement responsables de leur histoire, la poïétique débouche sur une philosophie de la responsabilité.¹¹
- 7) Or, parmi les différentes œuvres que l'homme élabore, il en est qui relèvent d'une poïétique du mal. Combien d'institutions n'ont visé que l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, combien de palais et de temples ont été des chefs-d'œuvre d'arrogance et d'orgueil, combien d'inventions technologiques n'ont pour but que le meurtre et le génocide... Faut-il insister ? Nous avons défendu l'idée que les œuvres de l'esprit, les arts littéraires notamment, sont aptes à canaliser les pulsions agressives et la *Schadenfreude* vers le monde de la fiction et vers les artefacts qui étancheraient le sang de l'histoire. Donnant une image du mal au niveau supérieur de la culture, l'art prendrait en charge, dans la facticité des œuvres, les pulsions égoïstes de l'*Urmensch*. Le dépassement de la poïétique du mal¹² ne peut guère s'opérer que par des œuvres qui, non contentes d'esthétiser le mal pour qu'on en jouisse mentalement, suscitent plutôt une conscience éthique, où le mal devient un objet de méditation sur la condition humaine.
- 8) Ainsi la poïétique, capable, certes, de servir l'esthétique à travers les œuvres créées, s'ouvre-t-elle à une éthique de la création, où les œuvres, même composées pour l'exercice du mal, ne peuvent, en tant qu'œuvres parvenues à l'existence plénière, qu'exonérer l'art des services odieux auxquels l'histoire le plie – l'art étant, comme le pensait la Scolastique, parfait en son genre (sinon l'œuvre ne viendrait pas à l'existence), et les vertus poïétiques constituant, dans la pratique, une *recta ratio factibilium*. Ce serait notamment l'exemplarité de l'art qui permettrait à l'éthique d'imposer une vertu poïétique comme le respect du matériau, devenu le respect de l'homme, dans la mutation pédagogique de ce qu'il vise à devenir, quand il est à la fois le sujet et le matériau de son histoire comme œuvre.

¹¹ Cf. René Passeron, «Poïétique et histoire», intervention au Colloque *Idées, mentalités, histoire*, Université de Sfax (Tunisie), 9 mai 1992, repris dans *Espaces Temps, Les Cahiers*, n° 55/56, Arts, l'exception ordinaire, 1994, p. 98 sq.

¹² Cf. René Passeron, «D'un dépassement possible de la poïétique du mal», in *Recherches poïétiques*, n° 6, 1997.

V

Cette considération de la responsabilité dans l'auto-Poïétique de la personne, comme au niveau de l'histoire, me permet de revenir à l'esthétique, pour quelques remarques terminales, qui vont sans doute creuser le fossé qui la sépare de la poïétique.

Pourquoi faut-il qu'un amateur d'art, visitant mon atelier, m'ait dit un jour : «Je préfère cette toile-là, elle est moins esthétique.» ? Comme je lui demandais de s'expliquer, il a ajouté : «Elle est moins visuelle». Le sens péjoratif de l'épithète esthétique rejoint la condamnation d'un attachement excessif aux séductions de l'apparence. On se souvient que, pour Duchamp, l'impressionnisme est trop «rétinien». Pour les surréalistes, la sensation, selon le mot du symboliste Odilon Redon, est «basse de plafond», la logique de la sensation : doublement marquée d'intellectualisme et d'empirisme (la musique notamment, n'est que chatouillement d'oreille), et la recherche d'une «rationalité de l'art» : trop liée aux censures de l'esthétiquement correct. Entre la sensation qui nous retient dans les apparences et la systématique du concept, qui nous enlise trop souvent dans le verbalisme, l'art ne trouverait ses vraies racines que dans les fantasmes intérieurs de l'éros et le tragique de la condition mortelle. Et cette exigence, portée si loin par Artaud dans sa quête d'un art de la cruauté, en arrive à condamner la notion même d'œuvre d'art, en raison de sa facticité foncière. Le «jargon de l'authenticité», réprouvé par Adorno, ne concerne que l'esthétique. Pour la poïétique, la double authenticité du matériau traité et du sujet qui agit reste une valeur essentielle.

Qu'importe à l'esthétique la facticité de l'art, si elle y trouve le beau et le sublime, la verve et le tragique : ses catégories sont elles-mêmes des émanations du sentiment. Or, nul n'est responsable de ses sentiments, c'est bien connu. L'esthétique a un cœur, elle a une tête, mais elle n'a pas de main. Nous sommes tous des esthètes capables de chanter devant l'incendie de Rome. Est-ce par esthétisme que nous prenons tant de plaisir à la description du crime parfait, ou au film catastrophe ? Des *Diaboliques* de Clouzot au *Titanic* de Cameron, le mal et le malheur nous révulsent et nous font pleurer – quel plaisir ! Le mal, pour l'esthétique, ne sera perçu qu'à travers les catégories dont parle Moutsopoulos¹³, le démoniaque et le satanique. Au plaisir du spectacle, l'esthétique ajoute celui de la dissertation... Pour la poïétique, le mal est le produit d'une conduite, sinon celle d'un artiste appelé Satan, à tout le moins celle du lézard archaïque qui gît au fond du cerveau de chacun.

¹³ Evaghélos Moutsopoulos, *Poiésis et techné, Idées pour une philosophie de l'art*, Montréal, éd. Montmorency, 1994, 3 vol., t. 1, p.125.

Ainsi l'esthétique est-elle située du côté des branches sensorielles de l'arc nerveux, alors que la poïétique se trouve du côté des circuits moteurs. Si nul n'est responsable de ses sentiments, voire de ses fantasmes et même de ses pensées – quitte à ne pas toujours s'y complaire – chacun est responsable de ses actes, même dans la spontanéité créatrice des surréalistes... Cette différence, fort banale, suffit à légitimer la distinction de la poïétique, non pas à l'intérieur d'une esthétique générale, mais en dehors, carrément.

Cette allusion à la physiologie, qui n'est qu'une indication de mise en place, ne situe pas forcément l'esthétique en aval de l'œuvre faite, tandis que la poïétique serait en amont de l'œuvre à faire. L'artiste a lui-même un goût et des émotions qui le mobilisent, une vision du monde où les affects précèdent la création. La poïétique reconnaît parfaitement que l'esthétique fournit des nourritures à l'esprit, que les richesses qu'elle contient sont même les vitamines de la créativité – à condition toutefois qu'elle les laisse être à l'état brut, sans les sophistiquer par des discours savants. Si l'on pense que ces discours sont l'esthétique elle-même, ils se suffisent, et la poïétique s'en détourne. Les affects qui nourrissent la création sont à l'état naissant, et la poïétique n'a que faire de sentiments culturellement pré-conditionnés. Tout créateur est porté à se libérer d'abord des codes et des conventions, pour se mettre en situation poïétique, en amont de l'œuvre qu'il projette.

Se déclenche alors un processus créateur, qui s'oppose parfois aux sentiments et aux goûts de l'artiste lui-même. Nombre de créateurs révoquent l'esthétique au moment de leur travail le plus concentré, quitte à lui concéder un rôle, plutôt factice, dans les phases de finition. Quand Picasso esquisse *Gernica*, c'est sous le coup de la colère. Ensuite, pendant six jours, il travaille son œuvre plus froidement, pour atteindre à une perfection qu'on peut, certes, dire esthétique, en ce que son œil la pense et finalement la constate sur l'œuvre achevée, alors que c'est son action, durement défiée par des difficultés plastiques qui l'aura poïétiquement menée à bien. Dans d'autres cas, plus radicaux, l'œuvre va jusqu'à choquer l'artiste : ainsi Belmer devant sa *Poupée*...

Or, l'admiration vous donne envie de posséder. C'est l'esthétique qui a rempli les musées occidentaux de tant d'œuvres de l'Antiquité égyptienne, grecque et romaine. Quand l'esthéticien agit, le voici prédateur. L'esthétique est du côté de la propriété, alors que la poïétique est du côté du travail. Le lieu de l'art, a dit un critique¹⁴, c'est la galerie. En vérité, le lieu de l'art est, d'abord, l'atelier. Et l'on comprend que la sociologie de l'art dérape devant un phénomène qu'elle ne peut centrer sur son noyau dur et sa source

¹⁴ Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, «L'espace de l'art», in *Critique*, avr. 1970, p. 321.

principale : le travail, si souvent clandestin, de l'artiste. De Charles Lalo, dont l'esthétique sociologique considère l'art comme une « discipline de luxe » à Pierre Bourdieu qui se plaint aigrement que le domaine des arts soit « un monde à l'envers »¹⁵ et la prétendue création « l'euphémisation » d'une distinction vaniteuse, la sociologie néo-durkeimienne – à l'opposé de la « sociologie de la liberté » proposée par l'école de Gurvitch – reste bloquée dans un déterminisme, où le sujet n'est que l'esclave inconscient des « idéologies dominantes ». À laisser échapper de la sorte ce qui constitue l'ouverture créatrice vers l'avenir, où les hommes, selon Horkheimer « produisent leurs formes historiques de vie »¹⁶, l'humain est étrangement privé de deux traits qui lui sont essentiels : l'historicité et la responsabilité.

Ces deux traits ne sont que les prolongements d'une qualité plus profonde : l'homme n'est pas tant un animal raisonnable qu'un animal créateur. Car, la raison elle-même est une œuvre¹⁷. Et, si les sentiments contribuent aux impératifs du droit, par exemple à l'exigence d'égalité devant la loi, ce sont des sentiments moraux fondateurs de l'éthique qui interviennent alors dans la formation d'une « raison ardente » – non des sentiments esthétiques, trop souvent liés à des bonheurs d'âme que l'on souhaite voir perdurer comme tels. Jouir du présent, notamment de l'œuvre achevée et offerte, tel est le caractère topique de l'esthétique. Mais la jouissance – quand on sait ce qu'est la *Schadenfreude* – ne peut être tenue pour le critère du bien. Le bonheur esthétique est trop souvent l'euphémisation d'un *carpe diem*, dont la formule « après moi le déluge » signifie brutalement que, pour la jouissance, fût-elle la plus hautement spirituelle, l'avenir importe moins que ce présent. On aura compris que pour la poïétique, il en va tout autrement.

Quand l'hédonè envahit complètement l'aisthesis, ce qui est le propre de l'hédonisme, la poïétique refuse la jouissance et la relègue parmi les obstacles à la création. Vu son insatisfaction fondamentale devant *ce qui est*, elle centre sa pensée sur le projet d'un *devant-être*. Et c'est, à coup sûr, une des difficultés de la poïétique – la raison sans doute de son apparition si récente parmi les sciences humaines, malgré l'ancienneté de sa présence dans les écrits d'artistes – que d'avoir pour objet une sorte de néant, celui de l'œuvre à faire, même si la conduite créatrice – si mystérieuse fût-elle – est une réalité anthropologique des plus évidentes.

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 199. Cf. René Passeron, in *Recherches Poïétiques*, n° 2, print. 1995, p. 160 sq.

¹⁶ Max Horkheimer, *Traditionnelle und kritische Theorie* (1937), *Théorie traditionnelle et théorie critique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, postface.

¹⁷ Cf. René Passeron, *La naissance d'Icare*, op. cit., p. 198.

Ma conclusion ne saurait donc que s'inscrire en faux contre toute esthétique atteinte de syncrétisme, donnant dans un expansionnisme touche-à-tout, de plus en plus flou et embarrassé de lui-même, au fur et à mesure de son élargissement et de sa dilution. Mes meilleurs amis de la *Revue d'Esthétique* ne laissent pas de me donner raison, dans le numéro *Pourquoi l'esthétique?*,¹⁸ quand ils trouvent l'esthétique, telle qu'ils la pratiquent, pourtant, crépusculaire (Noguez), dispersée (Lascault), sans territoire (Maryvonne Saison) et idéologique (Revault d'Allonnes).

Allons, ne soyons pas si pessimistes : il suffirait que l'esthétique consacre quelques travaux épistémologiques à la délimitation rigoureuse de son objet, rejetant courageusement hors de son domaine les objets propres de la sémiotique, de l'hédonique, de l'érotique, de l'herméneutique, de l'histoire de l'art (sinon de celle des sentiments), de la technologie, de l'ergonomie, de l'économie politique, de la sociologie de l'art – et, bien sûr, de la poïétique, pour qu'elle retrouve un territoire, et cohérent, et lumineux, et scientifique, celui de la sensibilité humaine et des idées qui en émanent. Ample et merveilleux domaine, n'est-il pas vrai ? – Elle n'en est jamais venue à bout. Et, quand Gérard Genette étudie *La relation esthétique*¹⁹, il se dégage des discours sur l'art, se tourne vers la subjectivité de l'*aïsthésis*, et définit cette relation par la liberté du plaisir à toute chose. La voilà, l'esthétique !

A-t-elle besoin d'ajouter à l'étude de ce plaisir et aux méditations philosophiques qu'il suggère, la considération de conduites qui échappent si souvent à la sensibilité ? D'autres disciplines s'en occupent. C'est au point que, prise par l'idée, d'ailleurs juste, que l'affectivité se glisse partout, elle en fait autant, brouillant ses méthodes et ses concepts, notamment des concepts sur lesquels trop de dossiers s'entremêlent : nature, art, création, imitation, détournement, responsabilité, etc., alors qu'elle aurait déjà beaucoup à faire avec ses concepts propres, comme beauté, qualité de la vie, respect de l'environnement, défense du patrimoine, merveilleux, sublime, grandiose, comique, tragique, satanique, etc. – admiration, contemplation, extase, jouissance et possession – bref, avec les contenus affectifs d'une phénoménologie de la vie. Ainsi l'entendait le regretté Mikel Dufrenne, qui ne justifiait la création artistique que par les plaisirs ludiques d'*enjouer la vie*²⁰... Alors que la poïétique porte moins sur la vie, comme réalité donnée, dont on peut certes jouir et s'émerveiller, que sur l'esprit, comme vide ouvert au difficile dépassement créateur de l'homme par lui-même.

¹⁸ *Revue d'esthétique*, n° 21, Paris, Jean-Michel Place, 1992.

¹⁹ Gérard Genette, *L'œuvre de l'art*, t. II, *La relation esthétique*, Paris, Seuil, coll. «Poétique», 1997.

²⁰ Mikel Dufrenne, «Sur la création», in *Diotima*, n° 5, 1977, p. 84 sq.

Marija Bergamo
Musik als Gestalt der begrifflosen Erkenntnis

»...denn die Natur hat jedem Dinge seine Sprache
nach seiner Essenz und Gestaltnis gegeben; denn aus
der Essenz urständet die Sprache oder der Hall.«
Jakob Böhme (um 1610)

Die Frage, die an unserer Konferenz zur Debatte steht, hat, wie bekannt, eine lange praktische und theoretische Geschichte und zählt zu den fundamentalen musikwissenschaftlichen Themen. Man fragt sich, ob Carl Dahlhaus wirklich Recht hat, wenn er geistvoll meint, daß möglicherweise auch Musikwissenschaft zu den Disziplinen zählt, in denen »die fundamentalen Fragen eigentlich nie gelöst werden, sondern allmählich veralten und von anderen, genauso unlösbaren Problemen verdrängt werden« (Dahlhaus 1974)? Oder, zählt die Idee der Musik als Sprache tatsächlich zu den Ideen »mit geschichtlich begrenzter Reichweite« (de la Motte-Haber, 1985:33), denen heute gar nicht mehr das früher so lebendige Interesse gebührt? Handelt es sich um eine Frage, die jede Zeit aufs neue, nur aus der Sicht der jeweils gültigen ästhetischen und theoretischen Paradigmen beantworten sollte? Oder ließe sich das Problem doch auch von der phänomenologischen Seite anpacken und von den immer stärker betonten linguistischen Ausgangspunkten wieder dem Musikwesen näher bringen?

Die Überlegung, sich wieder einmal mit diesem Thema auseinanderzusetzen, stützt sich auf folgende Argumentation:

Am Ausgang eines mit der Megakultur des Modernismus gekennzeichneten Jahrhunderts (das uns immer noch als Nachzeit und nicht Vorzeit einer möglicherweise sich schon deutlich profilierenden neuen musikalischen Perspektive bewußt ist), befindet sich Musik, eben was ihre »Sprachlichkeit« betrifft, in einer ihr bis jetzt kaum bekannter Situation: Sie pendelt (um mit Sloterdijk zu sagen) zwischen *kopernikanischer Mobilisation* und *ptolomäischer Entwaffnung*, zwischen geschichtlichen Kulturen/bzw. Stilen und deren postmodernistischer »Inventur aus dem Jenseits« (Oraić-Tolić 1996:107). Die zu allen Zeiten einigermaßen einheitliche, für den Komponisten selbstverständliche, schützende und ihn stützende ästhetische und kompositionstechnische Rahmen, von einer fast normativen Kraft, gingen

in Zerfall. Sie waren aber jener gemeinsame Nenner, der die individuellen Lösungen im unzähligen Zähler ermöglichte und den Sprachcharakter der Musik immer wieder – zwar in geschichtlich sehr verschiedenen Deutungen – fundierte. Wie kann man in einer Zeit ohne »gemeinsamen Nenner« die Sprachlichkeit der Musik erhalten? Oder braucht man sie nicht mehr? Die Titelfrage wäre also vor allem vom Standpunkt *der Musik selbst* zu beantworten.

Herausfordernd ist sie aber auch angesichts der angehäuften, oft entgegengesetzten theoretischen Ansichten und Argumentationen, als ein *musikwissenschaftliches Thema*. Obwohl auch hier, so Gerhard Engel, »die Fülle der Antworten das Fehlen einer Antwort verdeckt« (Engel, 1990:272), bewirken sowohl neuere Schritte in der Grundlagenforschung wie auch aktuelle Erkenntnisse über die nichtlinearen, unvorausehbaren »fluidartigen Phänomene« (zu denen auch musikalische Strukturen zählen), oder heutzutage breit gefächerte und differenzierte semiotische und systemtheoretische Fragestellungen auch in der Musikwissenschaft – in der Richtung Hoffnung und Neugierde: ließe sich mit Hilfe solcher Vorschläge auch bei diesem Problem ein Stück weiter kommen?

Zwei noch immer anhaltende entgegengesetzte Grundpositionen was Sprachfähigkeit und Sinn/Bedeutung der Musik betrifft (eine, die Musik als reines Strukturspiel ohne Bedeutung auffaßt, und andere, die in jeder Musik das Mimetische, die Gehalt- oder sogar Denotaspuren detektiert) sowie eine Fülle vermittelnden Varianten dazu machen eine »interparadigmatische« Diskussion sehr schwierig. Ästhetische und theoretische Voraussetzungen bestimmen nicht nur die Ausgangsprämissen, sondern auch die Diskussionsergebnisse. Wie aus dem Programm ersichtlich ist, werden bei unserer Konferenz semiotische und kommunikationstheoretische (auch pragmatische) Standpunkte erörtert, systemtheoretische Vorschläge miteinander verglichen, historische Modelle bei den methodologischen Fragen zu Hilfe gerufen und Beispiele als Beweismateriale diskutiert. Ich glaube zwar nicht, daß wir – der Natur des Sachverhaltes wegen – zu *einer* Antwort auf die gestellte Frage kommen können, doch hoffe ich, daß wir – im Sinne Peter Bürgers Gedanken, es wäre in der musikwissenschaftlichen Diskussion bereits ein wesentlicher Fortschritt »wenn es zu einer Selbstverständlichkeit würde, daß jeder Wissenschaftler die Wahl seiner... Problemstellung begründet« (Bürger 1974, zit. nach Engel 1990:1) – einen anregenden Meinungsaustausch durchführen werden.

* * *

Meinen Beitrag dazu möchte ich, in Anbetracht anderer angekündigten Blickwinkel, mit dem Versuch leisten, das Thema sozusagen »am Ausgangspunkt« zu fassen, bei der kompositorischen Gestaltung, dem Phänomen des »Musiksetzens«, also beim Prozeß des »Zeigens ohne das Sagen« (wie der späte Wittgenstein das Denken im Bereich des Auditiven formulierte).

Unlängst meinte Paul Crowther in seinem neuen Buch (*The Language of Twentieth-Century Art*, New Haven 1997), daß die Antwort auf die Frage, wieso die Kunst eine Geschichte hat, wenn sie die geschichtlichen Bedingungen ihres Entstehens stets überbietet, in den strukturalistischen Grundlagen unseres Bewußtseins, in den sogenannten wechselseitigen Erkenntnisrelationen zu suchen sei. Am Beispiel der Unterschiede zwischen dem Bild und dem Wort erörterte er, wie sich erkenntnis- und bedeutungsgebende Prozesse nicht von vornhinein formulieren und auch nicht hinterher in eine andere Sprache übersetzen lassen. Symbolische Strukturen innerhalb einer Kultur seien eben von diesem System der Unterschiede abhängig. Musik als eigenartige symbolische Struktur par excellence bestätigt ihrerseits die These vollkommen.

Damit ist meine Pointe schon vorweggenommen: es ist durchaus möglich, die Musik als Sprache aufzufassen (was ihr geschichtliches Dasein bezeugt und bestätigt), doch kann man sie nicht für klare und deutliche »Sprache der Gefühle« erklären, aber auch nicht für eine der Wortsprache ähnliche Struktur halten, die man weiter mit linguistischen Denkparadigmen argumentieren würde. Sie kann zwar als Zeichensystem interpretiert werden, doch sprachlich fundierte semiotische »vorgefaßten Theorien«, wie demnächst Kollege Gligo zeigen wird, können ihr Wesen nicht erfassen, weil ihre Essenz nicht gegenständlicher, begrifflicher und wortsprachlicher Natur ist.

Die angsterregende Szientifikation des Denkens läßt uns heute oft vergessen, daß die rationale Erkenntnis die Ganzheit der Welt nicht umfaßt. Besonders deutlich wird das, wenn es um das Phänomen Musik geht, das sich nur durch die Einheitlichkeit der wissenschaftlichen und künstlerischen Erkenntnis einigermaßen »fassen/fangen« läßt. Die Musik wird – um Eggebrechts Formel zu gebrauchen – ebenbürtig durch mathematisierte Emotion und emotionalisiertes Ratio konstituiert. Interaktion zwischen der anscheinenden »Unordnung« einer Konstituante, und der »Ordnung« der anderen, steht nicht im Zeichen des Gegensatzes, sondern der Ergänzung. Unordnung ist nur als Unvordeterminiertheit und Unlinearität zu verstehen, Ordnung dagegen nur als Systemheit, als eine besondere Art der Organisation, die den musikalischen Sinn erschafft. In den musikalischen Strukturen werden, ähnlich wie im Wesen und Struktur des Lebens, Ordnung

und Ordnung gekoppelt. Eine musikalische Idee oder Emotion wird in der abendländischen Musik nur als rationalisierte Struktur realisiert: durch stark entwickelte Theorie und Notation, komplexe kompositionstechnische Verfahren, nicht zuletzt auch durch ihre Geschichtlichkeit. Der ganze Apparat ist ein Teil des Musikwesens. Durch ihn wird das (unbegriffliche und begriffliche) Auditive erfaßt und umfaßt, mit dem Irrationalen verflochten, das sich in verschiedenen Intensitäten und Gestalten sowohl in das musikalische Bewußtsein wie auch in das Denken über Musik Eintritt verschafft. Diese spezifische Oberhand des Rationalen über den musikalischen Bereich, welcher sonst dem Sinnlichen und Emotionellen verschrieben ist, verwirklicht sich aber jedesmal in einem individuellen schöpferischen Bewußtsein. Hier wird das Irrational-Subjektive rational objektiviert und damit auch der wissenschaftliche Zutritt zu einem Teil des Systems Musik ermöglicht. Viel leichter ist aber diese gekoppelte musikalische »Ordnung« und »Ordnung« im dynamischen System Musik als sinnvolles ästhetisches Phänomen zu erleben, als sie in beiden Dimensionen rational zu fassen und durch begriffliches Instrumentarium zu analysieren. Ins Sprachliche übersetzen läßt sich diese musikalische Sprache nicht. Der musikalische Sinn überragt – trotz allen andersartigen Argumentationen – die Ebene der rationalen Faßbarkeit und ist darum mit einseitigen methodologischen theoretischen Konstrukten nicht faßbar.

Die Fülle der wissenschaftlichen Modelle stellt darum nur einen (zwar notwendigen) Humus für die individuelle phänomenologische »Neugier« dar; eine solche, die mehr erlaubt als sie sich zu eigen macht. Sie kann die erfinderische Potenz stimulieren, wenn man das Künstlerische jeder einzelnen Musiksetzung in dem subjektiven Fort- und Abrücken von den normativ geltenden Muster, Normen, Symbolen einer »verstehbaren musikalischen Sprache« aufspüren möchte. Es geht ja jedesmal um eine andersartige Interaktion zwischen der scheinbaren Systemdeterminiertheit und freien kompositorischen Wahl des nächsten Schrittes im System. Diese Eigenart der Musik ist der Hauptgrund ihrer spezifischen Sprachlichkeit, die das Komponieren in unserem informatischen Zeitalter so schwer formalisierbar macht. Die Sprache der Musik sollte die Sachen »sichtbar« und »verständlich« machen, die ihren Ursprung jenseits des begrifflichen Verständnis haben. Das Denken in Begriffen unterscheidet sich grundsätzlich von dem musikalischen Denken dadurch, daß sich bei letzterem seine polare Formen, nämlich analytische Diskursivität und auf das augenblicklich erkannte Ganze ausgerichtete Intuition, verflechten und in einem »offenem Spiel« zwischen bewußtem und unbewußtem Handeln in Gleichgewicht gehalten werden. Geschichtlich vorgeformte kompositionstechnische Mittel

(vom Material und Vokabular an bis hin zu den komplexesten Satz- und Satzregeln), diese unumgängliche Bedingung einer musikalischer »Sprache«, setzt sich zusammen aus einer Fülle ihrer »gleichzeitig auf verschiedenen Ebenen wirksamen Teilsprachen.« (Mechtler 1984:448). Kriterien für die Wahl aus den Wörterbüchern dieser verschiedenen Sprachen basieren keineswegs nur auf eindeutigen grammatikalisch-syntaktischen Gesetzen und sind nur teilweise bewußt; sie können sich aus dem unbewußten oder zum Teil bewußten Wechselspiel der Teilebenen ergeben. Hermann Broch grenzt diese künstlerische Erkenntnis gegenüber der wissenschaftlichen als »poetische« ab, und bezeichnet sie als »ahnende /s/ Symbol der geahnten Totalität« (des Logos).

Es ist signifikant, daß die Selbstempfindung der Komponisten, der Tonsetzer, einer solchen Auffassung der Sprache Musik schon immer nahe war. Arnold Schönberg hat die Idee des Sprachcharakters der Musik geradezu emphatisch vertreten, und Anton Webern, der mit seinem Werk und Wort, mit seinem autonomen, strukturalistisch betonten musikalischen Denken die Bahnen einer Position gegen musikalischen Ausdruck, Aussage, Inhalt und Intuition eröffnet hat, meinte in seinem Vortrag im Jahr 1932/33: »Was ist denn die Musik?... Die Musik ist Sprache. Ein Mensch will in dieser Sprache Gedanken ausdrücken; aber nicht Gedanken, die sich in Begriffe umsetzen lassen, sondern musikalische Gedanken...« »Es will jemand in Tönen etwas mitteilen, was anders nicht zu sagen ist. Die Musik ist in diesem Sinne eine Sprache.« (Webern, 1960: 46, 17) Es geht also nicht um die Begriffe, und in Begriffe gefaßte Gedanken, sondern um »musikalische Gedanken«, die sich im auditiven Medium der Töne formen. In diesem Medium muß der sinnliche Stoff zum »Objekt solchen Denkens erhoben sein, um 'geistfähig' (Hanslick), d.h. der künstlerisch-musikalischen Form dieses Denkens... verfügbar zu werden.« (Eggebrecht, 1961:74)

Aber bei verschiedenen methodologischen Versuchen, Begriffen wie musikalische Idee, Intention, Aussage, Ausdruck das Metaphorische zu nehmen und es mit dem Satztechnischen und Logisch-Syntaktischen zu ersetzen, das Begrifflose ins Begriffliche zu »übersetzen«, zeigen sich die unüberwindliche Grenzen (sprachliche, nicht musikalische!), die die bereits erwähnten Unterschiede in erkenntnis- und bedeutungsgebenden Prozeßen zur Sicht tragen. Diese veranlaßten Th.W.Adorno zu der bekannten Feststellung: »Musik ist sprachähnlich, aber Musik ist nicht Sprache« (unter Sprache ist selbstverständlich Wortsprache gemeint). Diese Feststellung postierte er am Anfang seines *Fragment über Musik und Sprache* (Adorno, 1978: 251-256). Aus seiner *Ästhetischen Theorie* stammt übrigens das Titeldiktum meines Beitrags. Seine Anhaltspunkte sind damit enthüllt.

(Verständlich, daß in meinem Alter, trotz wachem und offenem Ohr für neue Erkenntnisse, ein Paradigmawechsel nicht zu erwarten ist. Aber das lange Leben mit und durch die Musik bewirkt die ständige Überprüfung musikwissenschaftlichen methodologischen Vorschläge an der Musik selbst, und sie fasziniert und bezaubert mich in ihrem Reichtum an verschiedenen Setzungen noch immer tiefer und stärker als noch so vollständig ausgearbeitete wissenschaftliche »vorgefaßte Theorien«.)

Die Antworten Adornos auf die fundamentalen Fragen sind immer dialektisch. In seiner Interpretation verschränken sich in der Musik die mimetische und kognitive Erkenntnis. *Sui generis* Erkenntnischarakter der Musik begründet er durch mimetische, begrifflose, »stumme Erfahrung, die sich durch Stimmigkeit der musikalischen Zusammenhänge zwar zum Begriff bestimmen ließe, aber als ein einmaliges Vorgang doch eben seine Ungegenständlichkeit hervorhebt.« (Zenck 1977: 115) »Musik zielt auf eine intentionslose Sprache (...). Musik ohne alles Meinen, der bloße phänomenale Zusammenhang der Klänge, gliche akustisch dem Kaleidoskop. Als absolutes Meinen dagegen hörte sie auf, Musik zu sein, und ginge falsch in Sprache über.« (Adorno 1978: 252)

Auf dem Weg der Bestimmung musikalischer Eigengesetzlichkeit und gleichzeitig ihrer *Sprachähnlichkeit* stellt sich bei Adorno, wie später bei Dahlhaus, Eggebrecht und Faltin, als wichtigste die Frage einer Transformation der gegenständlichen in die ästhetische Erkenntnis und die Frage der Bedeutung ästhetischer Phänomene.

Zur Lösung der ersten Frage kann auch die Musik die kategoriale Formung zur Hilfe rufen, sich auf die Logik, Kausalität und das Formgesetzte stützen, wobei die spezifischen Definitionen dieser Kategorien nicht unbedeutende Schwierigkeiten bereiten. Aus der wissenschaftlichen Begründbarkeit müßte man sie auf die Erlebnisebene und das Ästhetische »transponieren«. Doch alle erwähnten Autoren begründen die Inhaltlichkeit der Musik nicht nur am aus dem Sprachgestus gelösten Ausdruck, sondern auch am Bedeutungsbereich der ästhetischen Teilmomente, die durch ihre kategoriale Formung zur Bestimmtheit gelangen. Sie werden, wie Adorno sagt, in eine »zweite Gegenständlichkeit« transportiert. Einfacher ausgedrückt: der äußere Impuls (welcher Natur er auch sein mag) muß erst in die Gestalt einer musikalischen Idee, eines sinnvollen Gedanken oder einer Vorstellung transformiert werden, um ästhetisch wirksam zu sein. Anders als in der diskursiven Sprache, wird das musikalische Zeichen (ich verwende hier Faltins Terminologie), in dem sich die ästhetische Bedeutung konstituiert, ein Vorgang, in dem die expressiv-gestischen und syntaktisch-formalen Elemente verflochten sind und in dem die allgemeinen Impulse,

die ästhetischen Ideen und deren materielle Form zu einer Einheit verschmelzen. Einmal konstituiert, ist diese Bedeutung unwiederholbar, da sie eine ästhetische Qualität darstellt.

Wenn man den Ausdruckscharakter der Musik nicht zu verneinen bereit ist (was in der postavantgarden Zeit endlich auch selbstverständlich sein sollte) stellt sich die Frage, was drückt die Musik aus? Auch wenn Peter Faltin mit Recht den Denotats-Fetischismus als dem musikalischen Wesen fremd betrachtet und semantische Fundierung für die Musik für ausgeschlossen hält (Faltin 1985: 99 und 72), tasten viele seit Nietzsches Bestimmung des musikalischen Ausdrucks als »internalisierte Nachahmung der Sprachbewegung« (zit. nach Zenck 1977:157) nach diesem »was« des Ausdrucks. Adorno übernimmt zuerst die Schönbergsche Idee des musikalischen Gedanken als Ausdrucksbestimmung, aber rückt dann diese »Bedingung aller Wahrheit« in den Bereich der Objekt-Subjekt Beziehung und meint, daß aus dem musikalischen Ausdruck eigentlich »das rätselhafte Etwas« spricht, was nicht objekthaft und auch keine Spiegelung der subjektiven Innerlichkeit ist, sondern selbst den Sprachcharakter der Kunst ausmacht und sich aus der Beziehung zwischen den Hervorbringenden und Empfangenden als Subjekt konstituiert (Adorno: 1970:249). Faltin versucht dieses »Etwas«, das Musik angeblich vermittele, aus der »Sprache der Gefühle« gänzlich herauszulösen und in die ästhetische Idee umzufunktionieren, die seiner Meinung nach in der Musik als Sprache vermittelt wird. Kein Objekt, keine diskursive Bedeutung, aber doch ein Sinn, der nur der Musik eigen ist und sich in ihrem spezifischen Code artikuliert, wird als Aussage musikalisch formulierter, geordneter und sinnvoll entwickelter Gedanken hervorgebracht und geht aus der ästhetisch-appellativen Funktion der Zeichen (und nicht aus diskursiv-kommunikativen wie bei der Wortsprache) hervor. Als Vermittlungsenergie ist also Musik der Wortsprache nicht analog. Es handelt sich um zwei verschiedene, Karbusicky würde sagen, »Strukturreihen« (Karbusicky 1989:15), nach Faltin (1985:37) um zwei Codes. Sie zeigen zwar Parallelen auf und stehen in einer komplementärer Beziehung, doch vermitteln nicht das Gleiche und unterscheiden sich bedeutend besonders auf den Ebenen der konstitutiven Funktion und Syntax, wie Karbusicky systematisch elaborierte (Karbusicky 1989:17).

Darum will Adorno die Musik sogar nicht als ein »System aus Zeichen« sehen (Adorno 1987:259), obwohl er sie für »wahre« und »beredeste aller Sprachen« hält. Ihr »immer verhüllter« Gehalt, ihr »Fluch des Mehrdeutigen« machen ihre Intentionen, sagt er, zu musikalischen Strukturen, die auf Interpretation verwiesen sind. Faltin aber rettet seine These von der spezifischen Bedeutung musikalischer Zeichen dadurch, daß man sie an die

Prozeße der Bedeutungskonstitution bindet, für welche besonders die syntaktische Dimension (In-Beziehung-Setzen von Elementen) von größter Wichtigkeit ist.

Kurz resümierend könnte man die wichtigsten Unterschiede zwischen Musik und Wortsprache folgendermassen zusammenfassen:

- Sprache vermittelt Begriffe, die Musik jedoch »musikalische Gedanken« in denen ja so vieles sedimentiert und in einer inneren Interaktion wirkend ist.
- Statt der diskursiven erfüllt sie vorrangig die ästhetische Funktion.
- Bedeutungen werden durch Syntax generiert. In der Sprache ist diese semantisch fundiert, Musik aber bildet im Bereich der reinen Syntax »Symbolketten« (Engel 1990:249) und interpretiert sie musikalisch. Diese Syntax ist durch das Phänomen der schwer definierbaren »musikalischen Logik« und »Innendynamik« (Dahlhaus 1975) fundiert. Als ästhetische Vermittlungsform ist also die Musik zwar eine Art Sprache und der Sprache ähnlich, aber gewiß eine eigenartige Sprachmodalität.

Schon Kant wußte, daß die Vorstellungskraft eines genialen Künstlers keine Sprache vollkommen erreichen und verständlich machen kann. Damit hat er zwischen der künstlerischen Vorstellung und der Begriffssprache eine klare ästhetische (statt kognitive) Hierarchie eingeführt. Was in einem auditiven Bereich der Phantasie gebärt und entfaltet wurde, kann nur im gleichen Bereich des Bewußtseins zu Ende gebracht werden, keinesfalls in dem diskursiven Sprachbereich.

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Aleš Erjavec

Aesthetics as Philosophy

Today we are witnessing an enormous reconfiguration of the humanities, which is an essential feature of the present postmodern global condition. Within such a framework new conceptual tools and frameworks have to be established to theoretically grasp the extant social reality and human knowledge. Aesthetics is a paramount example of a modern/ist discipline currently searching for its objects and methods, while reconfiguring its relation to philosophy, which is undergoing similar, albeit perhaps less visible changes as well.

The author argues that the prime reasons for this situation are (a) the aforementioned reconfiguration of the humanities, (b) the postmodern reconfiguration of the relationship between art and culture/nature, and (c) the increased globalization and phenomena emerging therefrom, an event perhaps more visible in marginal cultures and situations. It is the author's opinion that the present dynamic and changing situation offers an invaluable opportunity for aesthetics to establish itself as an important realm of essentially philosophical reflection not only upon art, but also culture. We should therefore treat the present aesthetics as an almost empty signifier waiting to be invested with new significations.

Arnold Berleant

Re-thinking Aesthetics

This paper proposes a radical re-examination of the foundations of modern aesthetics. It urges that we replace the tradition of eighteenth century aesthetics, with its insistence on disinterestedness and the separateness of the aesthetic, and its problematic oppositions, such as the separation of sense from cognition. In their place it appeals to a more process-oriented, pluralistic account, one that takes note of varying cultural traditions in aesthetics, that recognizes the aesthetic as a complex of many forces and factors, and that considers the aesthetic as part of a complexity of values, including moral, practical, social, and political ones. It urges, further, an aesthetic-based criticism, not only of the arts, but of culture and knowledge. Central to this account is the idea of aesthetic engagement, which not only recognizes and extends the many connections of and in aesthetic experience, but invites our total involvement as active participants.

Stefan Morawski

On Bitter-Juicy Philosophizing Via Aesthetics

To philosophize or not is a matter of conscious choice and option. But when we start with such a premise, we have to lay down what we understand by this activity. In the paper the author undertakes this task, distinguishing four-fold the philosophizing practice with regard to the domain of aesthetics. In the final section of the paper he considers the problem which seems to him fundamental, namely why today philosophizing via aesthetics in a definite way should be recommendable and primary, as well as why it has to be bitter-juicy.

Carolyn Kosmeyer

Disgust

Disgust is an emotion traditionally dismissed from aesthetic consideration because it seems to be so completely aversive that it cannot be positively employed in art. However, the history of art and – especially – contemporary graphic and cinematic arts arouse disgust as an indispensable element of appreciation. The nature of this appreciation and the character of the »pleasure« it contains is examined by considering Cindy Sherman's works and several other examples from television and film.

Martin Jay

Drifting into Dangerous Waters: The Separation of Aesthetic Experience from the Work of Art

The elevation of aesthetic experience in the Enlightenment, most extensively developed in Kant's analysis of disinterested contemplation, to compensate for the loss of putatively objective standards of beauty had several problematic implications. One was the privileging of the subject who had the experience over the object that stimulated it. Another was the potential extension of that experience to objects that were never intended to be works of art, not merely to ones given in nature, but also to political, social and cultural phenomena whose ethical or cognitive dimensions were concomitantly suppressed or marginalized. The aestheticization of the commonplace could thus countenance an inappropriate imperialism of the aesthetic sub-system of modernity over alternative sub-systems. Although the pragmatist aesthetics of John Dewey, recently revived in the work of Richard Shusterman, has acknowledged a need to revitalize the role of the art object, it may too quickly postulate a notion of aesthetic experience in which the equiprimordiality of subject and object is assumed. It is perhaps better to hold on to a tense constellation between art objects and the experience they generate in subjects in order to avoid a premature sublation of what remains still unreconciled in the larger culture.

Boris Groys

The Artist as an Exemplary Consumer

In our time the artist has disappeared as an unique individual creator but at the same time he has re-emerged as the subject of the aristocratic gaze, as the exemplary consumer. The artists, as a media-artist, has also gained much greater control over the gaze of the spectator. Accordingly, the art system of today has by no means collapsed. Rather, it has become stronger and better organized, so that it can function as the place where such an aristocratic gaze can manifest itself.

Maryvonne Saison

Playful Thinking: Theater and Philosophy
(*du jeu dans la pensée*)

The occasioned severity of theater with regard to philosophy is merely an echo of a long and lasting relationship. To this corresponds philosophy's malevolent fascination with theater. When exposed to the risks of theater, all of philosophy's projects are challenged in its metaphysical concerns as well as in its educational, moral and political aims. The staging of theater and philosophy together will necessarily take place in the mode of rivalry. In this paper, while acknowledging the lasting character of this relationship based on a power struggle, the authoress' aim is to expose its weaknesses and to illustrate how other options might be sketched out.

Rivalry only makes sense in a context of close proximity: »love and hate«. The notion of the »playful thought« is introduced in the paper (to translate the French »du jeu dans la pensée«). A dialogue is established when the philosopher exposes his thought to the risks of reality and when the theater opens up the stage to receive ideas that are not exclusively entertainment. Nonetheless, the only site of the encounter is within the spectator.

Miško Šuvaković

Advocates: Art and Philosophy. Approaching the 'Relations' of Philosophy and Art in the 20th Century

The author poses the dilemma whether we should view the relation between art and philosophy as an ecstatic and eclectic richness of the 'pleasure in the senses' of the possibility of advocating

art and advocating philosophy, or as a nomadic displacement from 'one possible world of advocating' into a 'possible world'.

Paul Crowther

Art and the Reconfiguration of Contemporary Experience

For a long time philosophers have concerned themselves with the problems of definition in relation to art *per se*, but such debates have let us nowhere. What needs to be done is to clarify the symbolic structures of specific media, noting, in particular, the epistemic conditions of their legibility. This means a clarification of the possibility of effective communicative codes. By revealing the sometimes obscure or indirect epistemic conditions which sustain perception of art objects the philosopher enables these to henceforth act as an acknowledged and explicit convention of reading, opening in this way the possibility of new communicative codes in art.

Marina Gržinić

The Virtual-Image and the Real-Time Interval

One could argue that virtual reality and cyberspace are merely fashionable passwords to contemporary culture; however, this paper takes the position that addressing questions of virtuality may enable a fuller understanding of some of the changes which deeply affect the notion of aesthetics today. Issues such as the nature of the human being, the difference between reality and the real, and those of the changed parameters of space and time, seem to be not only more deeply, but above all, differently questioned by the theme of virtual reality with its postulated construction of perfect, simulated environments. In the present paper I explore the changes in the space-time paradigm produced by cyberspace and virtual reality. The essential point to grasp is that all of these paradigms or concepts of space in the sphere of the visual are related to a broader context of conceptions of time and space and the subject within them. To understand the significance of a shift in the space-time paradigm, I propose a mapping out of a (historical) discursive timeline; to interpret the results of changes in the time/space paradigm, and in its experiences and sensations, as produced by the various technologies of the moving and digital images, e.g., photography, the film apparatus and virtual reality. To do so, I first make use of two paradigms, or time models, developed by Gilles Deleuze in the eighties in two books: *The Movement-Image* (1983) and *The Time-Image* (1985). Afterwards, I am proposing the third image – the virtual-image. What occurs here is, first and foremost, the reversal of the Deleuzian established basic relation of time and space: instead of the spatial rendering of time (i.e., time through space) we experience in the cinematic image, my thesis is that in the virtual-image, space is rendered through time.

Marie-Luise Angerer

Life as Screen? Or how to grasp the virtuality of the body?

In her book *Life on the Screen*, Sherry Turkle assumes that the new computer technologies materialize »postmodern theory and bring it down to earth«. Turkle is not the only »cyber-theorist« defining the new technologies as a kind of materialization or visualization of something previously invisible. But in doing so, such theorists erase important differences: that of a topological and a descriptive notion of the unconscious, between the Other and the other, between the body and its unconscious image, and between gender and sexual difference. Various examples of cybertheories and (art) practice (media art, net-projects) demonstrate this impulse to erase these differences. But when an equation is made between the unconsciousness and the cyberspace, a crucial difference is lost, namely that which constitutes the space of the subject.

Jos de Mul

Virtual Reality. The Interplay Between Technology, Ontology and Art

Virtual reality reunites art and technology which, since Greek culture, have gone their separate ways. In our attempt to elucidate the implications of the existence of virtual reality we have to try to avoid both its uncritical embracing and pessimistic rejection. Virtual reality is neither a holy grail nor »an assault on reality« (M. Slouka). It is not a neutral technology and like all technologies, virtual reality discloses the world in its own way and as such it offers us a whole range of new possibilities. We might expect that some of the greatest art in the next century will be based on the technology of virtual reality, and that at the same time this technology will be used for the most stultifying kitsch.

Joseph Margolis

All the Turns in 'Aestheticizing' Life

What we face today is the recovery of critical judgment under the condition of changing history. Aestheticizing bids us to abandon the need for legitimation by way of refocusing the public impulses of the »people« (whether in Heidegger's way or Rorty's) or assures us without argument that the aestheticizing impulse is reliably generous in the best democratic sense (as with Shusterman and Welsch). The author finds himself unwilling to trust either tendency and believes, rather, that if there is a disciplined debate that may be mounted, we will find that we have reclaimed the question of moral or ethical direction which would mean outflanking both the revelatory and the postmodernist options once again – without falling back to modernist assurances.

Lev Kreft

History and Everyday Life

In times of modernism, one of the most used and abused functions of art was its ability to produce meaning, make sense and promote social values and ends. For a long time it was believed that the business of artist and art is to promote history, while treating everyday life as its opposite was viewed as being of lower value and demanding less skill. This changed only in times of dissatisfaction with the outcome of history and in times of revolution, when the function of art became to invade, occupy and colonise everyday life – only to promote it as a decisive battlefield for historical goals and ends.

It was often claimed that the post-modern conditions were to be the end of such projects. In socialist countries the reception of post-modern issues occurred under totalitarianism at its last gasp, while the desanctification of history, combined with the decolonisation of everyday life, were here strategic ends in a struggle for political and human emancipation as well.

What happened after the fall of the Berlin Wall? Do we all live in the same world of the end of all ends? To answer this question, we have to examine art of the fall.

Wolfgang Welsch

Sport – Viewed Aesthetically, and Even as Art?

The author points out the artlike traits of sport in order to show what a valuable topic it could be for aesthetics. Sport is usually neglected by the discipline; one just sees sport's aesthetic traits and judges these to be simply obvious and not an interesting matter. But by neglecting the artlike character of sport we also fail to understand why it is so fascinating for a large public. In fact, the very fascination with sport derives from aspects which, in a different form, we are used to experiencing and admiring in the arts. In sport elementary aspects of the

human condition are at stake and are acted out – in a very direct and at the same time symbolically intense manner.

Bohdan Dziemidok
Artistic Expression of National Cultural Identity

The turn of the 20th and the 21st century is a very interesting period. On the one hand, there is a growth of internationalist tendencies, which make us look for common values and universal culture, and on the other hand, the centrifugal tendencies lead to the revival of new forms of nationalism and national and religious conflicts.

Integrative tendencies are an unquestioned fact of every aspect of societal life: economic (emergence of the world market, rise of international exchange and cooperation, modernization of technology, popularization of Western patterns of consumption, great development of transport and means of communication, etc.), political (expansion of liberal democracy, creation of a united Europe), and in culture, which succumbs to a tendency to create global and universal mass culture (mass media, tourist movement, fashion, show business etc.). It turns out, however, that neither international commerce, nor the blossoming systems of communication and transport, provide us with the common feeling of identity or belonging. At the same time the need for those does not cease to exist. As a result, »people rediscover or create new historical identity«, since they feel uprooted and »need new sources of identity and new forms of stable community, new systems of moral imperatives, which could give them a sense of meaningful and purpose life« (Samuel Huntington).

One of the most important forms of collective and cultural identity still turns out to be the national one. The prophecies of the end of the era of nations have not come true.

»The strength of national sentiments – writes Jerzy Szacki – even if changeable in time and diverse in space, does not show any symptoms of clear decline, (...) the era of nations keeps lasting and nothing predicts it will end soon.«

Arto Haapala
Aesthetics, Ethics, and the Meaning of Place

In the concept of place the problems of ethics and aesthetics overlap in a particularly interesting and fruitful way. When an area or site becomes a place for us, we are not indifferent to it. A place is something to which we have a strong and significant relation; in my usage of the term »place«, place is defined by our personal connections to an area. Not every environment suits everyone. Although we can visually familiarise ourselves with many milieus, »placing« ourselves somewhere is something else, and requires compatibility between individual and environment. Place is a place for me – its significance arises largely, although not exclusively, from meanings and values it gains through me. This has both ethical and aesthetic consequences: our judgments are based on the personal attachment we have to a place, and these judgments are strongly determined by our interests.

René Passeron
La poétique

La poétique est l'étude des conduites créatrices. Elle situe son objet en amont de toute œuvre : précisément dans la conduite, individuelle ou collective, qui l'élabore, même si cette œuvre ne vient pas, finalement, à se réaliser. Elle s'intéresse moins au créateur lui-même et à l'œuvre achevée, qu'aux rapports qui unissent celle-ci à celui-là au cours de son travail. Les méthodes de la poétique oscillent donc de la psychanalyse du sujet créateur à la technologie des opérations créatrices, fonction des matériaux, natures et culturels, qu'elles dominent. Elle s'intègre, ainsi, à une anthropologie historique et considère les civilisations comme des œuvres.

S'étant attachée à donner une définition claire du mot création, la poïétique a remarqué que l'activité créatrice se situe du côté de la motricité du système nerveux, alors que l'esthétique est considérée par elle comme spécialement consacrée aux phénomènes de sensibilité (*aisthesis*). Sans nier, certes, le rôle de la sensibilité dans les conduites créatrices, la poïétique souligne que seules celles-ci sont responsables : nul n'est complètement responsable de ses sentiments, mais chacun est amené à prendre la responsabilité de ses œuvres. C'est en ceci essentiellement que la poïétique, comme discipline philosophique autonome, se démarque de l'esthétique. Dépasant le domaine des arts, elle s'applique à tous les domaines où l'homme se fait constructeur : les religions, les mœurs, les techniques, les sciences, le droit, les institutions politiques. Par exemple, elle constate qu'un des grands dossiers poïétiques de notre temps est celui de la création collective de l'Europe.

Marija Bergamo

Musik als Gestalt begrifflosen Erkenntnis

Der Aufsatz versucht die Titelfrage von der phänomenologischen Seite, vom Standpunkt des »Musiksetzens« zu fassen. Es wird die These verfolgt, die Musik als eigenartige symbolische Struktur kann zwar als der Wortsprache ähnliches Zeichensystem interpretiert werden, doch ihre Essenz ist nicht wortsprachlicher Natur. Es geht um ein dynamisches System in dem »Ordnung« und »Unordnung« gekoppelt sind, und die Interaktion zwischen scheinbaren Systemdeterminiertheit und freien kompositorischen Wahl des nächsten Schrittes im System unvorhersehbar ist. Das musikalische Denken verflechtet polare Formen: analytische Diskursivität und auf das augenblicklich erkannte Ganze ausgerichtete Intuition. Auf der Spur vom Adorno, Dahlhaus, Eggebrecht und Faltin werden zwei wichtige Fragen der musikalischen Eigengesetzlichkeit und ihrer *Sprachähnlichkeit* behandelt: (1) die Frage der Transformation der gegenständlichen in die ästhetische Erkenntnis und (2) die Frage der Bedeutung ästhetischer Phänomene. Folglich sind die wichtigsten Unterschiede zwischen Musik und Wortsprache zusammengefaßt: Sprache vermittelt Begriffe, die Musik jedoch *musikalische Gedanken*; statt der diskursiven erfüllt sie vorrangig die ästhetische Funktion; syntaktisch generierte Bedeutungen sind in der Sprache semantisch fundiert, in der Musik werden Symbolketten musikalisch interpretiert und Syntax durch musikalische Logik fundiert. Als ästhetische Vermittlungsform ist also die Musik zwar eine Art Sprache und der Sprache ähnlich, aber gewiß eine eigenartige Sprachmodalität.



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