

Modernism and “Aesthetic Experience”

Art, Aesthetics – and the Role of Modernism

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ABSTRACT The role and influence of Modernism is the focus of this article. Modernism’s lasting and unforeseeable influence is due to its key importance to the development of the general conditions of art within modernity. Along with Modernism, the implications of the modern system of art became visible for real. Modernism produced the necessity of rethinking the distinction between “art” and “the aesthetic,” based on their original foundations in the 18th century, respectively – a call for a “divorce” after the long-lived marriage between the two, installed by Romanticism. Furthermore so-called postmodernism and today’s contemporary art have in fact not, as often assumed, really broken with high Modernism. What we see is rather a transformation of a time-based modus into a more spatially defined approach. The interpretations of Modernism itself are thus being altered, when regarded with a postmodern awareness of its surrounding enunciative space. The interrelationship between the modernisms, and what followed, is therefore achieving the character of an entanglement rather than that of a straight and clear development. Modernism’s influence, it is finally asserted, is seemingly not at its conclusion, but rather at its reoccurring beginning.

KEYWORDS Modernism; Art; Aesthetics; Aesthetic Experience

I

The kind of art, which we often designate “Modernism” using a carefully imprecise superordinate concept, already long ago became something we mainly regard as a past chapter of art history. This, however, is of course – or is becoming – a truth with modifications. Although historically, the conditions for the production and the appropriation of art have changed radically since the mid-18th century, it remains one of the fundamental properties of the actual institutional provision of the art system of this modernity that *operes manent*, the artworks remain. On the one hand, artworks are born within a distinctive historical context to which they are inescapably connected, genealogically and functionally. But on the other hand, they are also permanently at disposal to any thinkable future contemporaneity, and this exactly not just in the status of being historical documents. They are also at disposal in terms of living artworks for us here and now. In that sense, works may paradoxically participate in their own history, thus also forming part of the historically achieved contemporary insight out of which (art) history is acknowledged in general, when conceived and written.¹ So in that perspective, questions of

art history about the importance and influence of any specific period are always subject to an ongoing renegotiation. The greater the historical importance of the art and the period in question, the more extensive this renegotiation.

The importance of Modernism in this respect is overwhelming, and the negotiation of its importance and continuing influence not only has by no means been concluded. It may have only just begun. Above all, the lasting and unforeseeable influence of Modernism is due to its key importance to what might be called the general conditions of art within modernity. Along with Modernism, the real implications of the modern system of art became visible for real. Along with Modernism, the status of art's autonomy became unfolded in its full consequence. Therefore, it is no wonder that Modernism has been understood in more than one way. On the one hand, it has been interpreted as the period of art history in which art, through its various developments, eventually repeals itself and thus simply reaches the end of being art (cf. Arthur Danto, among others).² And on the other hand, Modernism has been considered to be that very breaking point of art history at which the possibilities of art were eventually really set free, i.e. the focal point for a new beginning, a new development of art, the one within which every compulsion of style, above all – had finally been cancelled.³

In particular, Modernism is the art form and the period in which the peculiar entanglement of the relationship between art and the aesthetic is made critically visible and radicalized. This entanglement is in focus on the agenda for the investigation in this article: The relationship between art and aesthetic experience and the distinct role of Modernism in this relationship. Including not least the question of whether this role today appears to be changing as part of the ongoing renegotiation, mentioned above. In order to approach a discussion and an analysis of this problem, I will take my point of departure in a critical redescription of the historical relationship coming into existence between art and the aesthetic in the early modern times, i.e. the way it develops from the initial differentiation processes during the 18th century and passing through what I, in various contexts, have called the "marriage," from Romanticism and onwards, up until the historical role of this relationship within Modernism, the way this has traditionally been interpreted.⁴ On this basis, I will finally raise the question of a possible critical reevaluation of this relationship in Modernism, the way it is about to appear today.

II

"Art" and "the aesthetic" in the sense we understand the substance and function of these concepts today – be it with stringency or obscurity – have both come into existence as parts of the Modern. They are both formed as part of the general process within which society and its mechanisms for formations of meaning are being differentiated, being divided and above all are from now on going to consist of differences, all of which are to be substantiated from below, from the inside and not, as hitherto, from the outside. In other words: The condition of inescapable immanence is being installed (but not concluded) during the 18th century and this also applies to the formation of "the art" and "the aesthetic." The fact that art and the aesthetic come into existence at the same time, as part of the same process, and even such that their formation histories are, to a great extent, mutually motivated and highly interdependent does, however, not imply that these concepts actually deal with or signify the same, neither substantially nor functionally.

"Art" becomes the designation for something, which metaphorically may be characterized as "an area." Art (as a collective singular) unifies (parts of) the former arts, and during this process it establishes important delimitations *inter alia* to craftsmanship and to "science" (which is also formed in this process). Based on this idea of a general joint or shared property within art, it now becomes possible to start contemplating the differences the art forms in between, in terms of variations of such a general joint property (cf. e.g. Charles Batteux and Lessing).⁵ Art becomes an area or a territory in the sense that it establishes horizontal borderlines, which define a decisive difference between "inside" and "outside." Inside, there is a territory inhabited by residents with specific functions (such as artists, critics, mediators) and institutions (such as museums, theatres, concert halls, educational institutions, publishers, etc.) and of course, above all, by artworks. This territory, or system if you like, has its own rules and is thus relatively *autonomous* compared to the surrounding society. And what is decisively important: This territory is capable of defending itself and renewing itself from the inside. It is an "autopoietic system" as phrased by Niklas Luhmann.⁶ The gradual development of this modern system of the arts has been described by Paul Oskar Kristeller in his classical studies, and of course by many others.⁷

On the other hand, "the aesthetic" is the story about a formative differentiation of a particular kind of relationality, of a specific mode, by which we may connect ourselves with our surroundings as singular individuals. Aesthetics is defined by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten

(who introduces the concept) as “*scientia cognitionis sensitivae*,” i.e. the science of the sensuous cognition.⁸ Baumgarten defines sensuous cognition, above all, in its differences from the conceptual, cognitive one. Later in the century, Immanuel Kant is the one analysing and describing the specific properties of this “aesthetic” kind of relationality.⁹ Above all, Kant emphasizes the fundamental character of aesthetic experience as that of involving *a judgment*. This judgment is a singular affair between “me” and “that” but it is pronounced as if it were based on and referring to a shared objective value (all the while, we know it is not and it does not). The aesthetic judgment implies a specific aesthetic value. The definition of a distinct aesthetic type of relationality entails a delimitation against other types of relationality. This delimitation expresses the fact that we may approach things in different ways. But basically, this delimitation is thus not about things or objects, but about the approach, about our own “modelling operations” (Iser).¹⁰ This relationality has its historical roots in the formation of “an audience” with appertaining positions and attitudes which are also part of the formation of the Modern. Among much else, these new audience-based attitudes obviously not only imply the approach to artworks but also comprise the fact that individual members of this audience are actually now being capable of understanding themselves as spectators to e.g. nature (cf. the “picturesque,” i.e. the idea that even nature may resemble a “picture” and may thus be experienced as something actually addressing us, addressing me). The formation of an audience in the distinction processes of the Modern has been described by Larry Shiner, among others.¹¹

Now on the one hand, in order to understand the subsequent history of the relationship between art and the aesthetic, it is important to recognize the intimate connectedness of the processes engendering the differentiation of art and of aesthetic experience, respectively. They are mutually motivated by each other, and this is true both in terms of the processes of their coming into existence *and* of their mutual functions. Without aesthetic value, no art, one might say. Without audience, without judgment of taste, nothing “particular” about art. And conversely; without art, no aesthetics in the sense: Without “art,” no particular palisade, no “templum” for the cultivation and the development of specific “aesthetic” modes of addressing, the way these are to be unfolded subsequently during the history of modernity, in which art obtains exactly the function of being the initial, highly productive and privileged laboratory of the aesthetic.

On the other hand, however, art and the aesthetic still actually designate something divergent. Something divergent with each its own con-

ceptual physiognomy and something which furthermore does not pertain to the same, at least not exclusively. Aesthetic relationality, aesthetic experience is in fact found outside art too. And artworks and the whole art system do indeed have other functions and potentials than the ones being mediated through aesthetic relationality, only and thus being recognized as subordinate to this relationality and to aesthetic value.

Already from the beginning, the mutual relationship between art and the aesthetic is thus highly complicated, and in the centuries that follow, this complexity manifests itself in many more or less peculiar ways, both within thought in general and within art itself. Their differentiation as such, however, is a process with far reaching irreversible consequences. The separation of *poiesis* from *aisthesis* results in the actual evaporation of the necessary space for a joint *mimesis* (as Jacques Rancière has it).¹² Consequently, this entails the tendential disappearance of the logics of representation as an unquestionable common base, the logics which up till then had been in power and had thus guaranteed the production of art on the one hand, and the perception of art on the other, as belonging to the very same order. Now two heterogeneous logics are installed and this implies a totally new position of *mimesis* in the game, as well. From having been the understood basis of everything, *mimesis*, "representation" now becomes a kind of free player, becomes a *libero*, one might say.

III

Already soon, however, and even before the complex and productive perspectives in the acknowledgment of the fundamentally diverging constitution of art and the aesthetic, respectively, really came into historical existence, another strong tradition was born. This was a tradition which in certain ways locked up art and the aesthetic in a mutual constraint by installing a quaint symmetry in their respective logics of extension. The tradition in question is Romanticism and its endeavours towards a kind of convergence between or unification of art and the aesthetic, their "marriage." As early as in the so called "Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus" (i.e. "The Oldest System Programme of German Idealism"), an unpublished fragment from the late 1790s, the aesthetic act is defined as "the highest act of reason, the one through which it encompasses all ideas," just like it is stated that "truth and goodness only become sisters in beauty." The aesthetic here refers directly to art, especially to poetry which is defined as "the teacher of mankind." This fragment, ascribed to Hegel, Hölderlin or Schelling is typical, especially by its intention of unification, of reunification, actually.¹³ Art and the aesthetic

become the highest form of exactly *reason*, they become “the *teacher* of mankind.” Art itself and the thought about art are thus merged together. Obviously, the sheer condition of possibility for the acknowledgment of such general (re)unifications as such is produced historically only by the fact that a separation has been taking place. Along with the Modern, the good, the true and the beautiful have now helplessly fallen apart; the laborious and uncontrollable differentiatedness of immanence thus entails a longing for transcending unity, for order and for unquestionable hierarchy.

There is nothing strange or surprising in such a wish for reunification in itself. This tradition, however, soon turned out to gain an importance and a persistence which has had extremely comprehensive consequences, ever since then, both for the development of art itself and for the understanding of art and of the aesthetic, respectively. One might say that with this tradition, aesthetics is simply divided into two. On the one hand, aesthetics is defined, e.g. already stated in the mature G. W. F. Hegel’s lectures, as “philosophy of art,” *schlicht und einfach*.¹⁴ Aesthetics hereby becomes the discourse which knows (or claims to know) what art is. In Hegel’s approach, including his whole historical-eschatological system, art’s primary mode of existence, is, as we know, narrowly connected to what might be called the truth content of art. The truth content is that by which art in its specific way contributes to our cognition of the world – also in a normative sense. On the other hand, since the aesthetic is also still (somehow) dealing with the distinctive sensuous cognition, art becomes literally spoken squeezed into, or tied up inside this aesthetic double packing, although this packing is not even coherent with itself anymore. The result is what has been called “the aesthetic regime of art” (Rancière),¹⁵ i.e. art wrapped in an aesthetic straitjacket. A straitjacket which has insistently been able to steer both the production and the perception of art in the direction of its exclusively cognitive contribution; a straitjacket which has made it difficult or even impossible to acknowledge aesthetic value outside of art, at least not in any other sense than as a discursive loan or theft from art; and a straitjacket which has effectively been able to lock up any comprehensive recognition of the difference between these concepts, also in terms of a possible palette of productive possibilities of such a difference. Hereby, one might say, *aisthesis* is sneaking back to *poiesis*. In this peculiar way, aesthetics also becomes an art’s jailer.

Based on the history of the coming into being of art and the aesthetic, there is, as mentioned, nothing mysterious in this alliance. The fact that

this partnership, historically as well as functionally, comes to prove itself so surprisingly stable, is obviously due to its ability to fulfil certain manifest needs, especially for the formulation and maintenance of the area of art. The price to pay for this, however, is firstly this peculiar and – in the long run – utterly inappropriate cognitive bias of the purposes of art. And secondly, of course, this price includes the chronic amnesia or obscuration of certain sets of possibilities to understand and to act according to the initial differentiations between the two. Above all, obviously, the obscuration of any understanding of aesthetic experience outside art.

IV

"Modernism" in its broadest sense establishes a comprehensive battle with the constitution and arrangement of the whole art system. A considerable part of this battle focuses on the critical farewell to the so-called Beaux Arts system for the benefit of the new "Art in general system," such as analysed by Thierry de Duve in his recent suite of articles in *The Artforum*, 2013–2014.¹⁶ This battle obviously includes the aesthetic regime, i.e. the alliance (or the straitjacket, if you prefer) between aesthetics (here primarily in the sense of a normative philosophy of art) and art. One might say that a productive (re)separation, at the face of it, is seemingly accomplished through this process. And then again, it is not. Though separations do take place, they never really carry through a decent divorce, after which the partners may each lead a new life of their own and enter into altered, mutually equal relations. These separations rather take the shape of systematic infidelity, but certainly within the comfortable setting of the marriage.

Modernism – or perhaps rather the modernist movements in art – implements a broad range of critical transformations of core properties of artworks and of art as such, properties which had not been challenged, up till then. In a general sense, this critique and demolition is true concerning what might be called "the consolation of good forms" (Lyotard), i.e. the entire fundamental idea that an artwork, if nothing else, should be in a kind of basic accord with itself, should be organic and coherent, and also in this sense, should be reducible or referable back to a kind of ideal ground (understood, in the artist and finally within society). The battle against the zealous guardsmen of the art system in a narrow sense (e.g. in the shape of committees of censorship in the salons) is gradually turned into frenetic attacks on the specific autonomy of art as such, e.g. by the historical avant-garde movements. "Autonomy," it was admitted, did though guarantee art a considerable free space of unfolding and

developing its forms of signification, free from the never-ending core demands for rationality of purpose from the surrounding society. But, on the other hand, it was equally acknowledged that autonomy did maintain that remoteness of art, which in the eyes of e.g. many politically radical artists, made art chronically harmless, and thus in fact without any real influence on the general development of society. As we know, this critique of autonomy has many different forms and it unfolds itself along highly different axes without being coordinated at any level, neither in time, nor in space. Once again, one might point out the puzzling story about the message posted by Marcel Duchamp in 1913 with his *urinoir* (and the context of this) – and which, when this message arrives in the 1960s, gains a radical importance and a distinctive symbolic status within its new context, cf. de Duve's analysis.

Generally, the Modernisms result in a pronounced displacement of the fundamental role and status of the artist. This applies to the transformation process, within which the artist, from being a *homo faber*, is becoming a *homo significans* – a process which is already an inherent part of the concept of art of the Modern and which is speeded up from Romanticism and onwards. The product, the artefact, of course still possesses status and (aesthetic) value, but this value is less and less understood as connected to the proper amount of work embedded in the material, due to the artist's mastership, his capability and craftsmanship. The value is now transferred from material to gesture, from result to idea or to thought. In its ultimate conclusion, the artwork from then on may be a sheer nothing, an absence, or perhaps an ephemeral situation. This de-objectualisation of art, as it has been called, is obviously connected to the battle against the traditional art system and the "good forms," but it is also referring to several more substantial acknowledgement processes. One of these is exactly about "representation" and this one manifests itself in new approaches and forms, each marked in their own peculiar way within the different art forms. Once again, the medial distinctiveness of the art forms is to become a standard and a program, as in Clement Greenberg's ideas about how the art forms should refine and pursue their own formal potentials.¹⁷ This pursuit of the proper logics of medialities turn out to become radical experiments of form, often with reference to what is called "the material" itself. This is true of abstract painting, narrowed down to the sheer monochromes, and to the still more monstrous "nie erhörte Klänge" of 12-tone music. *Homo significans* of course also attacks itself with automatic writing and all in all with different kinds of explicit self-imposed principles of procedure

in the production processes of art (cf. e.g. later on the *Oulipo* and similar movements). Many of these endeavours and intentions have (as in Peter Bürger's theory of *avant-garde*)¹⁸ rightly been acknowledged as efforts on the part of art to break the autonomy, to escape the *templum*, to come back to the practice of life. We may, however, ascertain that in a general sense, the result rather became the opposite. Modernism's break with the good forms, with the organic work of art, with representation, with figuration – all this rather drew art back to itself and cut it off from at least its broader audience. This is not least connected to the fact that (once again in general) any explicit "addressedness" of the work as a parameter had no privileged status within high Modernism, often even on the contrary. The "truth" of the artworks, now primarily understood as their message about what art is or should be, was far more central. "This is art" in a certain way became the new point of departure for the evaluative relation, for the judgment (de Duve).

Pertaining to our specific question about the relationship between art and aesthetic experience, the Modernisms seemingly expose an obvious paradox. On the one hand, it seems as if Modernism is actually clarifying, is pointing out the initial conceptual and phenomenal distinction between art (as art in general) and the aesthetic (as a specific kind of relationality in the perception). This is of course implied in the explicitly decoupled interest of aesthetic effect at the level of the artefact, which is characteristic of great parts of Modernism and which consequently emphasises the factual difference. But on the other hand, this specific distinction actually does take place in the name of that very marriage and within its setting and conditions. The quest for the truth of art (the truth about art) in the aesthetic thought (of production) and which thus actually belongs to *poiesis* is, in general, actually still in charge of the whole issue, and therefore ends up subordinating any aesthetic addressedness towards the beholder to this agenda of truth. As we know, this separation, which is insistently frenetic and barrier-breaking on the one hand, whereas still taking place under a "safe" cognitive regime on the other hand, along certain lines ends up driving modernist art literally spoken *ad absurdum*. And by the way, it also ends up driving parts of the theoretical understanding of art *ad absurdum*.

In general, as part of our re-description of history at this level (another version will follow below), we may conclude that Modernism, all in all, did *not* escape its aesthetic straitjacket. The autonomy and the particular set of conditions for the production of meaning of the art system was not broken nor abolished, art did not come back to the practice of life.

An amount of new rules and possibilities within the territory was introduced, but neither the conceptual anatomy nor the basic functions of the territory were altered or in any sense weakened, on the contrary. The autonomy actually became thicker or heavier in the sense that, although it had now become permitted within art to do so much else and so much more, in fact to do anything at all, this came with a price. Namely the price that no matter what was done in the name of art, it was inescapably turned into and had to be perceived *as art*, in any case. Art's understanding of itself remained wrapped up in a composite acknowledgement of the aesthetic, which had the capability of assigning the proto-normative aesthetic thought status of ruler and guiding star of the development, on the one hand. And which, on the other hand, was to recognize aesthetic effect as substantially deriving from and thus subordinated this cognitive mastership. Any other kind of aesthetics dealing with the specific experience part of it, therefore had no prominent position on the agenda of Modernist art.

V

Now, does all this imply that the radical Modernisms in fact are to be considered as a kind of esoteric niche, a break or a downright descend in the general course of conceptual development which was hereafter taken over by a triumphant postmodernism? At a supreme level, the answer to this is definitely "no." The so-called postmodernism saw and defined itself as something which might, at the face of it, look like a polemic antithesis to high modernism. The programme discourses of postmodernism were permeated by a metaphoric of reoccurrence. By then a painting was suddenly, once again allowed to be figurative, in fact painting as such was becoming possible at all, also in terms of an expressive and exclusive medium (cf. the "Junge Wilde"). Similarly, narratives were allowed to revert to literature, preferably including complex systems of displaced positions of narration, which could play with the narrator's role all the while the delight of, and the desire for the plot itself was unfolded and staged without any kind of constraints. Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler* is a beautiful example. The scepticism towards representation which had apparently forced the greater parts of high modernism, to not only turn its back on representation by cancelling any straight representational connection between the artefacts and our world – but furthermore, to frenetically insist on the demonstration of this "impossibility" of representation again and again, through intrusive experimental deplorations in the scale of 1:1 – that scepticism was seem-

ingly gone. By then, it had suddenly become possible to mock all this. Actually, a tendency arose to straightforwardly ridicule the entire heavy seriousness by which High Modernism accomplished its endeavours, and in the light of which it also apparently understood itself with high self-esteem. All of a sudden, the quest for authenticity, for seriousness, for inner truth was no longer highly rated and was seemingly replaced by a feeling of lightness, of the temporarity and relativity of everything. A lightness, however, which could have a reverse side as well, cf. Milan Kundera and his peculiar metaphor about how burdensome it may be to carry something, which is far too light.¹⁹

So in that perspective, the modernisms could certainly appear as a dead-end from which we had finally and fortunately been liberated. By way of its entire rhetorics of conquer, when phrasing its own gains and emphasizing its negative distance towards Modernism, early postmodernism pointed in that direction too. Actually, the very designation of postmodernism, expressed by way of the prefix "post-," was an indication of an idea based on linear development, according to which one might see oneself as representing a level one step higher (which was though paradoxically in contradiction to the notion of performing an entire thorough criticism of the very imperative about linearity and development paramount to the Modern and to Modernism).

Postmodernism's image of itself is here obviously exaggerated to the limit of caricature (as it already happened in the discussions back then). An analytic investigation of what actually happened in art (and shortly after, within the understanding of art as well) makes a somewhat different picture appear. The transition after what was actually not the end of art, but the end of high Modernism, turned out not to have the shape of a linear rectification of a level of development one step below, but on the contrary; to actually performing an extension into quite another dimension. It turned out to becoming a new framing of a different perspective on a phenomenon, "Modernism," which by that ceased being just a past done with, and instead was actually also becoming insisting contemporaneity, just in another light. This circumstance has been described as a transition from something primarily temporarily organized and oriented into something more spaciouly oriented. This is how the condition of post or late Modernism is asserted e.g. by Fredric Jameson, whose initial analysis of this has been put forward again recently by W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, among others, in connection with their rethinking of the contemporary discourse about media.²⁰ Now, this dimensional displacement makes the interrelationship between the cancelled (obsolete)

and the reoccurring “Kunstmittel” (means of art) in Modernism and post-modernism, respectively, far more complex than the sheer notion of a pendulum swaying back. The achieved spacious orientation, as it seems, actually above all implies an attention to positions, to places, and consequently to distinctions between possible positions within the space, positions from which and to which speaking is possible (cf. Michel Foucault’s *énoncé*).²¹ This also implies that the kinds of narration, of figuration or of representation to which we are reverting, are by no means identical to what had been settled with. By now, these forms are openly understood as constructed elements within an exchange of signification, within situatively concrete enunciations. Hence, the designation of “the enunciative paradigm” has been introduced as adequate for the entire orientation (characterized like this by Thierry de Duve).²² I will come back to that in more detail below.

VI

The overall importance of Modernism, thus seemingly becomes visible through the spatialisation brought into play by the mature postmodern, including its theoreticized insights which have been called both post-structuralist and post-hermeneutic. Any feeling of having “surmounted” Modernism which permeated considerable parts of early postmodernism, thus understanding itself as a kind of neo-(or trans-)avant-garde, evaporated rather quickly.

This spatialisation or enunciatively coloured understanding of art as such, has finally achieved a particular specific importance to the referred to “marriage” between art and the aesthetic, to the installation by the aesthetic regime of “aesthetics” as a normatively regulating controller of the truth content of art. Today, this marriage is collapsing as a consequence of pressure from experiences and developments on several separate levels, all of them connected to the spatialisation process above. First of all, art itself has to an increasing degree produced artefacts which are about to completely escape the possibility of being understood within the cognitive paradigm. Secondly, the escalating use of explicit forms of addressedness within design and shaping in general, also outside of art, well, by and large, the exponential increase of the general degree of “design” in the society we live in, has accentuated the quest for an operative concept of aesthetic experience, not limited solely to art. Thirdly and finally, both theory of art and theory of aesthetics have worked themselves towards insights beyond the notions of union and this marriage. They have instead begun to demand an *aesthetic* analysis of contemporary art, a “Kant after/according to Duchamp.”²³ As is well known, this process has not been

taking place – and indeed does not take place – without a fight. In his inaugural speech at one of the prominent events in the development history of aesthetics, i.e. the conference "Die Aktualität des Ästhetischen" in Hannover in 1992, Karl-Heinz Bohrer expressed his attitude with the following sentence: "Ein Terror liegt über dem Land: Die Akzeptanz des Ästhetischen."²⁴ The sheer thought that it should be possible to define and to operationalize the aesthetic had to be construed as "terror" in Bohrer's optics. This statement really shows us something about the sacrosanct and completely untouchable status of the wrapped up concept of aesthetics – and by that also something about why so many theoretical discourses of art-understanding within this tradition have taken the character of over-praising obscurantism, rather than of clarifying analysis. Conversely, a secularized understanding like that of the aesthetic, as part of the enunciative dispositive, renders possible, even actually calls for a critical and cool reacquisition of the role of the modernisms to the historical change of the defining conditions of art. No doubt, the influence of the modernisms is tremendous and lasting. But this influence not only includes the recognition of agents and events in a historical narrative. It also applies to the insights and the perspectives which the re-consideration of the modernisms may bring forth, concerning our own contemporary art. Instead of understanding the postmodern *parabasis* as a kind of liberation from the hermetic and maybe somewhat esoteric space of Modernism, it has now become possible and perhaps inevitable to greet and to experience even a 'postmodern' contemporary art through the perspective of Modernism's acuity and seriousness – and perhaps consequently acknowledging art as what might be called *para-modern*, i.e. definitely Modern, and overtly addressing itself as such.²⁵ Concordantly, the interpretations of Modernism itself are being altered, when regarded with a postmodern awareness of its surrounding enunciative space. The fact that "seriousness" and "absence" are produced representational effects as well, and not (just) privileges given and/or inescapable conditions, actually changes or nuances the meaning of significative topoi like that.

Apparently, in an overall sense, the interrelationship between the modernisms, and what followed, is achieving the character of an entanglement rather than that of a clarified development. Jean-François Lyotard once stated something along the lines of this, that postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but at its beginning, and this beginning is reoccurring.²⁶ In that perspective, to conclude, it should be obvious that Modernism is not a deviation or a dead end, but a decisive and inevitable key factor within an ongoing process which could be summarized under

the headline of: Becoming Modern. During this process, the understanding and the concept of “art in general” is under formation from within, by and qua itself. During this process, the concept of aesthetic experience as pertaining to a specific kind of relationality, as a momentum or modus of enunciation, is under formation from within, by and qua itself. Both art and aesthetic experience certainly designate specific types of emergent differences mounted by and within ourselves. But these concepts, these phenomena, are mutually different. They are both developing as part of an ongoing negotiation of the Modern as such – by and within the Modern, a negotiation including the specific influence of the Modernisms in art, on this development. This influence, I believe, is not at its conclusion, but rather at its reoccurring beginning.

Notes

1. I am dealing with this problematics of historicity in my *Framing and Fiction: Studies in the Rhetoric of Novel, Interpretation, and History* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992).

2. Arthur C. Danto’s “The End of Art” was written as a “target essay” in *The Death of Art*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Haven Publishers, 1984). The German art historian Hans Belting had a similar point in his *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1983). Arthur Danto, ten years later, published a revised version of his points in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

3. This general point of view has most significantly been elaborated by Thierry de Duve in his extensive work, see for instance *Nominalisme Pictural: Marcel Duchamp, la peinture et la modernité* (Paris: Minuit, 1984), *Au nom de l’art: Pour une archéologie de la modernité* (Paris: Minuit, 1989), *Du nom au nous* (Paris: Éd. Dis Voir, 1995) and the English trans./reconsideration, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

4. See my *Den æstetiske relation: Sansoplevelsen mellem kunstvidenskab og filosofi* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2008). Parts of this book’s points of views have been published in English, see my “Art, Aesthetics – Divorce?,” *Site*, no. 33 (2013), 107–18, and in German, see “Ästhetik, Kunst und Kunstverständnis: Die Kunst und das Kunstwerk”, *Neue Rundschau* 123, Heft 1 (2012), 187–200.

5. See Charles Batteux (“Abbé Batteux”), *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (1746); Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766).

6. Niklas Luhmann, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

7. See Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," in *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

8. See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik. Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der "Aesthetica"* (1750/58). Übersetzt und hrsg. von Hans Rudolf Schweizer. Lateinisch-Deutsch (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), 7.

9. Especially in his *Critique of Judgment*. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Werkausgabe Band X. Hrsg. von Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968 (1790)).

10. See Wolfgang Iser, "Von der Gegenwärtigkeit des Ästhetischen," in *Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung*, hrsg. von Joachim Küpper und Christoph Menke (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003).

11. See Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

12. See Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scènes du régime esthétique de l'art* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), 30ff.

13. For an English version of this text, see "The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism," in *Art in Theory 1648–1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 815ff.

14. See G. F. W. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

15. Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2011.

16. Thierry de Duve, in this suite of articles, critically reconstructs this development of the Modern concept of art: "Pardon My French." Thierry de Duve on the invention of art (*Artforum*, October 2013); "Don't Shoot the Messenger." Thierry de Duve on the Duchamp syllogism (*Artforum*, November 2013); "Why Was Modernism Born in France?" Thierry de Duve on the collapse of the Beaux-Arts system (*Artforum*, January 2014); "The Invention of Non-art: a History." Thierry de Duve on the Salon des Refusés (*Artforum*, February 2014); "The Invention of Non-art: a Theory." Thierry de Duve on the rise of the Art-in-General system (*Artforum*, March 2014); and "This Is Art": Anatomy of a Sentence." Thierry de Duve on aesthetic judgment (*Artforum*, April 2014).

17. In his influential essay "Modernist Painting" (1960).

18. See Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974); see also my "Autonomi, kunstmidler, avantgarde: Litteraturen som institution i det borgerlige samfund. Introduktion til Peter Bürgers litteraturhistorieteori," in *SILAU* no. 4, 1981.

19. In his novel title, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

20. See W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen: "Time and Space," in *Critical*

Terms for Media Studies, eds. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2010), 105ff.

21. See Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 105ff.

22. De Duve, *op. cit.*, 1996, 382ff.

23. The pun is Thierry de Duve's, originally in French, as "Kant (d')après Duchamp," *op. cit.*, 1989.

24. See Bohrer, Karl Heinz, "Die Grenzen des Ästhetischen," in *Die Aktualität des Ästhetischen* [Der Kongress "Die Aktualität von Ästhetischen" 2–5 Sept., 1992]. Hrsg. von Wolfgang Welsch in Zusammenarb. mit Ivo Frenzel (Munich: Fink, 1993).

25. See my "Kunstens betingelser: Pathos, paramoderne, palimpsest," in *Riften og sløret: Essays over kunstens betingelser* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998), 236–53.

26. Originally in his article (J.-F. Lyotard), "Reponse à la question: qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?," *Critique*, April 1982 (Paris). The distinction before/after concerning Modern/Postmodern in this light was taken up by Thierry de Duve in his keynote address, "On time," at the conference in The Nordic Society of Aesthetics, "Aesthetics, Contemporaneity, Art," May 29, 2015, at Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies.