

CARSTEN FRIBERG

THE IMPORTANCE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Why must aesthetic experience be thematised? Why is it that aesthetic experience is of interest? What has made – or is making it – so? What could be the questions – or perhaps the experiences – to which aesthetic experiences are the answer?

In an attempt at an answer I want to present a philosophical short-story about aesthetic experience – a short-story in hermeneutical style i.e. of the form: “find the questions to which aesthetic experience is an answer”. Not *the* answer since a modern and pluralistic world has no room for definitive answers. Not even *the* question since that – cautious and modern – is too risky a strategy that can only be taken by a radical reduction that does not pay attention to the heterogeneity of the world.

I will present a short-story about philosophers with a special interest in the question of aesthetic experience. This includes first of all Joachim Ritter and Odo Marquard. Marquard has already asked the question: why aesthetic experience.¹ I dwell on his way of posing the questions for a while and elaborate it a little.

To anticipate, I will begin by, briefly, giving what seems to be a convincing answer. Aesthetic experience becomes interesting as a means for orientation in and understanding of the modern world, a means, and even more, a necessary supplement to other forms of experiences in the modern world. Aesthetic experience is necessary because the modern world is characterised by a loss of experience – a loss caused by the ideal of rationality that stems from the scientific revolution which reduces experience to mere information, a loss because the experience of our ability to form our surroundings according to our needs at the break of modernity [die Neuzeit] is what makes modernity break and causes a revolt against the old world, prepares the way for a modern world which is increasingly innovative and thus, causes a reduction in the range of our

¹ Marquard, *Krise der Erwartung – Stunde der Erfahrung. Zur ästhetischen Kompensation des modernen Erfahrungsverlustes* (Konstanz: Konstanzer Universitätsreden, 1982); cf. *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica. Philosophische Überlegungen* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989).

experience. Furthermore, with the reduction of experience the realistic limits of our expectations are threatened – which, in turn, creates another loss because unlimited expectations reduce our ability to learn from reality that gives us experience.

To make this narrative convincing – and outline a possible answer to – the following questions: How is it that we “lose” experiences in the modern world? And, in what way can aesthetic experience remedy this loss?

1. *The loss of experience.* What is experience? It is a concept that needs clarification, as it seems to be one of our most obscure concepts – at least according to Gadamer.² Initially, the prospects for such an undertaking do not look very promising, but Gadamer throws some light on it and we eventually may be able to say with him – and with Marquard, who says the same but with his distinctive sense for formulation – that experience is the disclaimer of expectation through the veto of a reality.³ This is still somewhat vague but a quotation from Heidegger will serve to sharpen it in emphasizing that the veto of reality is a strong veto leaving us as changed persons, from experience we become experienced persons: “Mit etwas, sei es ein Ding, ein Mensch, ein Gott, eine Erfahrung machen heisst, dass es uns widerfährt, dass es uns trifft, über uns kommt, uns unwirft und verwandelt.”⁴

The concept of experience has a long history that will summarize in order to emphasize those features that are necessary for understanding experience and the loss of it. One should as always take a brief glance at Aristotle, in particular when he talks about *empeiria* in the *Metaphysics* 980 b 28 - 981 a 4: “Now from memory experience is produced in men; for the several memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience. And experience seems pretty much like science and art, but really science and art come to men through experience”.⁵

² “Der Begriff der Erfahrung scheint mir – so paradox es klingt – zu den unaufgeklärtesten Begriffen zu hören, die wir besitzen”. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* 6th ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1990), 352.

³ “...das Dementi der Erwartung durch das Veto einer Realität – ist das, was üblicherweise Erfahrung heisst”. Marquard, *Krise der Erwartung – Stunde der Erfahrung*, 23; cf. Gadamer, op.cit., 356.

⁴ Heidegger, “Das Wesen der Sprache” in: *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske (1959), 1990), 159.

⁵ [Ed. Ross]; cf. *Analytica posteriora* 100 a 3-5.

Because experience is about particulars, it is neither science [*epistémé*] nor art [*techné*]; it only seems pretty much like it. To be experienced is to know something, but it is not merely a question of possessing scientific knowledge; it is – Aristotle again – to know *that* but not to know the answer to the inquiring question *why*.

Science and art are based on experience, experience is therefore the fundament upon which science and art rest. Now science is the keyword for the discussion of experience. Science for Aristotle is not modern science; but what happens when science becomes modern is important in regard to the question about experience in the modern world. Since experience is the fundament for science and art as well as for orientation and action, we need to distinguish the experience that is relevant to our scientific endeavours from that which is not. We must, with Francis Bacon, distinguish between *experientia vaga* – the drifting and vagabondising experience – and *experientia ordinata* – the ordered or regulated experience.⁶ Bacons protest is not against Aristotle or the Aristotelian sciences but against the sciences of his age i.e. the Renaissance. The outcome of this protest together with the protest of key thinkers of the scientific revolution of the 17th century – first of all Galileo and Descartes – is the question of what is acceptable as experience and what is not.

The Renaissance fosters a demand for objectivity, exactness and reproducibility, a demand for experiences that can serve an exact science, inspired by mathematical ideas and objectivity, as something definite and describable in opposition to subjectivity. A standard example is the difference between primary and secondary qualities, as presented first by Galilei in *Il Saggiatore* (1623)⁷ and treated in different ways by, among others, Descartes and Boyle; the difference between qualities such as size, shape and number, i.e. qualities describable in a mathematical language, and qualities as colour, sound, taste and smell that are private and not essential for the object. Unessential... This is crucial for the science that is based on the elimination of Aristotelian essentialism. What is essential becomes what is describable mathematically, in *Il Saggiatore* we find an important formulation: the universe is written in the mathematical language.⁸

⁶ Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620) I,82

⁷ Ed. L.Sosio, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1992), 261 ff.

⁸ "La filosofia è scritta in questo grandissimo libro che continuamente ci sta aperto innanzi a gli occhi (io dico l'universo), ma non si può intendere se prima non s'impara a intendere la lingua, e conoscer i caratteri, ne' quali è scritto. Egli è scritto in lingua

The scientific revolution and the founding of modernity can be succinctly characterised in the following way: with Bacon, Galileo and Descartes, new ideals are established: ideals for the regulation of experiences so that they can serve for a mathematical – or something that resembles a mathematical – science of nature.

Here, it is important to ensure that nothing is taken for granted that cannot be guaranteed as such; it must be open for anyone to investigate. That which is handed down by tradition is considered problematic; the tradition rests on prejudices that should be criticised and when necessary abandoned. The tradition is no longer the bearer of truth but is full of misunderstanding and mistaken judgements. The tradition-raider of them all – Descartes – radicalises the critic of tradition and the quest for an absolutely certain beginning. This fight against tradition becomes so established for the following age that it becomes a new tradition.

To insist upon an absolute beginning is to say that history has no role to play. From now on, knowledge is scientific, scientific knowledge is based on experience, and experience is something anyone in the same situation under the same circumstances can have – i.e. what is found in a certain repeatable context, which is to say a context that is independent of historical circumstances. Experience now delivers exact information to be described in mathematical terms.

The elimination of history is also a rejection of the experience of the experienced. Personal experience as the fundament for judgment and action does not serve as the basis for science since that kind of experience is subjective – constituting one's own personal history. It could have a place in the area of judging and acting – in morals – but even here, it is valid only on borrowed time: it has a role in morals which is only provisional, as Descartes says in the third part of *Discours de la Méthode*.

An absolute beginning is also the intensification of the self-confidence of reason. It is a reason which trusts itself to such an extent that it becomes its own guarantee. It becomes the instance of legitimation. When modernity has legitimated itself, and I will legitimate my claim that legitimation is a keyword for understanding modernity as succinctly as possible and in a very uncartesian way using an *argumentum ad verecundiam* – by appealing to Hans Blumenberg,⁹

matematica, e i caratteri son triangoli, cerchi, ed altre figure geometriche, senza i quali mezzi è impossibile a intenderne umanamente parola; senza questi è un aggirarsi vanamente per un oscuro laberinto.”, *ibid.* 38.

⁹ Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1966).

everything has to be legitimated on new conditions; on conditions set by what is new: the rationality of the modern sciences. This is of course not regarded as a new rationality but as rationality as such; therefore it has no need for history and tradition which can only be the history of mistakes – or at least of curiosities – the history of the unenlightened past.

An absolute beginning is the claim of reason to be beyond criticism. It is a reason that has purified itself to an extent where it has expurgated its critical content and thus become pure reason which is also a reason that makes itself immune to reflection and becomes dogmatic, as Kant's criticism points out. Should anyone contest the validity of this pure reason it can only be done from outside the accepted rationality, which for an absolute rationality was claimed to be rationality as such, and outside reason, we find the irrational.

This leads to the discourse about the loss of experience. What has been described here could also be called a naturalisation of rationality and experience, by which is meant that the ideal of rationality and experience based on the science of nature becomes the only acceptable ideal. This naturalisation has important consequences and attention should be drawn to two points:

a. The first is that naturalisation is a totalitarianism intent on controlling nature. Every acceptable experience is reduced to an experience of objects – and objects are spatio-temporal. To speak with Hegel against Kant, since Kant reveals himself as an empiricist on this point – that experience contains only “...dass hier ein Leuchter steht, hier eine Tabakdose”.¹⁰ What Hegel draws attention to is the reduction of experience understood as a reduction of what can be recognised as a valid experience; experience is now seen as a certain sort of reliable information. It is a reduction of what could be called experience as an experience of life which is experience as the basis for orientation and thus for action. It is experience that lacks the openness to the situation in which we are prepared to learn something new since it is only open for acceptable information¹¹. This opens for further discussion, but the point to emphasise here is that by loss of experience is meant the loss due to the reduction of experience to information.

b. The second consequence is that naturalisation shortens the life of experiences. The scientific revolution is the articulation of what lies behind the

¹⁰ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), 352.

¹¹ Cf. the structure of question and answer in Gadamer op.cit., 375 ff.

productive interests of the Renaissance; an interest in forming the world – and forming it according to needs we see as fundamental and unquestionable – and what will eventually be regarded as our human rights. Forming our surroundings is the keyword – together with an absolute beginning and the loss of tradition – it is a strategy of getting-away-from and getting-towards i.e. a strategy of progress. The telos for the practical interest of Renaissance technology – for engineering, architecture, medicine etc. – becomes an alternative to the biblical telos. The telos of our salvation and the telos of saving us from practical problems comes into conflict after the Renaissance. When the sciences gain in cultural importance – and our culture becomes viewed as a scientific-technical civilisation after the second half of the 18th century – the idea of progress becomes crucial. It is the breakthrough of modernity – the age in which it becomes of vital importance to be modern as modernity is aptly characterised by Gianni Vattimo.¹² This demand for being modern has the consequence that our experiments become antiquated. A rupture occurs, between our experiences and the expectations they give rise to. History was about the connection between before and after; it was not so much about the past as it was about the experiences of others and from which one could learn – history was the cicero-nian *historia magistra vitae*. Where the demand for being modern becomes modern, history loses its importance as the bearer of experiences that offers us justified expectations. The experiences of our parents no longer serve as a basis for our actions as they are now antiquated, and even our own experiences may soon be outdated. The demand for being modern is a demand for being more modern than everyone else, it leads to an accelerated pace of change and thus to an increased half-life of experience.

When events pile up experience suffers – this is a characteristic trait of modernity.

In order to solve this paradox, we must remember that experience is the veto from reality – a veto that leaves us as a different, an experienced, person.

¹² “...la modernità è l'epoca in cui diventa un valore determinante il fatto di essere moderne.” Vattimo, *La società trasparente* (Milano: Garzanti Editore, 1989), 7. For the relation between experience and expectation see Koselleck “‘Erfahrungsraum’ und ‘Erwartungshorizont’ - zwei historische Kategorien”, in: Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), 349-375; and for acceleration of history cf. the works of Hermann Lübbe especially *Im Zug der Zeit. Verkürzter Aufenthalt in der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1992). Here (p. 24), Lübbe gives the tempo signature of Robert Schumann's Sonata in g minor, op. 22 as an example of acceleration from the field of aesthetics: to begin with *So rasch wie möglich*, followed by a *Schneller* and later *Noch schneller*.

Experience occurs when expectations fail. I expected it to be so, but – veto from reality – it is not so. I am then – if I am really prepared to undergo an experience – prepared to accept the veto and learn from it. Experience is characterised by openness. I have expectations because of my experiences – expectations are future experiences. What happens in modernity is, following Koselleck, that the biblical expectation is repealed and only everyday expectations are left. What biblical expectation did was to set a limit to our expectations; it was the total expectation beyond our everyday expectations, *the* expectation against our expectations. The church had a monopoly regarding the ultimate expectation – the eschatological expectation – and served as a guarantee against tendencies to overrate worldly expectations. Thus, to integrate this insight with Blumenberg's analysis we could say that the church served as a neutraliser of gnostic elements. When the church monopoly is repealed in modernity, the futurisation of our expectations without limits becomes possible. It is to take our experiences, and they are now experiences of our ability to change the world, with the political main experience: the french revolution, and turn them into a prognosis for the future.

Experience is the veto from reality. If we moderns live by expectations that are futurised experiences should we not expect to find that many expectations fail because they do not agree with reality – and thus have more experiences than ever before?

We do think, as moderns, that we live by experiences. This is a reaction against the mediaeval and unenlightened: they did not live by experience but by authority. But we – the moderns – are different.

We base our science on experience, and not only our science. We base our daily lives on experience to an extent where we must institutionalise experiences in schools – and schools not only for basic education, but for ten or twenty years' schooling followed by continuous further education. We experience the main events of the world via various mass media; we have modernised experiences, i.e. information, to the extent that our society becomes an information society. But are these really experiences? It has already been claimed that this kind of modern experience is a reduced kind of experience, since it is reduced to mere information. Does a reduced experience generate reduced expectations? What happens when modern expectations fail? Do we recognise any veto from reality? Do we recognise any reality? What reality can impose its veto on expectations that are expectations of a better future – of progress? What other reality than an antiquated reality, exactly the reality we do not

accept, the reality we are intent on leaving behind us, a reality we wish to improve and make modern? When reality and expectations are in conflict it is a challenge to be overcome; politically we have a reactionary opposition, scientifically we have unsolved problems. Reality has lost its right to veto because modernity is the idea of reality as it really should be – something for us to decide. Modern experience loses the openness of experience – the readiness to learn something new which is only possible when one is humble enough to realize one might be mistaken.

Modern experience is without openness – it is controlled. It is – as argued earlier – immunising itself against reflection – against self-criticism and thus against – experience!

The question concerns aesthetic experience; experience may be gained when the expectation is in crisis – namely when reality negates the expectation. We live in an age of crisis of expectations because of the lack of experience as experience – because of the accelerated pace of change in the modern world – loses its ability to be applied to the future since the future is a different world from the one in which experience was gained. Now the crisis in expectation was supposed to give us experiences, but the decreasing ability to have experiences because we are unprepared for experience in a changing world that destroys the openness necessary for making experiences, leaves us in a situation of too little experience which aggravates the crisis of expectations. This problematic dialectic of experience and expectation creates a vicious circle in light of which aesthetic experience takes on a special importance.

2. *Aesthetic experience*. What can aesthetic experience offer? Aesthetics is, after it became a philosophical discipline in the middle of the 18th century, a philosophy of art. Before then aesthetics was *aisthesis*, that which is related to the body, as sensation, feelings, emotions, awareness of external objects as well as of facts etc.; i.e. a concept of problematic translation; but here it suffices to emphasise its relation to the senses.

But why does philosophy take an interest in aesthetics at the same time as the philosophy of the scientific revolution becomes a dominant cultural factor – i.e. at the same time when experience is reduced to information and its half life develops? And why aesthetics as philosophy of art – and in the beginning only of the *beaux-arts*?

Before the rise of philosophical aesthetics beauty and art were separate. The philosophy of beauty was the philosophy of the good and the true as well,

i.e. philosophy of being. This has nothing to do with art since art is a matter of producing – of the artificial – and being is not produced. Why did beauty and art become united in a philosophy of the sensuous in aesthetics? Because this happens at the same time as the breakthrough of modernity a possible answer is that it is an answer to the modernisation – to the naturalisation – of reason. How does this modernisation bring beauty and art together and open for aesthetic experience?

The modern world is the world of the sciences and of technology i.e. a world of production – a world of challenges that can – and this is the imperative of modernity – and should produce a technical solution for controlling our surroundings. What is produced is in one's power. As modern science legitimizes the productive interest in the world relying on a concept of nature reducing nature to objectum [Gegenstand], the modern world is a world of production to the highest degree; it is turned into a produced world – into an artificial world.

When the world becomes artificial in this sense, as a result of scientific rationality that only recognizes calculable elements – elements such as lamps and tobacco tins; when the scientific rationality transforms "...das Schöne zu Dingen überhaupt, der Hain zu Hölzern, die Bilder zu Dingen",¹³ then the following question becomes urgent: what happens to the holy and to beauty especially if we have what Kant calls a natural disposition for them? If reason cannot reasonably treat the holy and the beautiful, is it then reasonable to sacrifice them or can something else replace them? Is this functionalisation of reason only throwing out what should be thrown out or is something of importance thrown out as well? Does rationalisation make the production of reason too rational? Two answers are possible.

a. Before the rise of philosophical aesthetics, being and beauty were related. The beautiful is what is harmonious and orderly, and that is exactly how the world is – it is a world-order. It might appear chaotic and disordered, but only because of our ignorance. He who knows how to think orderly will bring the mind in order and, thus, his thoughts will reflect the order of the world. It might *seem* different but it *is* the best of all possible worlds. It follows from the ideal of a world-order that our thinking as well as our behaviour must conform to rules, and so must art.

The modernisation of the sciences is the story of legitimating productive interests by detaching reason from metaphysical ambitions of order: from the

¹³ Hegel *Glauben und Wissen* [1802] (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), 290.

obligation to follow rules given beforehand. Hence the imperative of modernity now makes it necessary to form rules to solve the task: To bring the world in order. The beautiful is then no longer what reflects the given order but what is related to what brings in order – to our production. Being, order and beauty remain united, but under new conditions where being is an object – an object for our opportunities – and the union of order and production is established.

Not every product is beautiful, some reflect not just our practical interest but is a free creating, the products of art. Here beauty is transferred from the metaphysical realm without losing its metaphysical contents. It had a relation to *theoria* – to seeing, seeing the world from the perspective of God, i.e. seeing the world without productive interests, i.e. disinterested, and seeing it from the perspective from which everything can be seen to be in order – and it becomes a value added to production.

Theoria was the keyword for metaphysics. *Theoria* was about the experience of being and order, as they were seen, literally in the play in honour of the gods; it became the intellectual in-sight into this order. The sensuous presence of the world-order must – to satisfy the intellect – become intellectually present and *theoria* must be translated from sensuous intuition to intellectual intuition. What is seen in the play and in philosophical insight is not related to our practical interests, it is what concerns us when we are free from these concerns – free from the affairs of the market and assembly, it is the Sunday of life when our concern is the divine¹⁴.

The modernisation of science was an emancipation from metaphysics and theology. *Theoria* follows suit and becomes modernised under the imperative of modernity: not to contemplate the order of the world but to legitimate our efforts to bring it in order by providing the explanatory fundament. Thus *theoria* is circumscribed and leaves room for the free contemplating meditation *theoria* once was –it opens up for art. The presence of order and beauty maintained in *theoria* is now a presence to be found in art.

b. Making present was the ideal of reason, to maintain what had an original presence – what is immediately before us, and immediately is what is sensuously given. Thus the ideal of maintaining the form of the seen – the *idea* – must be established on conditions that satisfy the intellect. Every single sen-

¹⁴ Ritter “Die Lehre vom Ursprung und Sinn der Theorie bei Aristoteles” in Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik. Studien zu Aristoteles und Hegel* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), 9-33; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983 a 6-10.

suous detail is not immediately given to the intellect but only what is essential, that which something is when it is presented in its being and not in its appearance.

When reason relies only on calculable information then the incalculable to which beauty belongs must find a home in the sensuous. This is, of course, not to be taken too literally but as a question about perceptions that may be decisive for our experience of totality. A question about *petits perceptions* that make its career in *scientia sensitive cognoscendi et proponendi*¹⁵ and become related to the rational activity influencing the senses the most: art.

Art makes present. It makes present what we desire to keep in view, what we desire to remember or to feel the presence of – our native place, the beloved person, the sacred. It makes present by imitating. A key-formulation is – as always – found in Aristotle, “...generally art partly completes what nature cannot bring to finish, and partly imitates her”.¹⁶ Imitating means imitating the ideal; it is not the imitation of appearances in nature, but the way nature works – as we see it in Alberti and the story of Zeuxis’ painting a panel in the temple of Lucina at Croton: beauty was not to be discovered in one body alone so he needed “...five outstandingly beautiful girls, so that he might represent in his painting whatever feature of feminine beauty was most praiseworthy in each of them”.¹⁷ What the ideal is, however, a different problem,¹⁸ here it is enough to say that art imitates and makes similar when it makes something present in its ideal form – in its being [Wesen].¹⁹ What is presented in art (as “Aussage” and “Vorstellung”) makes connections accessible that would have been inaccessible to us without art, as Joachim Ritter puts it.

Art is imitation that presents an ideal and this presentation is an interpretative activity. When interests and ideals change in modernity, art must follow. Modernity, characterised by an interest in forming the world surrounding us according to practical interests in agriculture, engineering, medicine etc.,

¹⁵ A.G.Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (1739), editio VII, 1775, § 533.

¹⁶ Phys. 199 a 16 [ed. Ross].

¹⁷ Alberti, *On Painting* (1435) tr. C.Grayson, (Penguin 1991), 91.

¹⁸ See: Panofsky, *Idea. Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Wissenschaftsverlag Volker Spiess, 1993).

¹⁹ “Das Bild wird (so hat die Philosophie dies ausgedrückt) geschaffen ‘zur Ähnlichkeit eines anderen’. Das Bild ist ‘ähnlich’, wenn es ein anderes so abbildet und sehen lässt, dass es in seinem Wesen vor uns steht.” Ritter, “Experiment und Wahrheit im Kunstwerk”, *Stahl und Eisen. Zeitschrift für die Herstellung und Verarbeitung von Eisen und Stahl* 73 (1953), 92-99, 92.

makes it possible to bring in related new elements to the arts which now can contain a surplus of information, to speak with Norman Bryson.²⁰

Art as a surplus activity may be an important characteristic of aesthetic art as well as a characteristic of modernity: modernity as a surplus epoche. Modernity has a surplus, it has – as successful modernity – no need for the singular; for the one explanation, the one history, the one eschatology, the one genius malignus, but can lead plurality towards the intensified singularity. Intensified singularity is what becomes universal, and universalisation at the expense of plurality is failed modernity. Successful and failed modernities are strong expressions and should be understood only in a weak sense as a matter of acceptance of elements that are not to be included in the one interpretation offered by the dominant philosophy.²¹ When the concept of rationality originating in modern science becomes dominant, it leads either to a failed strategy of repudiating what lies outside the sciences and thus to a failure to answer questions necessary for our orientation and actions in the world, or, a successful strategy that can open up for the multiplicity of phenomena which are not dealt with in the sciences. The openness is necessary for grasping contexts and perspectives different from the practical use of everyday objects. Acquaintance with different contexts and perspectives is exactly what characterises the experienced person – the one who has enlarged his horizon and who has seen more than others.

Art as a surplus activity, containing a surplus of elements and also being a free production, can maintain and make present what is outside reason when reason, as naturalised reason, has taken care of its own business. Thus art and aesthetics – which were united in the beginning of modernity, although aesthetics ceases to be identified with the philosophy of art and the bond between art and beauty is severed – are necessary for our orientation and actions in the modern world.²²

Art – and aesthetic experience – makes the relation between our being and our world accessible; it is a reflection that modern experiences reduced to information is immune to. They can add to, or compensate for, the informa-

²⁰ Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1981), 10.

²¹ For a discussion of the successes and failures of modernity see Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982).

²² As aesthetic experience – perhaps also as aesthetic thinking as it is found in Welsch, *Ästhetisches Denken* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), 41 ff.

tional interest in utility by presenting everyday objects and everyday scenarios and make them perceivable as they are in themselves and not as means for use, or, by focussing on the mere abstract form of something to present it in repressed aspects. An experience as the disclaimer of expectation through the veto of reality is made possible by aesthetics, by the unexpected presentation of perspectives which show a more heterogeneous reality than expected. The more the world is objectified and the more things are seen as useful objects, i.e. the stronger the reduction in perspective is, the greater the need for experience to penetrate the being of things.²³

Aesthetic experience in the modern world is an experience that has many functions. Two diverging functions will serve as the concluding remark. Either the function is to compensate for short-lived experiences by maintaining contact with the past and giving us a sense of continuity with the no-longer-actual past thus offering relief from the ever increasing pace of change. Or the function is to protect one against the fear of being antiquated due to the ever increasing pace of change by being in front as the avant-garde. The modern world may lose its sense of reality and thus call for a cultivation of the sense for the overlooked. Perhaps, here, choosing either-or demonstrates the condition of the modern world since it is the world of discontinuity between past and present, as Hegel or Ritter, or perhaps the Hegel of Ritter shows.²⁴ Being either nostalgic or avant-garde it contains an actuality for us – a sort of life experience containment – that serves us as a compensation for our informational insufficiency for understanding and acting as modern.

²³ Ritter, *op.cit.*, 97.

²⁴ Ritter, "Subjektivität und industrielle Gesellschaft", in Ritter, *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 11-35 & 165-166 and *Hegel und die französische Revolution* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1965).

