

Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics: Towards a New Form of the Discipline

Wolfgang Iser

It is still considered self-evident that aesthetics has to be artistic: 'And we cannot get outside it, for it lies in our discipline and this discipline seems to repeat it to us inexorably' (to adapt Wittgenstein)¹. But there are very good reasons for trying to escape from the aesthetics-artistic equation, for one of the central problems of traditional aesthetics is that it is incapable of doing justice to the singularity of works of art. The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conversion of aesthetics into a philosophical attempt to establish a universal and everlasting concept of art, one that is indifferent to individual works and to historically different types of art, cannot hold. Art does not consist in exemplifying a universal concept, rather it involves the creation of new concepts along with new practices. The new concept will certainly have some aspects in common with the concept formerly dominant, but will differ from it sharply in other, no less important aspects. This is obvious in every shift from one style or paradigm to another. Hence, paradigms are connected by the overlapping of one concept with the next—by 'family resemblances' in the Wittgensteinian sense—not by a universal pattern or an essential, indwelling form. There is no such thing as an essence of art.

This means the traditional approach is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of art. Insight into the historical genesis of different concepts of art through art itself makes this failure obvious and commands the shift to a different, pluralistic type of aesthetics. But the reorganisation of aesthetics which we currently have to consider must go even further beyond the traditional equation of aesthetics and artistic. The inner pluralisation of artistic—the shift from a monoconceptual analysis of art to the consideration of different types, paradigms, and concepts of art—should be supplemented by an outer pluralisation of aesthetics: an expansion of the discipline's field to include transartistic questions and the development of a transdisciplinary structure. That is what I want to advocate in this essay.

I

There are, generally speaking, two groups of reasons for a broadening of aesthetics: the first refers to the contemporary fashioning of reality, the second to the contemporary understanding of reality. Today, we are experiencing an unprecedented aestheticisation of the real world; embellishment and styling are to be found everywhere.² Individuals are undergoing a comprehensive styling of body, soul, and behaviour, for example. In beauty salons and fitness centres they pursue the aesthetic perfection of their bodies; in meditation courses and New Age seminars they practice the aestheticisation of their souls; etiquette courses train them for aesthetically desirable behavior. The *homo aestheticus* has become the new role model.

In urban areas, moreover, just about everything has been subjected to a facelift over the last years, at least in the rich western countries. The economy, too, profits largely from the consumers' tendency, not so much to acquire an article, but by means of that article to buy themselves into the aesthetic lifestyle with which advertising strategies have linked it. Even ecology is, in aesthetic regards, a partner of the economy. It is on the way to being an embellishment sector and favours a styling of the environment in the spirit of aesthetic ideals like complexity or natural beauty. If the rich industrial societies were able to do completely as they wish, they would transform the urban, industrial and natural environment *in toto* into a hyperaesthetic scenario. Genetic engineering, which links individual and ecological styling, is a further piece of evidence. It adapts all sorts of life to our needs and enables us, according to our aesthetic expectations, to provide just the sort of children we desire. Genetic engineering is a kind of genetic cosmetic surgery.

It is surely not necessary to expand on these tendencies towards embellishment and globalised aestheticisation in detail. The phenomena are all too obvious. Equally obvious, however, is the fact that reflection on these phenomena becomes obligatory, since they represent not only an extension of the aesthetic, but at the same time alter the configuration and valency of the aesthetic. Hence aesthetics, as the reflective authority of the aesthetic, must also seek out the state of the aesthetic today in fields such as the lifeworld and politics, economy and ecology, ethics and science. It must, in short, take account of the new configuration of the aesthetic. This does not mean that the globalisation and fundamentalisation of the aesthetic is simply to be sanctioned, but it does belong on today's agenda for every

sufficient aesthetic diagnosis and critique.

The issues of an aesthetics beyond aesthetics concern not only those who are already willing to broaden the reach of aesthetics, therefore, but likewise represent an obligatory subject for those who still adhere to the traditional framework of aesthetics. Old aesthetic dreams are being redeemed in the present aestheticisation. But the irritating fact which demands explanation is that the results today are quite different from the original expectations. They are, at the very least, disappointing. What was meant to endow our world with beauty ends up in mere prettiness and pushiness, and finally generates indifference or even disgust, at least among aesthetically sensitive people. The globalised aesthetic may even be experienced as terror. In any case, nobody would dare to call the present aestheticisation straightforward fulfilment. Something must then be wrong with this redemption of old aesthetic dreams. Either the current application of old programmes is inadequate, or these venerable programmes themselves already contained a flaw, one which has just remained hidden so far, and which is now being revealed.

Thus redemptions equate to revelations. The fact that ubiquitous beauty loses its distinguished character and decays into mere prettiness or becomes simply meaningless confirms that what is exceptional cannot be made standard without changing its quality. The strategy of globalised aestheticisation falls victim to itself, moreover, and ends in anaestheticisation or a willed aesthetic indifference designed to avoid the importunity of this ubiquitous 'beauty'. A need for the non-aesthetic arises, a desire for interruptions and disruptions, for breaking through embellishment. If there is still a task for art in public space today, then it consists not in introducing ever more beauty into the already over-embellished environment, but in stopping this aestheticisation machinery by creating aesthetic fallow areas, deserts in the midst of the hyperaesthetic.

These critical experiences with the contemporary redemption of the old aesthetic dreams of the world's enhancement must have repercussions for our assessment of a traditional aesthetics which never even conceived that universal embellishment might disfigure the world, instead of consummating or even redeeming it. Yet the same traditional aesthetics is repeatedly invoked as rhetorical support for the current aestheticisation processes. A threefold criticism of traditional aesthetics is thus called for. First, objection must be raised to the unqualified praise of beauty. To do this, one can either distinguish between, on the one hand, mere prettiness as a good common to both

'the enlightened and the unenlightened' and, on the other, an exceptional and moving phenomenon of the kind Rilke described when he said that beauty was 'the beginning of what's frightening'.³ Alternatively, one can consider that beauty represents a value only in opposition to standard non-beauty, one however which loses its distinctiveness by its very propagation. Second, traditional aesthetics forgot the discovery—which was a discovery of aesthetics itself, incidentally—that not a single aesthetic quality alone, but *variatio delectat*. This flaw becomes painfully clear in the present embellishment. Aesthetics, which may be the pluralist discipline *par excellence*, falsely singularised itself and failed to recognise that homogenisation is systematically wrong in aesthetic respects too. Third, the efficacy of traditional aesthetics in the household of our cultural beliefs and desires needs to be critically questioned. Aesthetics has every reason to become self-critical.

The second group of arguments that I mentioned in favor of the turn to an aesthetics beyond aesthetics refers to the current apprehension of reality, which has become, as I want to demonstrate, more and more aesthetic. An obvious predominance of images and aesthetic patterns exists today, not only in the current shaping of reality, but in the current mediation of reality as well. This dominance stretches from the presentation of single objects or subjects and the nature of our daily news, through to our basic understanding of reality. Think, say, of the pictorial dominance in advertising and in the self-presentation of companies, or of our own visual appearance in the World Wide Web. Or think of the pictorial demands of television which not only selectively determine what might count as news at all, but have recently also tinted the presentation of news outside television in, say, the printed media. Finally, think of change in our apprehension of reality. In earlier times, to count as being real, something had to be calculable; today it has to be aesthetically presentable. Aesthetics has become the new leading currency in the reality trade.

These phenomena are far too familiar and have often been analysed. In considering their effects on aesthetics I will concentrate on just one point—on what I call the 'derealisation of reality'—and on two of its consequences: the reconfiguration of *aisthesis* and the revalidation of experiences outside electronic media. By 'derealisation of reality' I mean the fact that reality as it is conveyed by the media is deeply affected by this type of mediation,⁴ due to the peculiarities of media aesthetics which generally favors the free mobility and weightlessness of bodies and images. Everything is an object for possible electronic

manipulation; within the media, 'manipulation' is no longer a normative, it is practically a descriptive term. Whatever enters the realm of television, steps into a realm of transformability instead of constancy. If there is a 'lightness of being' anywhere, then it is in the electronic realm. Think, say, of the Gulf War reports which sometimes deluded us with technological simulations, whereas the reality of victims was never shown. Or take the example of pixel technology. Ultimately you never know whether you are witnessing a playback of reality or a simulation, the difference between them becoming less and less evident and tending to lose significance as the viewer's desire for media entertainment gains the upper hand in the same measure as the former belief in the reality of what is transmitted is disappearing. Accordingly, the media themselves—primarily television, though the effects of the more advanced technologies only intensify the tendency—increasingly present their pictures in modes of virtuality and playfulness.

This attitude towards media reality is extending more and more to everyday reality too. This comes about because everyday reality is being increasingly formed, presented, and perceived according to media patterns. In that television is the main bestower and the role model for reality, derealisation leaves its mark everywhere. The real is tending to lose its insistency, compulsiveness, and gravity; it seems to be becoming ever lighter, less oppressive and less obligating. Already the importunity of media's presentation of reality no longer creates affliction, rather its opposite: indifference.

Amidst this suspension of reality we judge and act differently, too. Our behavioural patterns are becoming increasingly simulatory and interchangeable. Furthermore, a reconfiguration of *aisthesis* can be observed. One of the consequences of media dominance, for instance, is the challenging of the primacy of vision which has shaped occidental culture since the Greeks and which culminates in the television age. Vision was traditionally favoured because of its hallmarks of distance, precision and universality, because of its capacity for determination and its proximity to cognition. From Heraclitus through Leonardo da Vinci to Merleau-Ponty, vision was considered our most excellent and noble sense.

In the meantime, while the dominative patterns of perception and cognition underlying this privilege have been subjected to critique by authors like Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Derrida, and Irigaray,⁵ we are currently experiencing the fact that vision is no longer the reliable sense for contact with reality that it was once held to be. The privilege of vision no longer holds in a world in which physics has

become indemonstrable and in a world dominated by media.

Other senses have found new attention, moreover. Hearing, for example, is being appreciated anew because of its anti-metaphysical proximity to the event instead of to permanent being, because of its essentially social character in contrast to the individualistic execution of vision, and because of its link with emotional elements in opposition to the emotionless mastery of phenomena through vision. Touch has found its advocates in the same way, due both to new developments in media technology as analyzed by Marshall McLuhan and Derrick de Kerckhove and to its emphatically corporeal character—this again in contrast to the ‘pure’, uninvolved character of vision.

In the wake of such developments an increasing departure from the traditional hierarchy of the senses comes about. The cards of sensibility are being reshuffled and instead of a firmly established hierarchy one tends either to an equitable assessment of all senses, or (which I would prefer) to different, purpose-specific hierarchies. Aesthetics should make these new states of *aisthesis* and the accompanying transformation of cultural patterns the object of its analyses, helping us carry out these transformation processes in a clearer and more reliable way.

Besides encouraging a reevaluation of the senses, media experience and derealisation tend to encourage a new appreciation of non-electronic reality and modes of experience, one in which particular emphasis is put on those traits which are neither imitable nor replaceable by media experience. In other words, the highly developed electronic world does not simply overcome or absorb traditional forms of experience, as some media enthusiasts would have us believe. Instead, a revalidation of ordinary experience complementing media-experience can be observed—a point that has received too little attention in the discussions of recent years—as we learn to value anew the resistibility and unchangeability of the natural world as distinct from the universal mobility and changeability of media worlds, for example, and to value in the same way the persistence of the concrete as distinct from the free play of information and the massivity of matter as distinct from the levitation of imagery. In contrast to arbitrary repeatability, uniqueness gains value afresh, as the electronic omnipresence awakens the yearning for another presence: for the unrepeatable presence of *hic et nunc*, for the singular event. As opposed to the mutual social electronic imaginary, we are again beginning to value more highly our own imagination, one unavailable to others. And in the same way, we are discovering anew the body’s sovereignty and intransigence (think, say, of Nadolny’s ‘Discovery of Slowness’, or of Handke’s praise of weariness).⁶

These counter-elements do not deny the fascination of electronic worlds, nor simply return us to sensuous experience, such as it might have been in pre-electronic times. As revalidations are tinted by the experience of electronic media, so are there obvious links between electronic and non-electronic experience. In accordance with the prevalent media tendency on the one hand, and the revalidation of non-electronic experience on the other hand, our *aisthesis* is becoming twofold, pursuing both media fascination and non-media goals. We have here an interesting example of the widespread turn to plurality which is coming about in the present day. As we wander to and fro between different types of reality and experience, contemporary *aisthesis* is perhaps the domain where this is already happening most naturally and successfully.

The dercalisation of reality, the reconfiguration of *aisthesis*, and the revalidation of accustomed forms of experience are therefore important issues for a contemporary aesthetics that wants to do justice to its name. Aesthetics would criminally hurt itself if it left the discussion of these issues solely to the sociologist and psychologist or to the feuilletonist.

II

In the second part of my notes towards a new form of the discipline, I want to discuss three remaining questions relating to my suggestion to reorganise the territory of aesthetics by expanding it to include issues beyond traditional aesthetics. First, why is it conceptually correct to demand of the discipline that it should comprehend all dimensions and meanings of the aesthetic? Second, to what extent does the expansion of aesthetics bring with it advantages for the discipline, even with regard to its narrower goal of art analysis? Third, what would the disciplinary structure of such an aesthetics beyond aesthetics look like?

Some colleagues object to the possibility of an aesthetics beyond aesthetics that the difference in the meanings of the term 'aesthetic' inside and outside aesthetics would make a discipline trying to cover all of them hopelessly ambiguous and a victim of mere equivocation. Certainly the expression 'aesthetic' exhibits a considerable variety of different meanings. The term can refer to art and beauty in particular; to *aisthesis* in general; to a type of unobligating existence; to an ontology of virtuality, fictionality, and suspension. 'Anything—and nothing—is right', as Wittgenstein once noted, 'this is the position you

are in if you look for definitions ... in aesthetics'.⁷

But does this polyvalence really condemn it to unusability? Wittgenstein himself pointed to a way out of this alleged conceptual difficulty by demonstrating that an expression's coherence need not be due to a unitary essence, but can come from what he called 'family resemblances'. In the discipline of aesthetics such a coherence is quite possible based on the family resemblances between the different meanings of the expression 'aesthetic'. Of course, one has to differentiate sufficiently between the different usages, but if you do this you can, by pursuing the overlapping that connects them, reap great benefit from this manifoldness and become capable of developing an aesthetics which manages to cover the full range of the expression 'aesthetic'.

Aesthetics should make use of the opportunity, in other words, and strive to comprehend the *full* range of such endeavors. The polyvalence of the expression 'aesthetic' is rather an indication of fruitfulness than of the term's unusability. It is precisely those concepts which are important that are likely to be polyvalent, and to those the prescription to remain unambiguous has never applied. How else, for example, could there have been an ontology when the expression *το ον* is all but hopelessly ambiguous, just as Aristotle himself showed before nonetheless being the first to develop an explicit concept of ontology?⁸ Or should one have abstained from developing a logic on account of the different meanings of *logos* ('language', 'relationship', 'reason')?⁹ The polyvalence of an expression can be no reason for hindering the development of a discipline that pertains to all its variants.

Indeed, given that (as Wittgenstein pointed out) 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language',¹⁰ it would be wrong and antiquated to dictate a single, ultimate concept of the aesthetic. Dictatorially to exclude those parts which do not suit one's own preferences, or to declare one certain meaning the basic meaning amongst the diverse meanings of the aesthetic is an imperial gesture which seeks clarity by *de facto* drawing the field of the aesthetic incorrectly. Performing conceptual bulldozing instead of a complex analysis of the problems means failing one's duty, in both philosophy and aesthetics.

To what extent will expanding aesthetics beyond its traditional borders bring advantages for the discipline itself? By becoming more complex aesthetics may, admittedly, become more difficult too. But in no longer being restricted to a narrow set of questions, it can achieve more intense contact and interchange with other disciplines, and gain

new fields of research. This would bring an advantage not only with regard to the breadth of its issues, but on the institutional level as well. The type of aesthetics I advocate will meet with greater interest, both for the breadth of its spectrum and its contributions to contemporary problems, and it is likely to meet with greater support—as well as more financial support for its research activities.

Ultimately, an expansion of aesthetics to include issues beyond art will also prove advantageous to art analysis itself. Art always reaches out beyond art, referring simultaneously to transartistic phenomena and states of the aesthetic. Therefore transcending the aesthetics-artistics equation in favor of an aesthetics beyond aesthetics is obligatory even with a view to the traditional nucleus of aesthetics: the analysis of art. Even when apparently autonomous, art has always and quite consciously reacted to states of the aesthetic in the world surrounding it. Formerly, in a world more aesthetically sparing, it demonstrated the Elysium of beauty; when in the modern world sensibility has been under threat, art has heeded an old bond and understood itself as the harbinger and rescuer of the sensuous (as with Matisse and Dubuffet); where embellishment is rife, as it is nowadays, art can see its responsibility in countering this and behaving decidedly demurely (as in *arte povera* and 'concept art').

Whatever the relationship between art and non-art might be in detail, artworks require attention to their reference to other modes of design and perception and an understanding of their specific intervention in the artistic as well as transartistic states of the aesthetic. Moreover, the energy of works always transcends their frame—the museum's threshold, that is, or the moment of their observation. The elementary aesthetic experience is not of art as something closed, rather it is of art as something able to open one's eyes to other ways of viewing the world. Among the key experiences with art—and, conversely, the tests as to whether someone actually confers an efficacy upon art or would like to banish it in eulogising about its autonomy—belongs the phenomenon, upon leaving an exhibition, of being able suddenly to perceive the world with the eyes of the artist, through the optics of his works and in the light of the aesthetics they exemplify. Thus to engage art's perceptive form in the perception of reality and, instead of shutting oneself off to the efficacy of artistic optics, to operate and experiment with them—this is natural and undistorted behaviour.

As tools for an extended or intensified perception of reality, then, works of art bring about wondrous mental as well as emotional effects in their human vicinity. Consider, for example, how forms of perception

which today appear natural and self-evident originated historically in processes in which art played a pioneering role. Romantic art had a key role in the perception of the world of mountains, for example; much of our everyday perception derives from generations of art experience. Something similar applies to behavioural patterns. George Steiner has pointed out how much our amorous behaviour and rhetoric have been formed by generations of artistic models:

The words, phrases, tropes, gestures of spirit and body with which we seek to communicate the birth, ripening, withering of love in our being, with which we seek to convey these elemental experiences both to our own perception and to 'the other', whose otherness is, at this very point, most critical to us, are taken very largely, whether consciously or not, from the repertoire of the great sayers, painters, music-makers before us.... According to the levels of our verbal and literate holdings, we experience and signify love as did Jack and Jill, as did Romeo and Juliet or Tolstoy's Natasha before us. Our jealousies are Othello's.... The broken syllables which generations whispered or panted in the rhetoric of seduction and of intercourse were out of Petrarch's phrase book.¹¹

Beyond this production of forms of perception and behavioural repertoires, works of art can also provide models for ways of living. This belonged to the normative demands of classical art already, of course, but in the face of modernity's dissolution of general norms it is still carried on in the individual's adoption of models and sentiments for his or her own aspirations. Rilke's contemplation of the archaic torso of Apollo, which concludes with the line 'You must change your life', provides an impressive example of this.¹²

The border between art and the reality outside art certainly should not simply be broken down, but nor should the entanglements and transitions between the two be ignored. An aesthetics of art always has to consider the dual character of art on the one hand and of an aesthetics beyond art on the other. That is why Adorno, who as almost no other knew of and defended the significance of art's autonomy, nonetheless opposed the separation of art from reality and its reduction to mere autonomy: 'How deeply [the] innervations of art are rooted in its position in reality could be felt in the bomb-shattered German cities during the first years after the war. Faced by the material chaos, the optical order, which the aesthetic sensorium had long since repudiated, abruptly allured once again as blessed.'¹³ Even when, for aesthetic experience, order had long since revealed itself to be a synonym for purposive rationality, an order destroyed (destruction

itself being due to a comparably purposive rationality) could still rouse the aesthetic yearning for order. Adorno makes it clear that the seemingly purely aesthetic perception is patently determined by contrast and that aesthetic experience would be systematically misrecognised if it were stripped of its references to reality.¹⁴

Such transartistic references are not introduced to art from the outside in some way, but inhere within the singular artwork. Let us take as an example Goya's *The Shootings of 3rd May 1808*, painted in 1815.¹⁵ This picture cannot simply be received in an aesthetically contemplative manner. It offers not just an exciting colour dynamics and compositional innovations, but simultaneously carries out the interpretation of a historic event, and its aesthetic impulse aims for a certain understanding of what is portrayed and serves to awaken a new form of attitude to phenomena of the type shown. Obviously several perceptive modes intersect in the perception of the work: the observational manner of the picture and its artistico-aesthetic arrangement; the expressive manner of its dynamics; the historical manner of the events of 3rd May 1808; the narrational manner of a shocking model plot; the appellative manner of future intervention and prohibition. The explosion in the picture aims for the end of such deeds and simultaneously detonates the process of merely 'aesthetic' representation and reception. The picture cannot be considered simply as an aesthetically contemplative structure; instead it triggers a multitude of perceptive feats. Piercing the contemplation cocoon in favor of a multidimensional perception, it transcends into contexts of communication and life. The picture thus becomes a warning: things such as this shooting are no longer to occur, it declares. So in Paris in the nineteen thirties, anti-fascist demonstrators carried with them placards on which the picture had been copied, thus ensuring that its transgression of the museum's threshold was not just metaphorical.

The perception of art is restricted to no single aesthetic feat, involving rather a multitude of feats in which diverse acts from the palette of aesthetic perceptive forms belong to the perception of a work. The singular work is characterised by a specific selection from and combination of this range of aesthetic feats and stipulates a specific array of perceptive modes for which the work functions as a point of intersection, so to speak. A traditionalist aesthetician might object that, while several ways of perceiving are in play in Goya's picture, only one of these is the specifically aesthetic one, and it is this which is to be dealt with exclusively in aesthetics. This argument, however, comes close to an oath of disclosure when it suggests in this

'aesthetic' constriction that no art, only at best one element of art, can be understood. An aesthetics which limits itself to an 'aesthetic' of this sort would render itself recognisable as a narrow gauge aesthetics.

A further perceptive dimension which is often important for aesthetic judgement becomes clear when one moves on to Manet's picture *The Shooting of Maximilian* of 1868, which obviously has Goya's work as a foil.¹⁶ Perception of the picture by Manet includes that of Goya's precedent. The perception here has to be intericonic, otherwise it would simply fail to recognise the complexity of Manet's picture. In addition to the palette of perceptive modes previously named, perceptive feats involving the history of painting—intericonic awareness, that is—are necessary here. Marcel Duchamp's *Mona Lisa* parody *L.H.O.O.Q.* of 1919 may be taken as a further example.¹⁷ In addition to its evident intericonic structure, a semantic dimension is also to be included: the sequence of letters in the title is to be read as 'elle a chaud au cul' ('her ass is hot'). How ridiculous the retreat to mere aesthetic contemplation would be in this case! In order to understand a picture such as this you must not only see, but also know, suspect, make inferences. Things here are not settled by orientation towards the execution or self-referentiality alone. Reflection is more important than contemplation—though, equally, there are dangers inherent in using contemplation as the sole legitimate aesthetic outlook.

Dimensions of historical perspective belong to works of art in the same way as semantic and allegorical; social, political, and everyday dimensions—and, of course, emotional and imaginative processes too. Not all of these and other perceptive modes are at play in every picture, but several always take part. Something similar can be seen with music. You can practically hear the salvation in some of Bach's fugues. The inner musical prerequisite for this can easily be stated: every resolution of dissonant tension offers the chance of being developed through to salvation. Do we want to object reprovingly, wherever music not only thematises salvation but allows it to become real, that music has drifted into the transaesthetic and must be pruned back to the phantom of a pure aesthetic as a countermove? Petty mindedness of this type would go too far for everyone. Bach wanted to create music, and not just comply with a reductionist aesthetic theory. In Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* there is a scene in which the Count Almaviva, filled with jealous distrust, knocks on the door of the countess. But in no way does the music indulge itself in this human lowliness. In this way it makes clear the contradistinction between society as an ensemble of swindlers and swindled on the one hand, and

music on the other, in which alone inhere truth and dignity and humanity. But this radiant sovereignty can only be heard completely when perceived against the scenic events. The music intangibly criticises that which it cannot touch. It is this double perception, not just a merely 'musically' contemplative listening, which is needed to be able to perceive this superiority and purity of the music.

Adorno once highlighted art's inalienable double structure with reference to Beethoven: 'That someone is so little conversant with a Beethoven symphony unless they understand the so-called purely musical events in it—in just the same way as someone who doesn't perceive in it the echo of the French Revolution; and how both elements mediate themselves in the phenomenon counts among the ... inalienable themes of philosophical aesthetics'. This led Adorno to the observation that 'aesthetic experience ... [must] transcend itself'.¹⁸ This characterises *in nuce* what I want to point out here on the whole: the aesthetic has need, too, of the transaesthetic, and what is decisive for the single work is how the two are brought together in it.

What holds for all traditional art, moreover, holds even more for modern art, which distinguishes itself by testing, questioning and altering its boundary conditions in a particular way. It does not simply rinse off an apparently well defined programme named 'art', but raises anew in each of its works the question of what art is, and provides novel answers accordingly. Artworks are able to alter their short and long range conditions, can make unaccustomed criteria requisite, or do away with the boundaries of art. In this way Duchamp questioned the dictate of visibility, Joyce the form of the book, Pollock the limit of painting, Cage the status of music. It was precisely the project of the avant-garde to transcend the confined status of an art and to open itself to an aesthetics beyond aesthetics. It would be an anachronism to want to ignore or annul this through an aesthetic-theoretical restriction.

Highly varying perceptive modes become more or less relevant according to artistic type. One artwork can require perceptive modes which for another are completely irrelevant. For some of Malewitsch's works it is not enough to observe what is factually given, rather the perception must extend into the cosmic (and Malewitsch helps you in this, for instance through the way he uses black). You have not seen Munch's painting *The Scream* until you have actually *heard* a scream; the visual perception must proceed through to an acoustic one. With Duchamp, however, the activity of the senses is insufficient altogether; without bringing in reflection you would recognise only banal nonsense. Pollock can only be apprehended kinaesthetically. But woe

betide whoever wants to insist on this with Mondrian. Sol LeWitt demands an analytic construction of vision. And On Kawara can only be really perceived along with the horrific vision of Hiroshima. The disagreements of even aesthetically highly experienced observers are not just reducible to subjective taste, they result far more from the availability or unavailability of the specific perceptive modes required for the specific work of art.

Each time, a specific reconfiguration of the perceptive field takes place. The palette of conventional perceptive modes is overturned or constellated anew, traditional hierarchies are deposed and new ones established. Precisely the perception of something unapparent or unheard, even of something imperceptible in the traditional sense, can slip into first place. Art intransigently determines for itself the field of perceptive types relevant to it, the perception of art being on principle polyaesthetic, not monoaesthetic. Without the introduction of everyday perceptual competence you would not even be able to recognise the objects in pictures. Beyond this, it is advantageous to have a perception honed by experience of the art at your disposal. It cannot hurt if you know what a complementary contrast is, for example, or wherein the artificiality of the seemingly natural central perspective lies—its only this which lets you see the measures which Masaccio had to adopt so as to produce suspenseful pictures in spite of isocephaly. Put another way, you must know the established codes in order to recognise deviations and new emphases; the *pictor doctus* also calls for a *receptor doctus*.

The recipient's perceptive faculty must therefore probe varying forms of perception and discover the specific constellation stimulated by the work. Aesthetic experience as a whole distinguishes itself through a combination of contemplation, imagination, and reflection. Even contemplation is not simply observational, but evolving and reflexive. Fundamentally so, moreover: even the apprehension of linear convergence and divergence or of colour contrasts alone implies feats of sensible reflection. What is respectively seen is not *factum brutum*, but is preceded by the interpretative process and dependent on subsequent viewing. And in these acts of interpretation pictorial experience as well as life experience come in. The perception that a gesture is reaching out and yet at the same time shies from taking its grasp would not be possible without a certain maturity and sensitivity on the perceiver's behalf. And Caravaggio's attack on the sovereignty of pictures can first be seen correctly against the background of his predecessors and contemporaries. References to the lifeworld thus

belong to the picture process in the same way as intericonic allusions.

Experiencing art requires a particular openness to the alteration of familiar categories and divisions and distinctions, moreover, for art assumes the freedom to divide the world up in unaccustomed ways or to show up correspondences, analogies, transitions between sectors considered separate. Morandi's still lifes, for instance, are not straightforward still lifes of objects, but are sociogrammes at the same time. The arrangement of objects is to be read just as that of families. You recognise hierarchies, contacts, fears, self-assertions, evasive manoeuvres, dismissals, linkages. As an artist, Morandi practises microsociology, just as Mondrian practised macrosociology. His pondering art concerned not only pictorial elements, but represented a model for the balancing of life's burdens at the same time—just as must be achieved in every individual life and, analogously, in the life of every cultivated society. These silent, seemingly unpretentious works are first fully perceived when their grasping of practical dimensions is recognised. Mondrian himself also understood them as paradigms for the equation of social forces which characterises democratic societies.

Again, the experiencing of art is compelled to include seemingly alien horizons. Only when complex does it succeed, because art brings several types of perception into play, suggesting a specific constellation of these perceptions as well as an often unaccustomed organisation of the perceptive field as a whole. It is the very fact that neither the range nor the relationship of perceptive dimensions is fixed once and for all which distinguishes aesthetic perception. A disposition to general 'aesthetic' contemplation or a restriction to formal analysis would on the other hand systematically diminish and misrecognise the potential that works of art have to grasp outwards. If one wanted to deny the polyvalence and lateral holds of aesthetic perception—because, say, contemplation alone is alleged to be relevant, demanding the dismissal of all everyday, social, semantic, as well as other perceptive dimensions—then the danger exists that such august contemplation tends to approach not seeing but mere gaping. (When Andrea, the young lad in Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, insists 'that in the evening the sun halts somewhere other than in the morning. So it can't, after all, stand still!', Galileo answers, 'You see! What do you see! You see nothing at all. You're just gaping. Gaping is not seeing'.)¹⁹

If art constantly brings into play a whole palette of sorts of perception and affords each a certain organisation, then aesthetics too, as the reflexive authority of the aesthetic, obviously has to be in a position to

take account of diverse sorts of perception and differing constellations, and to do justice to them. Put another way, the experiencing of art itself demands an aesthetics which looks both at the inner polyaesthetics of art and at art's transartistic entanglements; an aesthetics which is capable of considering all dimensions of *aisthesis*. Aesthetics must extend over the whole breadth of the aesthetic. What will the structure of the discipline aesthetics be in the wake of such an expansion? My answer is surely not surprising: its structure will be transdisciplinary. I imagine aesthetics being a field of research which comprehends all questions concerning *aisthesis*, with the inclusion of contributions from philosophy, sociology, art history, psychology, anthropology, neurosciences, and so on. *Aisthesis* forms the framework of the discipline. And art is one—but, as important as it might be, only one—of its subjects.

More surprising, perhaps, is my envisaging the parts of the discipline referring to *aisthesis* as becoming effective branches of the discipline aesthetics. They would be integrated in its institutional structure. Aesthetics ought to be interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary in itself, instead of displaying interdisciplinarity only when occasioned by meetings with other disciplines. In an aesthetics department, as I envisage it, all the branches mentioned ought to be taught; and the individual aestheticians themselves ought to have considerable knowledge of them, and be in a position to teach at least some of these branches themselves—and not just, say, an ontology of art or the history of taste.

If this suggestion seems far too radical, still I cannot help but think that a structure of this type is necessary in almost every discipline today. This derives from insights which have effected a fundamental change in our understanding of the structure of rationalities and which, consistently, demand an altered design to research fields and research objects. Once a differentiation and separation of rationality types was advocated, and these rationality types were held to be clearly outlined and different in their core. More recent analyses, however, have shown that this is at best only superficially correct, indeed is basically wrong. The diverse rationalities cannot be delimited from one another in a watertight manner, but exhibit core entanglements and transitions which undercut traditional departmentalisation. Such entanglements, transitions and penetrations have become the contemporary agenda.

Of his own paradigm shift in philosophy, Wittgenstein wrote: 'I still find my own way of philosophising new, and it keeps striking me so

afresh; that is why I need to repeat myself so often. It will have become second nature to a new generation.²⁰ I am not claiming that the transdisciplinary structure of an aesthetics beyond aesthetics will, analogously, have become second nature to another generation. But this might very well be the case. Outside the discipline it seems already to be the case.

Notes

- 1 Wittgenstein actually said: 'A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably', *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, New York, 1968, p.48^e [115].
- 2 'Aestheticisation' means that the unaesthetic is made, or understood to be, aesthetic.
- 3 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duineser Elegien*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols, Frankfurt, 1955–66, I, 685 (first elegy).
- 4 By 'media' I will—in the following—always refer to electronic media, without suggesting that there might be any kind of experience independent of media of *some kind or other*.
- 5 Cf. Martin Jay's survey *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley, 1994.
- 6 Sten Nadolny, *Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit*, München, 1983; Peter Handke, *Versuch über die Müdigkeit*, Frankfurt, 1989.
- 7 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p.36^e [77].
- 8 *Metaphysics* IV, 2.
- 9 Or do we not want to consider, say, Hegelian logic—which in this respect is of an almost exemplary completeness—to be a logic at all? With what right?
- 10 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p.20^e [43].
- 11 George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there anything in what we say?*, London, 1989, p.194.
- 12 Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Archaischer Torso Apollos', in Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 557. To this, George Steiner responded tersely in *Real Presences*: 'So do any poem, novel, play, painting, musical composition worth meeting' (p.142).
- 13 Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, 4th edition, Frankfurt, 1984, p.237f.
- 14 Already in 1915, Paul Klee had noted a connection of this type in another way: 'The more shocking this world (just as today), the more abstract the art, whereas a happy world produces a worldly art', in his *Tagebücher*, Cologne, 1957, p.323.
- 15 Francesco Goya, *The Shootings of 3rd May 1808 in the Manzanares Valley*, 1815, Madrid, Prado.

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- 16 Edouard Manet, *The Shooting of Maximilian*, 1868, Kunsthalle Mannheim.
- 17 Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), Philadelphia Museum of Art, collection of Louise and Walter Arensberg.
- 18 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p.519.
- 19 Bertolt Brecht, *Leben des Galilei* [1938/39], Frankfurt, 1962, p.11 (Scene 1).
- 20 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch, Chicago, 1980, p.1^e.