

Eva Backhaus and Jochen Schuff

Are you experienced?

- **Art and Experience. Goethe-University Frankfurt/M., June 24 to 26, 2010.**

In his introduction to the conference, **Martin Seel** (Frankfurt/M.) pointed out the scope which should define the contributions and discussions. According to his diagnosis, the relevance of aesthetic experience can be put in two extreme claims. Firstly, the concept of aesthetic experience is said to be of central importance, if not the very point, of aesthetic theory. Secondly, it is held that works of art and their peculiar properties are, or should be, the basic subject of aesthetic theory. In this view, aesthetic experience, being a subjective experience, is merely seen as a marginal or even epiphenomenal aspect of our encounters with art. This distinction, Seel suspected, could turn out to be a false alternative over the course of the conference.

In fact, none of the participants rejected an at least minimal notion of aesthetic experience outright, although there were a number of different intuitions in play. Analysing the conference title, speakers chose either to highlight art or experience. Both these concepts are opaque in themselves. We might, for instance, talk about something definite, some kind of essence, when labelling things works of art. But then again, the objects in question could be unified, if at all, only by something like a family resemblance. Moreover, experiencing a painting or theatre play could differ decisively from experiencing site-specific installation art or novels. Thus, speakers not only aimed directly at the elucidation of the process of aesthetic experience, but also confronted ontological or meta-theoretical questions concerning the arts. Others, in turn, aimed at exploring the structure of experience: is it best understood in terms of its content, in terms of its phenomenal character, or in terms of involving a peculiar emotion?

In the opening talk »Art Experience and the Philosophy of Art« **Stefan Deines** (Frankfurt/M.) compared two accounts of the interdependence between art theory and aesthetic experience. On the one hand, Monroe Beardsley argues that an object is only justifiably called an artwork by its ability to evoke aesthetic experiences, and that the quality of an artwork is measured by the intensity of the response we have towards it. A central problem of this and related theories is to explain what aesthetic experience consists of and what kind of emotion, if it is an emotion at all, might be the crucial one. Deines believes it to be a central problem that most candidates that have been proposed are not universally applicable and work only with one or two similar art forms. On the other hand, Noël Carroll and George Dickie opine for a deflationary concept of aesthetic experience. They believe that aesthetic experience is not a helpful concept for the definition of art. For Dickie, an aesthetic attitude is attentiveness to the formal structures of the work and a genuine aesthetic experience is merely a myth. Carroll does not go that far, but holds that in an aesthetic theory the concept of aesthetic experience is worth being addressed but is not central to a definition of art, but rather adherent to it. In Carroll's view, an experience is aesthetic if we pay attention to the formal, aesthetic or expressive features of an artwork. Deines argues that Carroll's account is informative about one sort of aesthetic experience, but, because of its neutral and descriptive nature, does not grasp exhaustively the kind of experience we have with artworks of different kinds. He argues that we should treat aesthetic experience as an essential part of the reception of artworks, but should abandon the idea of one single experience that is constitutive for all encounters with art. He opines for a pluralistic theory of aesthetic experience where aesthetic experience should be looked at with regard to the whole artwork, its intentions, the context and all those

features that play a significant role in its reception and interpretation. Accordingly, aesthetic experience does not contribute to the value of the artwork by intensity or quantity, but instead due to its adequacy to the conception of the artwork. As aesthetic experience is mainly important in its relation to the other features of the artwork, Deines opines for a pluralistic and media-specific account of aesthetic experience.

Speaking of aesthetic experiences, philosophers frequently refer to feelings too, most prominently of course to pleasure. **Catrin Misselhorn** (Berlin) took up the more profound question of emotions in her paper »Is There an Aesthetic Emotion?« In working out theses put forth by Clive Bell, Misselhorn confronts the traditional notions of feelings such as ›disinterested pleasure‹ or perception to be necessary for aesthetic experience with an account concentrating on the work of art (and especially its form) and the different emotions induced by it. It seems, according to Misselhorn, that Bell, though implicitly, really provides a notion of a peculiar aesthetic emotion distinct from that of an aesthetic attitude. Bell's notion of ›significant form‹ serves to tie the emotional state to the aesthetic object, because it can be interpreted as the ›formal object‹ of the emotion in question, that being the common quality that unifies all tokens of emotional responses towards works of art. From this perspective, significance can be taken as the quality of being valuable in an evaluative sense. Thus, Bell's account provides a basis for explaining the relation of formal properties and aesthetic emotions while it excludes an appeal to perception or feelings concerning aesthetic evaluation. The formal quality shared by all works of art is exactly what individuates the kind of emotion in question as aesthetic. So the aesthetic emotion is both tied to the specific experiential situation and characterized by its content. If such an emotion exists, it is reasonable to believe that a feature distinct to all works of art provokes it and that this feature is the essential feature of artworks qua artworks. When Bell claims that the artwork is »nowise dependent for its value on the outside world«, he does not necessarily think it to be unconditionally valuable. We do not have to say that an artwork is independent of human experience or practice to hold that it is valuable in itself. Thus, it makes sense to speak of essential qualities of an artwork qua artwork and of a peculiar aesthetic emotion that has these qualities as its formal object. Misselhorn does not fully commit herself to this conception, but states that Bell's notion of an aesthetic emotion may certainly be worth exploring.

In addition to re-introducing the notion of pleasure, **Nick Zangwill** (Durham) promised to give an ›old-fashioned account‹ of art and aesthetics in his contribution, »Aesthetic Theories of Art: Methodological Considerations«. Instead of approaching artworks in terms of experience, they should rather be seen as having functions. Like a knife, which is for cutting, artworks too are *for* something. According to Zangwill, the concern of aestheticians for at least two generations has centred on establishing a theory and then facing the counterexamples designed to refute the latter. Zangwill argues that theories of art should focus on the essence and identity of what we conceive of as art rather than propose various criteria of necessity and sufficiency designed to catch every dubious case. The search for the appropriate definition of art is to be changed to provide for the evaluation of conflicting theories of art. The decisive question in art theory is, in this sense, why we bother with artworks at all. Although Plato, as is well known, approaches art in a purely negative way, he provides an interesting and substantial theory of art. Thus, following his example, substantial theories should not start with controversial, but with paradigmatic cases of encounters with aesthetic objects. While generality certainly is a goal, it is not the only one. The proposed view justifies building an aesthetic theory around the basic concepts of pleasure, beauty and ugliness. Although one function of artworks might be to induce aesthetic experiences, a theory highlighting solely this aspect might tend to neglect the explanation of aesthetic production. For it is the properties of an artwork the artist generally aims at, not primarily the

– actual or anticipated – reactions of the audience. So it is clearly the properties of artworks that count – and that should count in the first place – when it comes to aesthetic theory.

Noël Carroll (New York) gave the conference's public evening lecture, entitled »Recent Developments in the Analysis of Aesthetic Experience«. Basically, Carroll vindicated and refined his own so-called ›content-oriented approach‹ to aesthetic experience by contrasting it to recent attempts of other authors, namely Gary Iseminger, Jesse Prinz, Mary Devereaux and Berys Gaut. Iseminger's approach to aesthetic experience might be characterized as a cognitive valuing approach. For Iseminger, aesthetic experience lies in a state of mind that is found to be valuable for its own sake. Carroll believes this account to be problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it does not explain cases like the George Dickie's scenario: two well educated music students listen to a piece of music and have exactly the same experience, though one is listening because he is going to be examined about the piece and the other is listening just for the sake of listening. Does only student number two have an aesthetic experience? Iseminger would have to admit that this is the case, but this seems strangely counterintuitive, since both students have exactly the same experience. The second objection Carroll puts forth is that Iseminger's approach cannot deal with negative or indifferent aesthetic experiences. Both are clearly not valued for the sake of the experience as they are not very rewarding, but we would still like to maintain that they are aesthetic experiences after all. The main objection to Iseminger's approach is the very criteria he offers for aesthetic experience; Carroll holds that ›valuing something for its own sake‹ is not useful information if we ask for an elucidation of the *aesthetic* experience of a piece of art. There are other various criteria, such as specific styles or formal features, that are much more helpful if we want to explain what a specific aesthetic experience consists of. Jesse Prinz argues that aesthetic experience is a value-attributing emotional state like wonder, awe or marvel. One major problem in Carroll's view is (again) that certain artworks are excluded by this criterion, like horrifying and comical ones, and uninspired works of art as well. Prinz fails to give a detailed account of the specific emotional state necessary to determine an experience as an aesthetic one. In the end, the notion of the emotional state remains too vague for Carroll to be of any use in clarifying our concept of aesthetic experience. Carroll continued by discussing the conceptions of aesthetic experience developed by Berys Gaut and Mary Devereaux. These conceptions must be understood in opposition to autonomism. While the autonomist holds that only aesthetic features of the artwork are relevant for an aesthetic experience/evaluation, Devereaux and Gaut claim that moral and cognitive aspects (and in the case of Gaut, almost every predicate that is used in the evaluation of artworks) must additionally be integrated into our aesthetic judgements. Carroll welcomes their efforts to expand the reach of the aesthetic but notices a problem in their approach. In his view, both fail to explain *why* moral and cognitive aspects of the work are relevant for *aesthetic* evaluation. They may simply have begged the question against the autonomist. Carroll wants to integrate the point Gaut and Devereaux are making, but claims to give a better explanation of the way moral judgments may be relevant for an aesthetic experience. He claims that in an aesthetic experience we focus on the formal, expressive and aesthetic properties of the given work. Although a full interpretation of an artwork includes moral and cognitive aspects, they are not per se necessary for the aesthetic evaluation. The aesthetic experience we have with artworks is primarily concerned with *how* the content of the work is presented or embodied, i.e. with the formal features of the artwork. So its content is in part determined by the form of a work of art, the form being the ensemble of choices made to realize the point or the purpose of the work. Thus, aesthetic experience is best described by conceiving of the attention to formal, aesthetic or expressive properties as being disjunctively sufficient for it. Although this seems to be an account a moderate autonomist could agree on, there are independent reasons to doubt aesthetic autonomism. Carroll holds that moral defects of an artwork may be part of our aesthetic evaluation, for

some moral defects are at the same time aesthetic defects. His analysis is similar to the Aristotelian view that, if the purpose of a tragedy is to evoke pity, the character of the protagonists has to be of a certain type, e.g. a character that is good and does not deserve the tragic events that happen to him. If the protagonist is not *designed* to act in an appropriate way, Carroll considers this as both a moral and simultaneously a formal defect and thus as an aesthetic defect of the artwork. As many works of art are designed to evoke a special emotion, many moral features can be relevant for an aesthetic judgement. If the artwork aims at a certain emotional response in the beholder, moral features of the artwork may at the same time be aesthetic features and are thus part of our aesthetic evaluation of a given work of art. Consequently, Carroll manages to integrate moral features of an artwork into the aesthetic evaluation without expanding the field of the aesthetic like Gaut and Devereaux.

The title and topic of **Christoph Menke's** (Frankfurt/M.) paper was »The Aesthetic Possibility of the Artwork«. Menke initially apologized for not using the term »aesthetic experience« at all, but promised to generally talk about the artwork from the perspective of experience. For it is precisely the overwhelming power of artworks we can experience that makes us state that there are such things at all. Menke's initial question was: How are artworks possible? That is: granted that artworks exist, the philosophical enterprise is to explain their specific mode of reality. Viewed this way, the artwork is a matter of succeeding, or as Menke puts it, in the German expression, of »Gelingen«. Thus, certain kinds of knowledge and specific executions have to be involved. The philosophical issue therefore is asking for the human faculties involved in the process of producing an artwork. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates designates this project negatively: there is no way to understand art philosophically. As it is put in the *Ion*, for instance, art is subject to inspiration or divine madness, and because it is thus superhuman, the artist, in aesthetic production, is no subject concerning his faculties. This makes the question of the possibility of art unanswerable. Basically, Menke believes this Socratic answer to the question of art to be correct, albeit in a more positive reading. Art is possible precisely because it is impossible. To reinforce this claim, Menke draws on the views of Paul Valéry and Friedrich Nietzsche. According to Valéry, there is a discrepancy between the artwork and its making. This holds because, from the perspective of the making, no attention is and can be paid to the work as it will be; it is therefore a non-thing. The relation between the artwork and its production is an un-relation. So there is an internal discord in any theorizing about art, or »Poiétique« in Valéry's sense, in that it has to face the question of the artwork's making while one cannot possibly know what happens in this process in terms of faculties. It is Nietzsche who finally turns Socrates' accusation around and uses this impossibility precisely for the appropriate description of the artistic process. In Nietzsche's view, contrary to Socrates', inspiration is not to be characterized as »a telephone from the beyond«; it has its place inside the subject. Or, more accurately, beside and below the subject – for the artist makes use of the play of the »dark forces« of the sensual basis of subjectivity. Thus, enthusiasm and intoxication (as Nietzsche puts it), contrasting the self-conscious execution of practices, form the dialectic between the Apollonian and the Dionysian that is at play in artistic production. The artist's capacity is »to be able to be unable«. To conceptualize this seeming contradiction proves to be the only way to understand the possibility of art at all. But that means that we have to revise our understanding of the relation between possibility and faculty. As this relation is fundamental to philosophy, being the very way of understanding problematic phenomena since Socrates, the paradox may lead the way to a re-examination of the concept of philosophy itself.

When it comes to the artwork, the notion of its style is inseparably bound to ways of perceiving and experiencing it. **Eva Schürmann** (Hamburg) thus addressed the subject of »Style in Perception and in Representation«. Being a way of classifying things other than

itself, style serves to shape a depiction or representation in a certain way. It is a manner of how something is shown, a specific perspective on what is depicted. Traditionally, in art history style refers to the personality of an artist as well as a representative way of presentation in given places and times. In this view, style is at once general and individual. Rembrandt's style, for instance, is both incomparable and representative of the Golden Age of Dutch painting. A resulting logical problem is, according to Schürmann, the interdependence of style and content, or style and truth. Assuming that it is not reasonable to say that there can be a truth without any influence by its expression, formulation or style, respectively, Schürmann proposes to change descriptive vocabulary into the vocabulary of performativity. It is attention on the *how* of an action that characterizes the latter. In this sense, style is not only a notion that specifies representations, but has to be seen in relation to forms of life and world-views. Style is not only a way of depicting contents. It is interwoven with and expresses the very foundations of perception obtaining at a given place and time. Thus, it is not only the artist whose style is relevant in respect to the artwork, but also the spectator who brings his or her own way of *perceptio* – her perceptive style – into the process. Artworks thus make style perceivable, as Schürmann demonstrates by showing various paintings of »Susanna in the bath«, a topic prominent in 17th century. An important part of what we conceive of as aesthetic experience, Schürmann concludes, depends on performances that embody style both in representation and in perception. Her main goal was to show that style is an important aesthetic category and that paying attention to style is constitutive of aesthetic experience. Here, style becomes a visible subject matter, whereas in other areas, style is, as a matter of course, given, but we are often unable to notice it.

One perspective philosophers tend to downplay, especially when it comes to aesthetic experience, is that of an evolutionary account. For this reason, **Elisabeth Schellekens** (Durham) gave this topic room to unfold in her paper, »The Autonomy of Aesthetic Experience«. Facing the fact that it is notoriously difficult to pin down aesthetic experience by means of a definition, especially in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, she suspects that the natural sciences might provide a more exact way to account for the phenomena at hand. If neuroscientists could prove that our aesthetic experience is merely a means to an end, theories that rest on aesthetic experience as an autonomous state of mind might face serious problems. If evolutionary aesthetics is right, an independent account of aesthetic experience faces serious problems in the face of data for a relation between art and the development of the brain. Furthermore, if there are universal rules of aesthetic production and experience to be detected, an independent ontological role of aesthetic properties cannot be maintained. And finally, if, for instance, beauty can be traced back to more basic evaluations, aesthetic judgements lose their epistemological independence. Art could completely be explained by means of, and seen in relation to, neurological processes. Even if we take a rather primitive account into consideration, like that of V. S. Ramachandran, it cannot easily be defeated by means of philosophical reflection. There is no general way to deny, for instance, that our concept of beauty is connected to shapes given in nature, like that of a sexually attractive (hence reproductively fit) woman. According to Schellekens, the escape from the results of evolutionary aesthetics might be narrower than philosophers think. It can and should not be denied that scientific research poses substantial questions in respect to philosophical interpretations of art and aesthetic experience. Although Schellekens argues that Ramachandran's conception of aesthetics is probably oversimplifying the topic, she believes that we can learn something about our faculties and their engagement with art if we pay attention to the development of evolutionary aesthetics.

It is almost a commonplace notion that modern art – let alone contemporary art forms – is characterized by what is called self-reflexivity. As **Georg Bertram** (Berlin) stressed in the

beginning of his talk, »Experience or Reflection? The Question of Modern Art«, the initial sentence of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* is one concise wording of this assumption: »It is now taken for granted that nothing concerning art can be taken for granted anymore: neither art itself, nor art in its relation to the world, nor even the right of art to exist.« If this is the case, can an understanding of modern art be conceived as dependent on a notion of aesthetic experience at all? Bertram discusses two conceptions of art in which the idea of self-reflexivity figures prominently, namely those of G. W. F. Hegel and Arthur Danto. Hegel's aesthetics is read, in the first instance, as an aesthetics of content. Since art is conceived of as a medium to carry fixed historical-cultural contents, the role of aesthetic experience is narrowed. Tokens of modern art – if one can stretch Hegel's notion of the romantic form of art that far – are self-reflexive insofar as they transcend the embodiment of historical-cultural contents in an adequate sensuous-material shape. However, as Bertram continues, Hegel's position is deficient in that it presupposes the idea of a content that in principle can be understood independently of its shaping in an artwork: his idea of self-reflexivity in his discussion of the romantic form of art depends on downplaying his own idea of the constitutive unity of content and shape in art. Danto affirms Hegel's position in principle, but lays greater weight on the role of interpretation in respect to modern art. In Danto's view, art gets more and more self-reflexive to the extent that it embodies its own interpretations until it »ends«, as he has it, »with the advent of its own philosophy«. Danto's notion of interpretation, however, is based on the idea that there is a ›material counterpart‹ of the artwork, that is to say an interpretation-free substrate that can be beheld neutrally. This is, as Bertram criticises, untenable, for it is implausible to imagine an artwork independent of the interpretive practices it is placed in, like it is implausible to imagine a beholder perceiving neutrally where interpretation is outside the picture. For Bertram, Danto's concept of artworks as ›interpretive constructs‹ is too intellectualistic; we must conceive of reflexivity as realized in the artwork itself. Bertram's own proposal does not separate between self-reflexivity and aesthetic experience. The self-reflexivity, or self-reflective elements, of an artwork are precisely subject to experience, if we understand artworks as a nexus of sensual-material elements. Aesthetic experience is the ›play of reflection‹, as Albrecht Wellmer puts it, that follows the constellation of elements that form the structure of the work. Where this structure becomes thematic through some of the elements of the artwork, reflexivity is part of the aesthetic experience itself. It might, however, be a speciality of modern art to exhibit the reflexive constitution of art in a central way.

In her contribution, **Juliane Rebentisch** (Frankfurt/M.) scrutinized the relation between »Aesthetic Experience and Contemporary Art«. When dealing with the latter, it is still more than its dependence on the reflexive faculties of the beholder that has to be explained. More often several employed forms of ›literalness‹ – that is, the artwork's merely being a non-artistic object at first glance – endanger their independent status as objects to be experienced sensually, that is, their autonomy as works of art. Rebentisch's aim is, contrariwise, to argue that it is a defective view of aesthetic experience that leads to the rejection of its role in the reception of contemporary art and that a refined understanding of the role of experience can, moreover, form a cure to modernist misunderstandings of art's autonomy. To get there, she takes a close look at examples from the range of installation art. It is one central feature of this art form, as can be seen in early works of so-called Institutional Critique (by Daniel Buren, for instance), that it is not only sensitive to its context, but inherently shows its involvement with it. More precisely, it is always a double sensitivity to context that it presents, namely to both the specific context of presentation it is placed in and the social context that constitutes the reception of art in general. But the seemingly huge amount of contextual knowledge the beholder is forced to invest does not mean that the experience that can be made with art like that is ›anaesthetic‹. Such an opinion would predefine aesthetic autonomy in terms of a view

of art as independent of social connections. But we can understand autonomy differently: such that art is placing us outside the context of instrumental action, and is thereby autonomous of practical relations. It is our own experience, seen as formed precisely by our involvement in social contexts, that we experience in our encounters with artworks. Contemporary installation art is thus defined through an interplay of the object and the informed experiences of the audience. Thereby it illustrates a feature that is central to all art, instead of detaching itself from common practices of reception. Thus, for aesthetic theory, it is exactly the example of contemporary art that shows how the concept of aesthetic experience is necessary to understand the artistic object and its reception correctly, correcting thereby the false objectivism put forth by modernist aesthetics.

Martin Seel (Frankfurt/M.) worked out a strong notion of aesthetic experience along an example from the art form of film in his talk, »What is happening here? Following a Sequence in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*«. He began by showing a sequence from the mentioned film where we perceive among other things a car ride through L.A. and a disturbing atmosphere. If we encounter artworks, we treat them as interpretable objects. Seel coins this feature of artworks in the following term: »their esse est percipi et interpretari«. Works of art are dependent upon perception and interpretation and at the same time they are objects that are structured in a way to provide a certain kind of response. Many of the aesthetic properties of the sequence stem from audiovisual interaction, but this interaction is not only in the work, it depends upon the perception of a beholder. This relation between beholder and work is the reason why we implicitly refer to the experience of the work when we speak about the form of the artwork. If we did not see the complexity of the formal arrangements within a work of art they simply would not be there. A happening in narrative media is always a potential happening to a beholder of the artwork. Therefore, to perceive what is happening in, for instance, *Zabriskie Point* means to be following this work of art in a specific mode of attention – to pay attention precisely to the paths the film lays out to present the way it is made. What this film *is* can only be determined in relation to what it *does*; to see and hear its complex construction and to appreciate it artistically are indiscernible. This obviously means that there literally is no artwork without reference to its perception, interpretation and evaluation. This is exactly where aesthetic experience comes into play: the beholder willingly disposes of his control without risking his physical and social integrity. This kind of experience is not a unique feature of artworks, but can be found in sports, nature and science as well. In the arts we find this experience manifested in an object that can be re-encountered. Works of art necessarily depend on a cultural and social background to make them meaningful to a potential beholder. In the artwork we pay special attention to the *how*, that is to say the way things are presented to us. In that way, the final sequence of *Zabriskie Point*, where a hotel in the desert explodes and is shot in slow motion from different angles, appears as a rather extreme metaphor for the experience of all artworks.

Facing questions of borderline cases again, **Jasper Liptow** (Frankfurt/M.) reflected upon what it means to be »Experiencing Aesthetic Properties«. For there are, in certain cases, aesthetic properties of a work of art that cannot or do not have to be apprehended via perception. These are cases where aesthetic properties are non-perceivable (like a movie plot's being elegant) and cases where testimonial accounts of such properties suffice as appropriate experiences (like the experience provided by a description of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*). In his paper, Liptow works out a minimal conception of what aesthetic properties are and how they are experienced, thus providing his way of determining aesthetic experience. Liptow describes aesthetic properties in a minimal Sibleyan way; in this conception aesthetic properties depend on non-aesthetic properties, they are ascribed to the objects independently of the non-aesthetic properties and they can only be perceived together with the non-aesthetic

properties on which they supervene. If we conceive of aesthetic properties as supervenient upon certain non-aesthetic properties, there is no way to explain experiencing them in a purely epistemic way. Such a conception of experience cannot simultaneously explain how non-perceptual aesthetic properties can be experienced and rule out cases of coming to know aesthetic states of affairs that we would not call experience (like through a neutral description). Liptow's proposal therefore consists of a phenomenological approach to the experience of aesthetic properties. Experience in this sense means a specific kind of phenomenal consciousness that can be circumscribed by the term appearance (or appearing). For instance, someone is experiencing a poem as being tightly knit (to use one of Frank Sibley's examples) if and only if the poem appears tightly knit to her. This proposal has several advantages compared to the epistemic approaches discussed before. It is able to explain the experience of non-perceptual aesthetic properties and it gets a better grip on the duration of aesthetic experiences. On the other hand, it seems to entail some version of what can be called the ›principle of acquaintance‹. This principle, saying that aesthetic judgements have to be based upon the immediate perception of the object under judgement, is, as Malcolm Budd and Paisley Livingston have shown, at least dubious; there are cases one can judge aesthetically on behalf of testimonial knowledge about an object or by being confronted with just a surrogate (say, a reproduction) of it. Since testimonial knowledge does not count as experience, a version of the principle of acquaintance – taking experiences via surrogates into account – can be stated that is able to catch all cases. For it is not unsound to count even reliable descriptions (say, of conceptual artworks) as surrogates. Under that condition, Liptow holds, his approach to aesthetic experience only entails being acquainted with objects in a way broad enough not to exclude these familiar cases of experiencing aesthetic properties.

The last paper of the conference was concerned with the appropriate evaluation of artworks. In »The Aesthetic Ought«, **James Shelley** (Auburn) explains why we are concerned with the overvaluation of artworks. The reason why we want to avoid undervaluation is far easier explained, because if we seek aesthetic pleasure in works of art we are of course interested in enlarging that pleasure. But exactly this argument makes it difficult to understand why we should not overvalue works of art, as this would provide more pleasure. Richard Miller gives two reasons why we should avoid overvaluation: firstly, if we spend time with overvaluing sentimental and shallow works of art, we lose time to engage with emotionally rich works. Secondly, if we are attracted to the sentimental and shallow features of a work of art, we might begin to value emotionally rich works of art in a sentimental and shallow way. These two problems rest on the assumption that the pleasure we find in emotionally rich works of art is more valuable than the pleasure we find in shallow works of art. But this is simply not the case, because we can of course find pleasure in shallow works that more or less equals the pleasure we find in experiencing emotionally rich works of art. Since Miller is an empiricist, the value of the work depends on the pleasure we find in experiencing it. But if that is the case, we cannot overvalue a work of art, as the value depends on the value we find in experiencing the work. The empiricist's problem only arises if we think the beholder's pleasure is an indicator of the work's value and at the same time the feature that determines the value of the work. For then we run into serious problems if we want to explain the problem with overvaluation. Shelley therefore accuses Miller of making no difference between the beautiful and the agreeable. For, it is possible to judge that an object is more beautiful than it is. It is, for reasons already shown, not possible to judge that an object is more agreeable than it appears to us. Shelley argues that for this reason he follows Kant's claim that beauty is something we find in the object and that it can be prescriptive. Shelley holds that in regard this aspect we can compare aesthetic judgements to moral judgements. They both aim for a certain kind of objectivity and prescribe a sort of action. Of course moral judgements ask for a specific kind of action, whereas aesthetic judgements merely ask to

continue engaging with the work of appreciation. Kant believes that aesthetic judgements are only discoverable by one's own experience and that one cannot be told to find something beautiful by an authority. Shelley believes this to be false. He argues that if we are told that a picture is beautiful, we ought to see it (i.e. travel to the museum and find out). If Kant were right, we would have to do that even if we would be told that the picture is ugly, because in Kant's conception we are the only authority when it comes to questions of beauty. But this is simply not the case; we only travel to a museum if we expect to see a beautiful work and not a mediocre one. Shelley claims that an aesthetic judgement is categorical; if something is called beautiful we ought to see it (i.e. see the beauty of the object). That means we are not the only authority in aesthetic judgements. We are forced to appreciate the aesthetic value of a work because all aesthetic judgements are normative. As Shelley puts it: »The aesthetic value of an object is the value it possesses in virtue of its being such that you ought categorically to experience it to be such that you ought categorically to experience it.« On this account, we are interested in making true aesthetic judgements because aesthetic judgements are prescriptive and we can only do as the aesthetic judgement prescribes if we perceive the artwork correctly. But the correct aesthetic judgement is not a precondition to do what an aesthetic judgement prescribes (like in moral judgements); it is simply doing as we aesthetically ought.

Conclusion

Among the aims of the conference was to initiate a dialogue between philosophers belonging to different theoretical contexts. One could think of the importance the notion of a specific aesthetic experience has in so-called continental philosophy via Kant's aesthetics compared to the focus on what works of art are about, thus their relation to and dependence upon language, in so-called analytic aesthetics prevalent in Anglophone countries. But the talks proved such distinctions to be obsolete. The touchstone of notions of aesthetic experience is not found in backgrounds of tradition, but rather in the phenomena in question: artworks in their countless shapes and media. There seemed to be a fragile consensus that these can be objects of an aesthetic experience – at least among other aspects, that is, they can also be understood to induce a specific kind of emotion, to define the very limits of philosophical understanding, to mirror styles of perception in the context of their origin and thus to stand in manifold relations and practices, and to be objects prescribing certain kinds of evaluations. Artworks do not stand outside human concerns and interests, although they clearly seem to form a unique domain. To understand aesthetic experience as a peculiar kind of experience does not necessarily contradict its non-instrumental character. Thus, despite the counterexamples that quickly come to mind, even contemporary art does not necessarily rule out the importance of thinking of aesthetics in terms of experience. On the contrary, there are ways to grant particular importance to it even when it comes to complex, knowledge-laden processes of aesthetic reception.

Hans Maes (Canterbury) and **Daniel Feige** (Berlin) alternately held the chair.

An anthology of the conference contributions is in preparation.

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