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Objecthood and the Problem of Form A Critical Introduction*

In his essay »Art and Objecthood,« written in 1967, Michael Fried sustains a detailed analysis of what he calls the »literalist attitude toward sculpture [...].«¹ Referring to Donald Judd's »Specific Object« and Robert Morris's »unitary forms,«² he criticizes their intention to create a new authenticity and non-illusionist presence of the artwork by leaving painting for »real« three-dimensionality and by avoiding compositional relationships. Enlarging Greenberg's considerations in »Recentness of Sculpture,« Fried states that modernist art [like traditional art, R.P.] would »defeat or suspend its own objecthood through the medium of shape,«³ while the literalist espousal of objecthood by Morris and Judd implies identity between shape and object: »The shape is the object [...].«⁴ Consequently, Fried maintains, »the demands of art and the conditions of objecthood were in direct conflict.«⁵

Contemporary perspectives: Jeff Koons's reinvention of the readymade

Even beyond the context of Minimal Art, Fried's and Greenberg's arguments can reveal the controversial status of the artwork as an object-like entity. Objecthood is a problem that did not just emerge during the twentieth-century avant-garde movements since Marcel Duchamp and his invention of the readymade; rather it has been a permanent debate and will be continued in the twenty-first century. In this vein, contemporary artists, too, provoke their public by assimilating their artworks to real objects of non-artistic spheres, first of all the sphere of popular culture. Take for example the work of Jeff Koons as presented in Frankfurt's Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung (fig. 2).⁶ The contrast of his works with sculptures from Ancient Egypt and the tradition of Western sculpture before the twentieth-century avant-garde revealed the fact that modern and contemporary objecthood is incompatible with the quality of the ritual objects in ancient religious cultures on the one hand and the autonomous status of the traditional western artwork on the other.⁷ This does not mean that there is no relationship between recent and traditional art production. It is clearly evident that an artist like Jeff Koons communicates with the central topics of European art. But Koons's answer to the tradition of high art is very complex, full of irony, and opposed to its idealistic premises. His artistic strategy can be – paradoxically – described as a materialization of gloss. (In this respect the choice of stainless steel appears to be comparable to Robert Morris's mirror glass objects.) As Monika Wagner points

out in her catalogue contribution to the Frankfurt Koons exhibition, idealistic aesthetics, with its claim that the idea is a decisive criterion of art, »required earthly materials for its manifestation, but the more the surface negates or dissolves its physical weight, the closer the form seems able to approximate the ideal. Polished, reflecting, transparent surfaces were considered more capable of corresponding to the ideal than dull, matt, or opaque ones.«⁸ The techniques of oil painting – I would additionally note – could help to conceal the materiality of the picture plane and of the brushstroke while in sculpture the use of precious metals culminating in gold and silver realized the intended effect of dematerialization.

In his own explication of his method, Jeff Koons addresses these metaphysical qualities of splendor by transferring aesthetic radiance to industrial materials. The shine of stainless steel, he points out, achieves an effect similar to that of the »gold leaf in Baroque churches.«⁹ At the same time no bigger contrast is imaginable. The spiritual quality of the precious metal succumbs to the technological connotation of steel while its polished surface overdoes the baroque splendor. The experience of a mystic depth yields to the impression of a mere object that is opaque despite its luminous shine.

This dialectical act of simultaneously overdoing and negating splendor as the medium of aesthetic semblance, which represents the higher – ideal – qualities of art, can be regarded as a revision or summary of the avant-garde movements in their totality. Jeff Koons is the heir of Marcel Duchamp, Dan Flavin and Andy Warhol; his art offers a highly sophisticated reflection about literalism as avant-garde strategy. Therefore I would like to employ Koons's art here as a starting and reference point for the panel's discussion about modernist and contemporary perspectives upon objecthood.

Koons's so-called Inflatables – his most famous work might be »Rabbit« (fig. 1) – modify the readymade shock that was initiated by Duchamp an entire century ago and was then renewed by Pop Art as well as, in a certain sense, Minimal Art. In his early series »The New,« Koons already combines the objecthood of Pop Art and Minimalism, referring especially to Dan Flavin: assembling vacuum cleaners and fluorescent tubes he uses both objects as signs of original purity.¹⁰ If we do not restrict our interpretation to the mysticism of the artist's commentary,¹¹ we have to acknowledge that metaphysical truth has been sarcastically perverted by this kind of a technological and chemical objectivization – a vacuum absorbing dust and dirt or the empty space of a tube which produces light by using electricity. It would be worth com-



Fig. 1 Jeff Koons, *Rabbit*, 1986 (from the *Statuary series*). Stainless steel. Santa Monica, The Broad Art Foundation

paring Koons's empty objects and shiny surfaces with Duchamp's last readymade »Paris Air« (1919)¹² and also with Warhol's »Silverclouds« (1966) and his use of aluminium paint or foil.¹³ All these works reflect on the tension between an appearance of weightlessness and factual materiality. They present the artwork as an empty container, which leads us to a paradoxical conclusion: objecthood as rooted in the readymade and its contemporary modifications emerges from the absence of form in terms of its classical definition.¹⁴ Thus the »making« of an object-like artwork is also an »unmaking«: an iconoclast attack against the idealist concept of aesthetic form. The work's interior may be almost tangible – that impression is caused by the well-rounded volumes of Koons's Inflatables – but it is not transferred into plastic values. Its literalness is referring to the photographic moment and place, the traumatic reality of the »punctum« according to Roland Barthes.¹⁵ I will come back to this point later.

Notwithstanding the historical distance between Duchamp and Koons, I would suggest a rather continuous development of objecthood as artistic strategy and quality that has to be discussed in an even broader context. The iconoclasm implied can already be observed since the beginning of the 19th century. Criticism on objecthood or literalism took place long before these terms were introduced as key terms of art criticism.

Objecthood's traditions: the classicist approach as claim on art's autonomy

Fried's most famous predecessor might be the philosopher Hegel whose diagnosis of the end of art (in its highest destination) is derived from his critique of the empirist attitude in painting which is not only no longer able to narrate the Christian myths, but also lacking the essential quality of sovereignty over materiality and its contingency.¹⁶ Several classicist theorists have mentioned the loss of an ideal fictional space, which seemed to have disappeared in favor of actual real space. One of those is the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand, author of the book »Das Problem der Form« (1893), which was already published in English in 1907.¹⁷ He offers an early critique of objecthood describing the tomb of countess Maria Christina von Sachsen-Teschen in Vienna's St. Augustinerkirche: »Much that today stands for modernity and originality actually signifies no more than an absence of the artistic reconstruction of reality.«¹⁸ In Canova's sculpture, Hildebrand already finds this crudity of realism: the latter even relates to popular wax figures and panorama, which lack, in his opinion, the »necessary artistic metamorphosis of functional into spatial values« and therefore the pictorial unity harmonizing plane and figure.¹⁹ Canova entirely separated architecture from his figures with the result that »the figures, indeed, belong more to the public than to the tomb; it seems as though they had just climbed up into their positions. The single bond of unity between the architecture and the figures lies in the suggested act of their entering the tomb. What is here constructed is not a picture seen, but a drama acted out: the figures are real men and women turned to stone.«²⁰

Hildebrand's critique refers to a heteronomous materiality of sculpture that he identifies with a loss of an imaginary spatial unity, the latter considered to be the artist's essential creative work. Real space and also real time seem to have replaced that fictional sphere. Whereas traditional plastic representation aimed at conceptual content and unity, the »crude« modern realism gives us, according to Hildebrand, isolated perceptions. Furthermore, the reference to popular wax figures might be a hint to Rodin, whose first masterwork »The Brazen Age« (1877–1880) was accused for being merely a copy of a human body, in other words: a mere thing, not animated by the artist's genius.

Obviously, Hildebrand's classicist view on Canova's tomb anticipated Michael Fried's negative critique of Minimal Art's literalism. Fried

also focused on a kind of unreleased physical quality, maintaining that the »presence of literalist art [...] is basically a theatrical effect or quality – a kind of stage presence.«²¹ Yet his claim that »theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting [...], but with art as such,«²² is not easily understandable. Fried's intention becomes clearer, when we regard it in the tradition of Hildebrand's normative criticism based on the ideal of a distant point of view (»Fernbild«) including and subordinating tactile values and details.²³ Similarly, Fried stated that Judd and Morris' objects were »too real« to distance the viewer. Becoming emphatic exclusively about its own materiality, the minimal art object does not allow a proper aesthetic experience but rather restricts the viewers to their ordinary, non-transcendent world. Moreover, Fried's classicist attitude is revealed in his suggestion that the literalist concept of presence is fed by a hidden naturalism or anthropomorphism lacking abstract shape which would be able to transfer an original artistic idea of harmony.²⁴ Fried later strengthened this value of aesthetic unity and autonomy by introducing the term »absorption« as opposed to »theatricality.«²⁵

Regarding the origins of criticism against objecthood, the inherent classicist intention of Fried's argument, foreshadowed in Hildebrand's objections concerning the intense physical presence of Canova's figures, becomes evident. Thus there seems to be no fundamental difference between the problem of objecthood in figural art and in abstract art. But of course, in 1967, classicist thought had reached a new level. Fried and also Greenberg, whose essay »Recentness of Sculpture« was positively viewed by Fried and anticipated the latter's essay »Art and Objecthood,« were able to conceptualize literalism as an aesthetic method concerning painting as well as sculpture. Greenberg, for example, recognized and respected the implied intention to confer an effect of presence using the »look of non-art.«²⁶ Unlike Hildebrand, Fried and Greenberg argue as theorists and defenders of the avant-garde. Nevertheless, they conserve the classicist idea of form, thought to transcend the banality of material objects. Greenberg then complained not about theatricality, but about the »continuing infiltration of Good Design into what purports to be advanced and highbrow art [...]«²⁷

Apparently, this latent classicist position receives a philosophical legitimation in Adorno's »Aesthetic Theory.« Modern art, according to Adorno, has to deny art's escapist illusionism, but at the same time it should avoid – Adorno is addressing Dadaism, Happenings, and implicitly also Pop Art – producing a second naturalism. If art »comes to resemble realia it assimilates itself to that reification against which it protests.«²⁸ The term »reification« leads us to a central issue: the link between the aesthetic object and commodity, touched upon in Greenberg's reference to Good Design and emphasized by Jeff Koons, Pop Art's radical heir. The wide range of his objects and techniques witness a historical fact: the overwhelming splendor of baroque churches has been replaced by the attractions of the cultural industry – movies and comics, television and computers. The classicist viewpoint claims that art should resist interference from the public sphere and that the artist should maintain control over production and art's external conditions. A radical literalism cannot be accepted, because it emerges from the apparent absence of the artist's self as author of form. The terms objecthood, theatricality, and reification evoke the threat of entertainment and mass culture menacing the identity of the bourgeois individual, traditionally established and consolidated by the fine arts and aesthetic experience. Moreover, there are two other thought lines concerning objecthood, apart from the classicist approach.

The romantic approach: the way beyond art

A popular solution to the problem of form has been outlined, in various, mostly syncretist, philosophical systems, by many artists,

and also by art historians, who were searching for the complete transformation of art. Whereas the classicist modernists wanted to keep art within its traditional borders, the romantic modernists advocated the »way beyond art.«²⁹ El Lissitzky claimed to create everyday things.³⁰ He was fundamentally convinced that, similar to painting and poetry, airplanes, cars, and houses could emerge from authentic art production. This socialist utopian conception, prevailing in the Russian avant-garde,³¹ implied that art could end its elitist existence as part of society's ideological superstructure (Marx's »Überbau«) and become – so to speak – a part of the economic basis. Then the work of art would be a commodity beyond the tragic capitalist opposition between use value and exchange value: a somewhat freed or »absolute« commodity.³²

It is furthermore important to state that concepts of new realism, not restricted to the affirmation of the present world and its social hierarchies, but outlining in advance the future of a free society, also determine the De Stijl movement. According to Mondrian's »Triologue« (1918–1920), an essay in conversational form, »abstract reality« will overcome the traditional expression of nature and individual feeling. The New Plastic intends to create »a clear image of the new,« which architecture would realize one day.³³ The artist's studio served as a model for that utopian objectification of painting.³⁴

The idea of art's forecasting a new, better life continued, even though it was transformed by the non-metaphysical spirit of Neo-Dada after the Second World War. In his 1958 essay, »The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,« Allan Kaprow claimed that it was »necessary to get rid of the usual idea of »Form« [...]«³⁵ In his opinion, Pollock »left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life,« and therefore »we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch [...]«³⁶ Kaprow simultaneously maintained the emancipation of the everyday object and the »unmaking« of its object qualities; in other words: the end of art is appreciated as a deepened experience and practice of life.³⁷ In contemporary art this pragmatist belief continued in many different artistic strategies. Koons touched again the utopian aspect of the day-to-day object when he used stainless steel as »poor man's gold.«³⁸

The Hegelian approach: Art's self-reflexivity

The third, most crucial approach to objecthood can be called Hegelian because of its dialectical structure. According to its defenders, the end of art is different from the end of art the romantic socialists believed in; rather it is considered to be the beginning of art as a self-reflective practice,³⁹ including the critical exploration of art's institutions and social functions. Adorno is of importance here again. His Aesthetic Theory is not restricted to classicist modernism, because its author acknowledged, contrary to Greenberg and Fried, the irreconcilability of traditional aesthetics and modern art.⁴⁰ To be authentic, Adorno emphasizes, art must recognize its historical failure and deny in part its conventional concept of an ideal totality. In 1967, while Fried and Greenberg published their critiques against Minimal Art's literalist position, Adorno published the essay »Die Kunst und die Künste,« which deals with the same problem of painting's spatial materialization, though not in regard to Minimal Art but concerning objecthood's historical roots in Cubism, or better: in the principle of montage – the »original example of erosion [Verfransung] of art.«⁴¹ Adorno's approach is not a formalist one; it aims at the very center of artistic subjectivity and its (anachronistic) metaphysical claim for being able to create a world like the Christian paternal God. According to Adorno the critical reflection that montage is able to generate consists in confronting the artist's creative gesture with the literal, inexpressive object. The sense of the Cubist, Dadaist, and surrealist montage hence consists in negating meaning

and thus negating the power of artistic creation based on the imitation of nature: »However, montage amounts to the disruption, and hence the denial, of meaning in works of art through the invasion of fragments of empirical reality that do not abide by the laws of art. The erosion [Verfransung] of the arts is almost always accompanied by the attempt by works of art to reach out toward an extra-aesthetic reality. This element is strictly opposed to the principle of reflecting reality. The more an art allows material that is not contained in its own continuum to enter it, the more it participates in alien, thinglike matter, instead of imitating it. It therefore becomes virtually a thing among things, a something we know not what.«⁴² In this view, the generic space of painting, sculpture, music, or poetry represents a subjectivizable continuity, which is interrupted and questioned by the heteronomous materiality of the non-art object or material.

A further important author should be mentioned in this context. Adorno learned from Walter Benjamin, whose theory about the decline of the aura refers to nothing other than the rise of objecthood.⁴³ I would even like to assert that Benjamin is the founder of the Hegelian approach to objecthood; and I would like to refer to Karen Lang's recent commentary on Benjamin's notion of allegory which implies, opposed to symbol and sign, the separation of person and world as well as the separation of object and meaning.⁴⁴ Modernity, according to Benjamin, is initiated in the baroque German mourning play (»Trauerspiel«) which reveals a new, empty Lutheran world, freed from magic animism. While »object and meaning continued to be yoked together in the symbol or motivated in the sign, [...] the allegorist sought to break down symbol and sign in order to reveal what had been lost in language as communication.«⁴⁵ Evidently Benjamin anticipated Michael Fried's claim for an anti-theatrical avant-garde art, but he deals with that concept in a completely different way, as Lang points out: »Benjamin described the theatre and emblem world of the baroque as replete with [...] self-absorption; and in an extreme state of mournfulness, depersonalization.«⁴⁶ While Fried suggested to avoid objecthood, which he considers to be identical with theatricality, Benjamin's observation of antitheatrical tendencies within the German mourning play is crucially focussed on objecthood.⁴⁷ In his view, contemplation and self-absorption are not, as for Fried, opposed to objecthood but rather imply the latter's threat of depersonalization. That Benjamin's Hegelian approach is much more plausible than Fried's classicist angle may be underpinned by his reference to Albrecht Dürer's proto-baroque (and therefore proto-modern) work »Melencolia I« (1514), in which »the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation.«⁴⁸ Benjamin maintains that the »contemplative paralysis« represented in this picture was linked with a »pathological state, in which the most simple object appears to be the symbol of some enigmatic wisdom because it lacks any natural, creative relationships to us [...]«⁴⁹ Karen Lang concludes: »Things are dumb (stumm, blöde), yet their silence, their awkwardness, is fringed with enigma.«⁵⁰ This clause could be read also as a description of many hermetic works of object-art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The Hegelian approach to objecthood would value their espousal of literalness not as materiality as such, but would connect it to the tradition of the melancholic allegorist, who has acknowledged the state of separation and sets his sights on a »futile repair« by producing »silent awkward things,« which »could expose, at best, a trace of the metaphysical, living wor(l)d.«⁵¹

Objecthood and (photographic) indexicality

Eventually, I would like to touch upon a last topic intrinsically related to Benjamin: photography and film as technologies of reproduction. According to Benjamin, these technologies destroyed the aura of the artwork. The highly estimated originality of the artist's mimetic appropriation and creation of the world became questionable, not because

photography took the lead, but because photography equalized the picture to an industrial product. Furthermore its cinematographic animation did not fulfill the conditions of aesthetic liveliness as the impression of movement was produced by machines, and not by the artist.⁵² Dziga Vertov was one of the first avant-garde film directors, who revealed the materiality of the cinematic picture and paralleled it with modern technologies of mass communication or public transport.⁵³ While classicist and modernist views on literalness include criticism against or negation of photography and film's objecthood,⁵⁴ Rosalind Krauss has opened a rather Hegelian perspective upon this issue suggesting that the indexical quality of the photographic picture relates it to the readymade.⁵⁵

Consequently, this section could also be called »The unmaking and the making of the object« – addressing photography's paradoxical function in the vein of modernist and contemporary processualization of the artwork.⁵⁶ A significant example is offered by the photographs showing Joseph Beuys's performance during documenta VII in Kassel. They document the destruction of the Czar's crown that

should be transformed into the »Friedenshasen« (rabbit of peace).⁵⁷ This action can be understood as a symbol of avant-garde operations in general. Beuys has visualized the iconoclastic appropriation of the religious object or fetish already introduced by Kurt Schwitters's »Merzbau.«⁵⁸ Mediating the process of dissolution and transformation of the magic object, photography has achieved a new reification, as it produced another picture object besides (or in other cases: instead of) the resulting artwork.⁵⁹ Evidently, the tension between the photographic moment, initiated automatically, and the supposed timeless presence of the artwork, released by the artist's authority, is even radicalized in the mirroring surfaces of Jeff Koons's »Rabbit,« which offers an infinite number of »snapshots« of the exhibition room and the visitors. The artwork presents itself as an element of its reception process. Consequently, reflection on objecthood, which can be considered as a method of deconstructing the work of art, also leads to a reflection on temporality, which is, above and beyond Kubler,⁶⁰ the topic of discussion in several of the following essays.

Notes

* I hope this sketch can provide a theoretical and historical context for understanding the panel's subject though I do not claim to represent the various perspectives of the contributions. My critical approach to Michael Fried is answered by Ralph Ubl's essay, who deals with »objecthood« in a way more positively attached to Fried's argument.

- 1 Michael Fried: Art and Objecthood [1967]. In: Michael Fried. Art and Objecthood. Essays and Reviews. Chicago/London 1998, pp. 148–172. Fried mostly agrees with Clement Greenberg: Recentness of Sculpture [1967]. In: Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology. Ed. by Gregory Battcock. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1995, pp. 180–186. For the panel's discussion on Minimal Art see Stefan Neuner's contribution on Dan Flavin.
- 2 Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 150.
- 3 Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 153.
- 4 Fried 1998 (note 1), p. 151.
- 5 Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 153.
- 6 Jeff Koons. The Painter & The Sculptor. Exhb.cat. Schirn Kunsthalle/Liebighaus Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt. Ed. by Vinzenz Brinkmann/Matthias Ulrich. Ostfildern 2012. For the discussion of other contemporary object art positions see the contributions of Angela Matyssek on Dieter Roth and Duane Hanson, Ileana Parvu on Fischli and Weiss and Stéphane Huchet on Hélio Oiticica and Vik Muniz.
- 7 See my review of the exhibition: Dialektik des Glanzes. Jeff Koons in Frankfurt. In: Texte zur Kunst, 22, 2012, n. 88, pp. 178–183.
- 8 Monika Wagner: Polished Stainless Steel – »Poor Man's Gold.« Jeff Koon's Material Semantics. In: Jeff Koons. The Sculptor (note 6), pp. 33–36, quote p. 33.
- 9 Interview: Jeff Koons – Anthony Gaden-Guest. In: Jeff Koons. Ed. by Angelika Muthesius. Cologne 1992, p. 21. The artist himself interprets the stainless steel as »poor man's gold,« referring to a democratic value of »fake luxury.« See p. 21. As commentator of his work, Koons thus denies any negative sense or critical intention.
- 10 See Raphaël Bouvier: Jeff Koons' Serien The New, Banality und Celebration: Drei Marksteine einer Entwicklung. In: Jeff Koons. Exhb.cat. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel. Ed. by Theodora Vischer. Ostfildern 2012, pp. 173–189, esp. 174–175.
- 11 On Koons's religious attitude and its biographical background see Gabriele Detterer: Glaube, Mission, Business-Card. In: Neue Züricher Zeitung, 29.06.2013.
- 12 Bouvier 2012 (note 10), p. 174, mentions the similar function concerning hygiene and the shared quality of air-filled objects.
- 13 Walter Grasskamp: An anatomy of Gloss. The Art of the Surface. In: Jeff Koons. The Sculptor (note 6), pp. 43–49, esp. 45 on this comparison: »Jeff Koons's high-gloss sculptures stand firmly on bases. Nevertheless, they seem to be on the verge of taking off to join Warhol's flying objects in the air at any moment.«
- 14 Note the parallels to Minimal Art. Numerous critics have mentioned, as Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 151 reports, »that Judd's and Morris' pieces are »hollow.« I would like to add one remark: emptiness is a quality also attributed to Mondrian or Pollock's painting. This is an important hint to the general relevance of objecthood also beyond sculpture. Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg did not ignore this coherence, but in the end they stuck to the concept of composition, underestimating the aesthetics of montage.

- 15 As Hal Foster (The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century. Cambridge/London 1996, p. 132–133) has pointed out, Barthes's »punctum« (Caméra Lucida, 1980) can be paralleled with Lacan's definition of the traumatic as a missed encounter with the real. Foster's argument concerning the repetitive »popping« of the image in the work of Andy Warhol seems also appropriate to Koons's commodity sculptures, whose perverse volumes represent the void and explicitly reveal the absence of any use value.
- 16 See G.W.F. Hegel: Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art. Ed. by Heinrich Gustav Hotho, transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox. Oxford 1973, vol 1, part I: The Idea of Artistic Beauty, Or The Ideal, Introduction (a): »For us art counts no longer as the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself.« For criticism against contemporary paintings see Section III, Chapter I. Painting (1.c) Principle of the Artistic Treatment. Hegel observes literalness in regard to imitation and sign. – For further consideration, see Regine Prange: Das ikonoklastische Bild. Piet Mondrian und die Selbstkritik der Kunst. Munich 2006, Exkurs 2, part 1, pp. 349–350. – On Hegel and literalness see also Rainer Metzger: Buchstäblichkeit. Bild und Kunst in der Moderne. Cologne 2004, pp. 82–94.
- 17 Adolf Hildebrand: The problem of form in painting and sculpture. Transl. and revised with the author's co-operation by Max Meyer/Robert Morris Ogden. New York et al. 1907.
- 18 Hildebrand 1907 (note 17), p. 112.
- 19 Hildebrand 1907 (note 17), p. 112.
- 20 Hildebrand 1907 (note 17), p. 113.
- 21 Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 155.
- 22 Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 163.
- 23 Hildebrand 1907 (note 17). See chapter V »The Conception of Relief,« pp. 80–99, esp. 84. – About the continuity of classicism in nineteenth century's art theory and art history, see Regine Prange: Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte. Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft. Cologne 2004. For my thesis that Greenberg's formalism, to whom Fried adheres, is rooted in Riegl's and Wölfflin's psychologies of style – which was strongly influenced by Hildebrand's book – see Regine Prange: Konjunkturen des Optischen – Riegls Grundbegriffe und die Kanonisierung der künstlerischen Moderne. In: Alois Riegl Revisited. Beiträge zu Werk und Rezeption. Contribution to the Opus and its Reception. Tagungsband zum Symposium, Alois Riegl 1905–2005. Ed. by Peter Noever/Artur Rosenauer/Georg Vasold. Vienna 2010, pp. 109–128.
- 24 Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 157.
- 25 Michael Fried: Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1980. Regarding paintings of Greuze, Chardin, and others, Fried addresses the need to negate the presence of the beholder, which he considers to be the most important element of modern art's prehistory.
- 26 Greenberg 1995 (note 2), p. 182. Concerning design and commodity, it might be of interest that Jean Baudrillard published his book »Le système des objets« in 1968, a reflection on the ambivalent character of modern everyday objects.
- 27 Greenberg 1995 (note 3), p. 186.
- 28 Theodor W. Adorno: Aesthetic Theory. Transl. by Robert Hullot-Kentor. London 1997, p. 103: »The difference of artworks from the empirical world, their semblance

- character, is constituted out of the empirical world and in opposition to it. If for the sake of their own concept artworks wanted absolutely to destroy this reference back to the empirical world, they would wipe out their own premise. Art is indeed infinitely difficult in that it must transcend its concept in order to fulfill it; yet in this process where it comes to resemble realia it assimilates itself to that reification against which it protests.»
- 29 Alexander Dornier: *The Way beyond Art – The Work of Herbert Bayer*. New York 1947. Dornier dedicated his book to the Pragmatist John Dewey.
- 30 El Lissitzky: Proun [1926]. In: Proun und Wolkenbügel. Schriften, Briefe, Dokumente. Ed. by Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers/El Lissitzky. Dresden 1977, pp. 21–34, esp. 31: »Konstruktion bedeutet das Bemühen, besondere und konkrete Dinge, Gegenstände zu schaffen.«
- 31 See the contributions of Simon Baier and Magalena Nieslony on the Russian avant-garde. Especially Nieslony concentrates on the (different) status of the object in Puni's work and Constructivist theory.
- 32 This term is employed by Sebastian Egenhofer: *Abstraktion, Kapitalismus. Subjektivität. Zur Wahrheitsfunktion des Werks in der Moderne*. Munich 2008, pp. 198–206 in regard to Warhol's »Spinozist materialism« (p. 206) and opposed to Ad Reinhardt's concept of the immanent »absolute picture.« [My transl.]
- 33 Piet Mondrian: *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality: A Dialogue (While Strolling from the Country to the City) (1919–20)*. In: *The New Art – The New Life. The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*. Ed. and transl. by Harry Holtzman/Martin James. New York 1986, pp. 82–123. – See also H.L.C. Jaffé on »Art and Life – The Utopian Prospect.« In: *De Stijl 1917–1931. The Dutch contribution to modern art*. Ed. by H.L.C. Jaffé. Amsterdam 1956, pp. 128–142.
- 34 A visitor of Mondrian's rue de Coulmiers atelier reported: »The walls of this room, itself rectangular, are subdivided by unpainted canvases or canvases painted in solid colors, so that each wall forms a sort of enlarged painting in rectangles.« *Het vaderland*, 09.07.1920. Quoted from *The New Art – The New Life 1986* (note 33), p. 83.
- 35 Allan Kaprow: *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Berkeley 1993, pp. 1–9, esp. 5.
- 36 Kaprow 1993 (note 35), p. 7.
- 37 In his contribution to this section, Philipp Ursprung gives new insight in his research on this topic.
- 38 Wagner 2012 (note 8), p. 34.
- 39 Self-reflexivity here means, contrary to Greenberg's claim for affirming the medium's essential nature, the negation of its historical generic law. With regard to painting, Adorno thus would not appreciate the representation of a pretended genuine flatness, culminating in the look of non-art. He would rather argue that flat surfaces attack the historical determination of art as an ideal, fictional sphere. See the following citation.
- 40 Theodor W. Adorno: *Aesthetic Theory*. Transl. by Robert Hullot-Kentor. London 1997, pp. 332–334.
- 41 Theodor W. Adorno: *Art and the Arts (1967)*. In: Theodor W. Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann: *Can one live after Auschwitz? A philosophical reader*. Transl. by Rodney Livingstone. Stanford 2003, pp. 368–387, quote p. 385, URL: <http://de.scribd.com/doc/43350732/Adorno-Art-and-the-Arts> [29.07.2013].
- 42 Adorno 2003 (note 41), p. 385.
- 43 According to Benjamin the waning of the aura is connected to photography and film (see also the last chapter of this article). Mass reproduction freed art from aura because it was no longer tied to specific rituals, spaces, or ideas of uniqueness. While objects with aura were distanced from subjects, the lack of aura allowed the viewer to get closer to the artwork and even to become part of it, especially in the contexts of capitalist mass entertainment and the political abuse of photography and film's principle of objectivity. Walter Benjamin: *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Cambridge, Mass. 2008, chapters IV and V. Advanced filmmakers, photographers (like Eugene Atget), and artists (like the Dadaists) employ, however, the destruction of aura in order to »introduce us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses« (chapter XIII) or intending »to hit the spectator like a bullet [...]«; the resulting »tactile quality« (XIV) of art is strongly opposed to contemplation.
- 44 Karen Lang: *Walter Benjamin's Allegory as a Problem of Form, in Three Parts*. In: *Das Problem der Form. Interferenzen zwischen moderner Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft*. Ed. by Hans Aurenhammer/Regine Prange (forthcoming 2014).
- 45 Lang 2014 (note 44).
- 46 Lang 2014 (note 44).
- 47 Fried has probably misunderstood the theory of theatricality established by his colleague (and reference author) Stanley Cavell (e.g. in: *The World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Cambridge 1979). While Cavell states a metaphysical difference between the stage actor's space and the viewer's space – the premise of traditional aesthetic experience as an illusionary subject-object-relationship, which was criticized by Brecht and Beckett – Fried reduces this argument, translating the conditions of aesthetic illusion and its experience of presence into real space: the »situation« of the Minimal Art object includes »the beholder's body.« Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 155. Thus Brecht's concept of a non-illusionistic theater, which anticipates the literalist position in art, does not realize Fried's vision of the modernist overcoming of theater. Yet he is not able to propose an alternative concept. A sculpture by David Smith or Anthony Caro fulfills his ideals, because »at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest.« (Fried 1998 [note 2], p. 167). He refers here to the totality of the artwork detached from reality, in other words his argument is based on the ideological premise of aesthetic illusion, which Minimal Art intended to defeat! (Thanks to Simon Gurisch, who has presented a detailed analysis of Fried's and Cavell's concepts of »theatricality« within my seminar on »objecthood« in summer 2012.) – For another critique see T.J. Clark: *Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried*. In: *Pollock and After. The critical debate*. Ed. by Francis Francina. New York 1985, pp. 81–88.
- 48 Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Transl. by John Osborne. London/New York 1998, p. 140.
- 49 Benjamin 1998 (note 48), p. 140.
- 50 Lang 2014 (note 44).
- 51 Lang 2014 (note 44).
- 52 See Michael Lüthy's contribution on that aspect of aesthetic liveliness.
- 53 See for example in »Man with a Movie Camera« (1930) the shots of negative film or the detail of a locomotive, paralleled with the camera's work.
- 54 Fried 1998 (note 2), p. 164: Film »escapes theater entirely;« it »is a refuge from theater and not a triumph over it« which »means that the cinema, even at its most experimental, is not a modernist art.«
- 55 Rosalind Krauss: *Notes on the Index: Part I (1976)*. In: *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge/London 1986, pp. 196–209, esp. 206: »The readymade's parallel with the photograph is established by its process of production. It is about the physical transposition of an object from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the art-image by a moment of isolation, or selection. And in this process, it also recalls the function of the shifter. It is a sign which is inherently »empty«, its signification a function of only this one instance, guaranteed by the existential presence of just this object. It is the meaningless meaning that is instituted through the terms of the index.« – A very different interpretation of the readymade and its relation to time is suggested by Sebastian Egenhofer in his panel contribution. Several authors thematize, from various angles of approach, the important role of photography, as in Rodin (Brigid Doherty), in Schwitters' later Merzbau projects (Megan Luke) and concerning the work of László Moholy-Nagy (Joyce Tsai).
- 56 Bruce Elder's essay deals with the relevant myths and methods of Futurism.
- 57 Beuys acquired a copy of Ivan the Terrible's crown from Helmut Mattner, a restaurant owner. On 30 June he appeared on the Friedrichsplatz together with his assistant Johannes Stüttgen. He took the crown out of a plastic bag and held it up to show it to the people, announcing that he would melt the crown. Unmoved by citizens' protest, he removed the jewels with a nail scissors, put off the cross from the top of the crown, hit the golden vessel with a hammer, and put it into an oven to melt it, while calling the names of great alchemists like Paracelsus. After a while Beuys presented a small golden rabbit to the public resembling an ordinary Easter bunny which today is located in Stuttgart's Neue Staatsgalerie – on Beuys's rabbit subject, see Maja Naev: *Zeichnung und Stimme. Studien zu Joseph Beuys*. Munich 2011, pp. 98–111. It would be worth considering the relationship to Koons's »Rabbit.«
- 58 On Schwitters's »Merzbau« projects since the artist's flight from Germany, see Megan R. Luke's contribution.
- 59 For example, on the double appearance of Land Art as object and film, see Eva Ehninger: *Die Land Art as Film. Parallelen der Raumkonstruktion in Land Art und Film bei Walter De Maria und Robert Smithson*. In: *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 55, 2010, n. 1, pp.109–127.
- 60 See Alessandro Nigro on Robert Morris's reception of George Kubler's »The Shape of Time« (1962).

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