



## ACTIVE PASSIVITY: ON THE AESTHETIC VARIANT OF FREEDOM

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'Being with oneself in the other' is a well-known formula that Hegel uses to characterize the basic relation of subjective freedom. This phrase points to the fact that subjects can only come to themselves if they remain capable of going beyond themselves. This motif also plays a significant role in Hegel's philosophy of art. The article further develops this motif by exploring the extent to which this polarity of selfhood and otherhood is also characteristic of states of aesthetic freedom. It does not offer an exegesis of Hegel's writings, but attempts to remain as close as possible to the spirit of Hegel's philosophy – with some help from Kant and Adorno. The argument begins with some key terms on the general state of subjective freedom in order to distinguish it from the particular role of aesthetic freedom and then, finally, drawing again on Hegel, works out the sense in which aesthetic freedom represents an important variant of freedom.

'Being with oneself in the other' is a well-known formula that Hegel uses to characterize the basic relation of subjective freedom. This phrase points to the fact that subjects can only come to themselves if they remain capable of going beyond themselves. This motif also plays a significant role in Hegel's philosophy of art.<sup>1</sup> I intend to develop the motif further by exploring the extent to which this polarity of selfhood and otherhood is also characteristic of states of aesthetic freedom. I will not be offering an exegesis of Hegel's writings, but will attempt to remain as close as possible to the spirit of Hegel's philosophy – with some help from Kant and Adorno. I will present my observations in the form of theses followed by additional commentaries. I begin with some key terms on the general state of subjective freedom (I–III) in order to distinguish it from the particular role of aesthetic freedom (IV–VII) and then finally, drawing on Hegel, to work out the sense in which aesthetic freedom represents an important variant of freedom (VIII–X).

*I. Only those who are able to lose themselves in other subjects or objects can come to themselves.*

This might seem an exaggeration, but in fact it is a trivial claim, at least with regard to Hegel's thinking. There can be no self-gain without engaging in practices such as work, education, love, play, science, artistic production, and so forth – that is, without getting involved in situations through which we realize where we stand with ourselves. This we cannot do in relation to a single object or person, but only

<sup>1</sup> For example, G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols., trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1:13.





in relation to several, perhaps many. This kind of selfhood cannot be attained once and for all, but must constantly be put at risk. No self-gain without self-loss – though of course we must not forget that self-loss can also happen without self-gain. To no longer know where we stand with ourselves, to no longer be familiar with our own life, and thus hardly to know our way around – this would be the sign of a pathological self-relationship. However, a personal loss of self is often enough the result of an inability to *lose* ourselves in a way that is crucial for our ability to *come* to ourselves.

This rough sketch is only intended as a way of foreshadowing an essential dimension of aesthetic freedom: the actualization of those forms of self-loss that foster a free personal self-relation. In his book on the ontology of film, Stanley Cavell remarks: 'Apart from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneous granting of otherness as well), I do not understand the value of art.'<sup>2</sup>

*II. Human actors can only become independent by being dependent on others and otherness.*

This merely complements the first thesis, once more recalling a central motif in Hegel's philosophy. After all, both his theory of self-consciousness and his social philosophy – far beyond the relevant passages in *Phenomenology of Spirit* – revolve around a dialectic of dependence and independence, which is crucial for humans' capacity for personal independence.

*III. The core of human freedom lies in the capacity to let oneself be determined – that is, to be determined in a double sense of the phrase: to be able to determine oneself in a way that allows one to be determined in a rewarding manner.*

This is an understanding of freedom I have developed in more detail elsewhere with relation to Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, among others.<sup>3</sup> This relation between 'determining' and 'being determined', as Fichte puts it,<sup>4</sup> is relevant when it comes to shaping and reshaping our epistemic and practical orientations. A responsible commitment to beliefs and intentions, both small and large, demands that we be willing and able to let our thoughts and actions be affected and even upset by perceptions, concepts, reasons, persons, institutions, traditions, rituals, atmospheres, landscapes, cultures, and the dramas of politics

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Seel, 'Letting Oneself Be Determined: A Revised Concept of Self-Determination', in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (London: Routledge, 2007), 81–96.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Part 3, § 5.



and the arts. This sort of responsiveness is constitutive of free action which follows our own initiative and considerations. For all the familiar commitments on which persons rely in self-determined acts are necessarily and largely related to what is more or less foreign to them; and it is this relation which the self-understanding of autonomous individuals is drawing on from beginning to end.

*IV. The field of aesthetics is a special arena for the exercise of the capacity for self-determination – and therefore a specific arena of freedom.*

This thesis emphasizes the close relationship between the concept of aesthetic freedom and a general concept of personal freedom. In order to localize the specific *difference* between the two, we therefore as well need to recognize the *unity* between aesthetic freedom and other types of freedom – and thus to clarify the extent to which aesthetic freedom represents a characteristic *variant* of freedom.

*V. Aesthetic practice constitutes one of the playgrounds of human freedom because it constitutes the playground of human freedom.*

This thesis reformulates a central concept in Kant's aesthetic theory. For Kant, aesthetic perception is a distinguished manner of exercising freedom. It enables humans to actualize the potential of theoretical determination and practical self-determination – a potential that can be experienced and lived out here in a special way. As Kant describes at the beginning of his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, when we enter the aesthetic state we are free from the compulsion of determining ourselves and the world. But there is a positive side to this negative freedom: in the play of aesthetic perception, we are free to experience the determinability of ourselves and the world. Kant therefore regards the experience of beauty (and the sublime) as a way of exercising the noblest human capacities. The wealth of the real opened up by aesthetic intuition is experienced as the relished confirmation of our ability to determine this wealth, as well as the ability of this wealth to determine *us* in manifold ways.

The 'imagination at play' of which Kant speaks in § 16 of the *Critique of Judgement* should not be understood as an idle state of our cognitive powers just because it is not aimed at controlling their object theoretically or in practice. Instead, it opens up a paradigmatic – paradigmatically desirous – human activity, that is, one of being-there-with and going-along-with an abundance of forms and relations that we usually fail to recognize in our everyday modes of relating to the world. Kant's description of this elementary form of aesthetic praxis places a particular emphasis on its self-sufficient character: 'We linger over the consideration of the beautiful because this consideration strengthens and

reproduces itself.<sup>5</sup> When we perceive aesthetically, therefore, we are not merely touched in a receptive manner, but dwell in the objects of our perception in such a way that we are capable of following their variations in a varying fashion. When we perceive aesthetically, we take time for the moment – both for the momentary appearing of the objects of perception and for an involuntary encounter with ourselves.

We can therefore also say that the loss of the capacity for aesthetic attentiveness would not so much mean that we would miss *something*, but that we would miss *ourselves*. We would no longer be capable of assuring ourselves of our own possibilities within the realities of life. We would therefore fail to experience that intensified feeling of being alive which comes along with taking pleasure in beauty – a feeling, as Kant puts it in § 1 of the *Critique of Judgement*, in which we are free from the constraints of cognitive and practical success or failure.<sup>6</sup> In a famous note Kant made to himself on a letter Markus Herz had written to him on 9 July 1771, the reason for this pleasure is described as follows: ‘Beauty is different from what is agreeable or useful. Usefulness gives but a mediate feeling of pleasure, while that of beauty is immediate. Beautiful things show [zeigen an] that man fits into the world [dass der Mensch in die Welt passe] and that his view of things accords with the laws of his viewing.’<sup>7</sup> The kind of fitting into the world that Kant has in mind here is primarily cognitive and instrumental, but at the same time it is linked to the possibility of rationally organizing the social and political world, because the subjects who receive this indication are assured of an essential condition of their practical self-determination.

However, the experience of fitting into the world is – for Kant as well – not the sole mark of aesthetic consciousness. After all, the experience of the sublime is characterized by the feeling of not merely being at home in the world, but of being challenged and overwhelmed by the encounter with it. Here it is the human potential for both theoretical *and* moral reason that enables a positive transformation of ‘displeasure’ in the face of exhilarating scenery. If we put these

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107 (AA 5:222).

<sup>6</sup> ‘*Spirit*, in an aesthetic significance, means the animating principle in the mind. That, however, by which this principle animates the soul, the material which it uses for this purpose, is that which purposively sets the mental powers into motion, i.e., into a play that is self-maintaining and even strengthens the powers to that end.’ Ibid., 192 (AA 5:313).

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kant’s Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16, *Logik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1924), 127, 1820a.

<sup>8</sup> – which, though it is not done in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, is in fact necessary. A separation of the aesthetic of ‘beauty’ from that of ‘the sublime’ fails to recognize what belongs together (in various ways and to various extents) within most aesthetic domains: the affirmation of what is alien *and* of what is familiar about aesthetic objects, as well as possible confusion through both; the comprehensibility

elements together;<sup>8</sup> then it follows that aesthetic experience proceeds by way of liberation from the constraints of cognitive and practical commitment; it takes place in an oscillation between consonance and dissonance in our relation to the world and to ourselves. That is precisely what turns aesthetic perception into a liberating and confounding, moving and entertaining, and thereby playful mode of human praxis.

*VI. The practice of aesthetic perception and production culminates in states of 'active passivity.'*

Adorno, influenced by authors such as Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Valéry, and by the developments of modern art, radicalized Kant's theory of aesthetic freedom. Like Kant, Adorno maintains that aesthetic freedom essentially consists in living out our otherwise hidden or distorted potential for perceiving and understanding. Inspiring works of art in particular succeed in giving their object a form that compels the reader, observer, or listener to engage in a form of sensing awareness that is at once captivating and liberating – a celebration of receptiveness and spontaneity, of impressibility and sensitivity paired with imagination and the ability to understand. And all of this happens in a way that our normal thinking is simply incapable of achieving.

In his lecture on aesthetics during the winter semester of 1958/59, Adorno gives a rather emphatic description of this phenomenon with reference to music:

If, for instance, you truly listen to a complex symphonic movement in a way that connects all sensual aspects contained there; if you truly hear them and sensually perceive them in their unity and mediation; if you thus not only hear that which you hear as it appears to you now, but also hear it in its relation to what has already occurred in the work, and to what you are still to encounter, and finally to the whole, then that is certainly the highest possible measure of precise, sensual experience.<sup>9</sup>

This highest possible form of sensual perception, however, also demands highly intellectual powers of comprehension, since we must follow the web of relations in such a way that every passage of the work appears in these relations. Adorno is therefore somewhat suspicious of the term 'artistic enjoyment' (*Kunstgenuss*). Especially in his twelfth lecture, on 8 January 1959, which, once again, is dedicated

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and incomprehensibility of aesthetic objects; the movement beyond ourselves and back to ourselves that they incite. Aesthetic pleasure does not consist in experiencing the world *either* in apparent proportion *or* in apparent disproportion to our own possibilities, but rather in experiencing what is accommodating in what resists and what is resistant in what is accommodating, in experiencing dissonance in what is consonant and consonance in what is dissonant.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Nachgelassene Schriften: Vorlesungen*, vol. 3, *Ästhetik (1958/59)*, ed. Eberhard Ortland (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), 184–85.

to 'the problem of the concept of beauty', Adorno argues that the vitality and intensity of the experience of significant works of art must not be understood as a kind of self-confident consumption: 'Thus I would say that aesthetic experience essentially consists in taking part in an activity of comprehending a work of art by being in the work of art, by – to put it quite simply – living in it.'<sup>10</sup> The metaphor of 'living' here indicates above all the fact that – and just how much – subjects of artistic perception are moved by what they perceive. They experience themselves as part of an occurrence to which they are subjected, despite their active participation. Thus Adorno continues by saying that 'enjoyment [*Genuss*] has no place here, because the type of experience I am trying to define for you in a certain sense represents a path *away* from the subject, whereas enjoyment is necessarily something that the subject gets something *out of*.'<sup>11</sup> This not only represents a rejection of a culinary instrumentalization of aesthetic experience, but of every effort to derive some utility or result from the process of aesthetic experience. Adorno thus says in the same lecture: 'Not what a work of art "gives" to us, but what we give to the work of art is important – that is, the fact that we, in a certain kind of active passivity, of an exerted dedication to the object, give to it what it, for its part, expects from us.'<sup>12</sup>

'Active passivity' is the crucial term here. An encounter with works of art demands that we be willing and able to attend to them in a way that allows them to unfold their own processual nature, in a way that draws the listener, observer, or reader into this process. The latter determine themselves *actively* in giving themselves over to a *passive* state of being determined.<sup>13</sup> In the light of this, it is rather irrelevant whether this takes place, as Adorno puts it, in a mode of 'exerted' (*angestregten*) participation or, as Benjamin has it in his artwork-essay with reference to cinema, in a mode of 'distraction', or in any other form of immersion,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>13</sup> There is an astounding correspondence between Adorno's strong emphasis on the aspect of passivity – not only here, but also in his subversive utopian fantasy in aphorism no. 100 in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005) – and a passage in Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*, in which he writes: 'Industry and utility are the angels of death who, with fiery swords, prevent man's return to Paradise. Only calmly and gently, in the sacred tranquillity of true passivity, can one remember one's whole ego and contemplate the world and life. How does any thinking and writing of poetry take place, if not by complete dedication and submission to some guardian genius? And yet talking and ordering are only secondary matters in all the arts and sciences: the essence is thinking and imagining, and these are possible only in passivity. To be sure, it's an intentional, arbitrary, and one-sided passivity, but it's still passivity.' Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 65–66.

be it joyful, entertaining, breath-taking, or otherwise captivating. In either case, what is important is that we give ourselves over to the play of the powers of the objects at hand. In either case, what is needed is a 'reflective following' of the respective work.<sup>14</sup> The 'precise, sensual experience' of art implies a remembering and anticipating, a differentiating and combining, and thus implicitly or explicitly interpreting attentiveness. Nevertheless, Adorno's description of aesthetic perception is one of willing devotion. When it comes to aesthetic freedom, we are not freed from some 'thing', but we give freedom to something – and thereby become free ourselves.

Although for Adorno the intense experience of art in no way proves that humans fit into the world as it is, it does show that – and in which way – they *could* be at home here theoretically and in practice.<sup>15</sup> Thus in his *Aesthetic Theory* he famously writes: 'The reality of the artworks testifies to the possibility of the possible.'<sup>16</sup> This should not, however, be read less as the expression of a utopian longing than as an indication of the incommensurability of selfhood and society. Elsewhere in his work – in a 1968 report on his experiences as a scholar in the USA – Adorno in a subversive manner even gave credit to the concept of adjustment. Alluding to Goethe's and Hegel's critiques of the 'beautiful soul', he writes:

[I]t is an illusion sharply criticized by Goethe and Hegel that the process of humanization and cultivation necessarily and continually proceeds from the inside outward. It is accomplished also and precisely through 'externalization', as Hegel called it. We become free human beings not by each of us realizing ourselves as individuals, according to the hideous phrase, but rather in that we go out of ourselves, enter into relation with others, and in a certain sense relinquish ourselves to them. Only through this process do we determine ourselves as individuals, not by watering ourselves like plants in order to become well-rounded cultivated personalities.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, heteronomy must be an essential dimension of autonomy, if the latter is not to decay into isolation and alienation.

<sup>14</sup> Adorno, *Ästhetik (1958/59)*, 190.

<sup>15</sup> At this point – and at many others – in his work, the experience of art subtly becomes a model of success interaction *in general* – between subject and object no less than between subject and subject. The cognitive, ethical and aesthetic 'freedom to the object', as Adorno says in line with Hegel, both enables and depends on just such a 'freedom to the subject'.

<sup>16</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 132.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 240.

VII. *Processes of aesthetic perception and production are self-sufficient.*

In the interpretation that I have given of Kant's and Adorno's theories of aesthetics, it is obvious why the capacity for aesthetic perception is anything but a marginal mode of self-determination. It awakens the potential of human determinateness – active and passive – in a unique fashion. This is true of the *entirety* of aesthetic praxis, given the role played by beautiful and sublime *nature* in the works of Kant and Adorno. Furthermore, this is true not only of the kind of aesthetic experience I have focused on here, but of all creative processes of aesthetic production. The activity of the artist too, as much as it differs from that of the viewer, essentially draws its energy from letting itself be determined by the object of its creation in the process of its creation. According to Adorno, from the perspective of artists the important thing is to make things 'in ignorance of what they are'.<sup>18</sup> This not only represents a liberation from previous conventions of artistic construction but also the freedom to let something happen in the exploration of the material at hand, something that opens up a space for self-encounter, a space that cannot be anticipated. Maybe 'passive activity' would be an even better label for this kind of work in progress, since the artist has to rely on the power of her responsiveness in order to come to grips with what she is creating.

Be it as it may, whoever takes part in processes of aesthetic production or perception participates in varieties of a particular kind of freedom. They involve themselves in acts that in a special way represent ends in themselves. What they do might be good for many other things, but in the first instance it is worthwhile *per se*. It is the occurrence of aesthetic attentiveness itself that brings with it a more intense sense of human existence – regardless of what this attentiveness might also bring about in terms of insights, changes of attitude, a broadening of perspective, education, and personal development.<sup>19</sup> The playgrounds of aesthetic openness are not a mere training camp in which special skills are learned. They are opportunities for encountering what is indeterminate in what is theoretically and practically determinate. Or, as Adorno remarks in *Aesthetic Theory*, 'The aim of artworks is the determination of the indeterminate'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 322.

<sup>19</sup> This is something that Hegel was clearly aware of in his discussion of the 'purpose' of art in his writings on aesthetics: 'The aim of poetry is imagery and speech, not the thing talked about or its existence in practice. Poetry began when man undertook to express *himself*; for poetry, what is there is only spoken to be an expression.' Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2:974.

<sup>20</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 124.

VIII. *The central virtue of aesthetic sensibility consists in the capacity for finding oneself through detachment from oneself.*

This thesis accentuates the inner connection between aesthetics and ethics, which has often been emphasized, though with heterogeneous interpretations. We can only get a proper understanding of this connection, however, if we understand 'ethics' as the fragile art of living a life. A well-lived life *cannot but* be caught up in an inescapable tension between knowing and not knowing, between taking care of oneself and being considerate towards others; it thus represents the risky attempt to do justice to oneself and others. This demands constantly putting our self-image to the test, in both a theoretical and practical sense. A life lived in self-respect and self-determination depends on our willingness at least hypothetically to alter our own beliefs, attachments, affinities, and obsessions. As much as this willingness might often represent a difficult and sometimes nearly unbearable demand, in the sphere of aesthetics it becomes a particular source of genuine pleasure.

Viewed in this way, the virtue of aesthetic sensibility proves to be a rather cardinal virtue. It is related to, though in no way synonymous with, virtues such as the ability to converse and love, humour, self-detachment, impartiality, sympathy, attentiveness, caution, imagination, curiosity, serenity, and many others. Just like these and other virtues, aesthetic sensibility is tied to a potential to transcend and alienate ourselves. Like all virtues, it is marked by an internal ambivalence. No virtue is ever secure from its neighbouring vices. There are instances in which every virtue can lead to harmful and even disgraceful behaviour, just as most real and supposed vices contain a potential for individual and social good.<sup>21</sup> We should thus do everything to avoid a crude moralization of aesthetic sensibility. It is precisely in the arts that our most important normative beliefs and attitudes – even, indeed especially, those that we took and take to be our best – are put into question. The experimental examination of these virtues is thus an indispensable part of the openness of artistic self-exploration, which must not be closed off within the field of the aesthetic. Only if it *replaces* moral attentiveness has aesthetic attentiveness crossed a line. Both have their time and place, though their time and place are not always the same. The decisive gain that we can derive from aesthetic sensibility – especially compared to moral sensibility – consists in the capacity for the unregulated balancing and re-balancing of our trust and mistrust in the world, of self-certainty and self-doubt, losing one's self and gaining one's self. That is what makes up the ethic of the aesthetic.

<sup>21</sup> See Martin Seel, *111 Tugenden, 111 Laster: Eine philosophische Revue* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2011).



*IX. The meaning of aesthetic praxis and the associated attitudes lies in becoming accustomed to becoming unaccustomed.*

In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, in the chapter on anthropology in the section on 'subjective spirit', Hegel gives a subtle analysis of the force of habit.<sup>22</sup> Hegel views habit – more so than in the corresponding passages of his *Philosophy of Right*<sup>23</sup> – as both an essential support and a structural hindrance to free human activity. It gives material form to the spiritual by forming physical and mental routines which equip individuals with a second nature that makes the conscious acquisition of skills and knowledge both unnecessary and impossible. It thus keeps the existence of the individual open 'to be otherwise occupied and engaged – say with feeling and with mental consciousness in general'.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, if the subject is to find itself, it must forget many of the views and skills it has acquired; it must forget the way it has become accustomed to attitudes that make up its character as a person. Otherwise, it would run the risk of going 'insane'.<sup>25</sup> In this 'liberation' of individuals from their merely 'natural' character also lies the danger of becoming 'indifferent' to their own aims in life.<sup>26</sup> The 'self-gain' enabled by habit also contains the seed of self-loss. In an extreme case, as Hegel points out, this can lead to a person's 'death' within his or her lifetime, to the disappearance of one's independence and individuality within corporeal and spiritual automatisms. The subject would then be so absorbed by mental and social conventions (Heidegger's 'Das Man'), that it would lose the ability to live its life in a self-determined fashion. It would lose the existential balance founded on webs of habits. The consequence would be intellectual and social decay, and excessive conformity to the pre-determined paths of one's own surroundings, which ultimately robs us of the air we breathe.

In contrast to this scenario, aesthetic praxis enables a permanent process of accustoming ourselves to what we are unaccustomed to. The aesthetic stance in its many facets can be understood as a habitus aimed at continually thawing out petrified theoretical and practical attachments. Recalling my first thesis, we could say that in order to avoid going under, the subject must repeatedly go under. We must lose ourselves so that we do not lose ourselves.

<sup>22</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), §§ 409–12. Here I have greatly profited from a seminar on the 'force of habit', which Christoph Menke and I held in 2011/12.

<sup>23</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, rev. and ed. Stephen Houlgate, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), §§ 151–52, 268.

<sup>24</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, § 401.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 402 and 406.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, § 409.



Of course, this rather drastic formulation again only makes sense if we distinguish between two forms of 'going under'. On the one hand, there is a kind of self-loss in which the subject *capitulates* before its everyday understandings and roles, without any resistance or detachment; on the other hand, there is a kind of self-loss that *enables* the subject to give itself over to an uninhibited self-experimentation through non-functional acts of aesthetic experience.<sup>27</sup> In the first case, the subject is in danger of losing itself in the 'prose of life', as Hegel puts it. In the second case, it constantly finds occasion to revive itself in a 'poeticizing' fashion, as Romanticists would say. Picking up on Benjamin and Cavell, however, we must add that such aesthetic therapy works not simply *against* the force of habit, but also attempts to *preserve* the liberating aspects of habit without succumbing to its constraining and oppressive dimensions.<sup>28</sup>

X. *Aesthetic freedom is a constitutive dimension of freedom.*

This thesis merely encapsulates the tenor of the previous ones. It is crucial, however, that we not blur the distinction between aesthetic freedom and other kinds of freedom. There are, after all, numerous other practices for which the dialectic of losing and finding oneself is characteristic. Here we might think of love, care, devotion, or the kind of going against the current we find within philosophy, of which Wittgenstein says: 'When you are philosophizing you have to descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there.'<sup>29</sup> And it is not only typical of *artistic* production, but of all kinds of creative work that we must give ourselves over to their challenges if we are to succeed at achieving something. The same is true for education or political activity. When it comes to all these forms of engagement, we can therefore say that 'active passivity' crucially *defines* the state of those involved – at least to the extent that the associated acts and experiences represent a liberating encounter with otherness and others.

This diagnosis, which recalls my first three theses, raises a number of questions as to the status of aesthetic freedom as a *variant* of human self-determination. What is special about the freedom of aesthetic praxis? To what extent is it a *model*,

<sup>27</sup> This dual nature of self-loss is a central theme in Thomas Bernhard, *The Loser*, trans. Jack Dawson (New York: Knopf, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Denkbilder*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Tillman Rexroth, vol. 4.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 'Gewohnheit und Aufmerksamkeit', 407–8; Stanley Cavell, 'The Uncanniness of the Ordinary', in *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 153–80. One of Hegel's greatest achievements in this regard is his positive account of the bifurcation in social and individual life contexts, which are only partially concealed by a rhetoric of theoretical reconciliation.

<sup>29</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. Georg H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 65.

but just *one* model, of the connection between determining and being-determined – a connection that is constitutive of freedom? And to what extent is it *much more* than a model, that is, a genuine *form* of the exercise of human freedom?

I have already given the basic answer in my fifth thesis: 'Aesthetic practice constitutes one of the playgrounds of human freedom because it constitutes the *playground* of human freedom.' Now we only need to repeat the implications of this thesis and those that follow it: Aesthetic perception (like aesthetic production) represents a special *variety* of freedom. It does so, because everything that follows from this activity follows from the fact that, in the first instance, nothing follows from it. In states of aesthetic awareness, we willingly give ourselves over to everything that grabs, compels, forces, binds, or unsettles us. Here, all events are relieved of most of their practical consequences. Here, the *telos* of our being involved is not to *determine*, but to *let* ourselves be determined and moved. Especially the arts offer us manifold opportunities for an active exploration of our passions: objects of art are of significant concern to us, because they undertake an experiment with everything that might concern us.

For these reasons, aesthetic freedom is constitutive of the capacity for self-determination. By exercising this freedom, we play out our bodily and mental affinities. We immediately and to a certain extent involuntarily activate our potential for receptivity and responsiveness – a potential upon which we depend for all our other activities as well, at least if we seek to gain and preserve an unforced relation to ourselves.

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