

## The Experiment of Freedom

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What is the role of public institutions for the presentation, reception and discussion of the arts in society? In the following I want to defend the claim that we should think about this role from the perspective of the significance of the arts for the achievement of freedom: the public institutions for the presentation of art are—or should be—institutions of liberation.

I will proceed in two steps. The first step is a clarification of the idea of liberation: what does it mean to understand freedom as a process (and hence not as state or condition) and how is such a process of liberation possible? I will address these questions by drawing on Hegel's radical theory of *Bildung* (education or subject-formation in the broadest sense) as liberation. In the second step, I will try to clarify the role of the arts, of aesthetic experience, in the becoming of freedom. Here, I will try to defend the thesis, that this role of the arts can be best analyzed by the idea of experimentation. From this follows that the role of public institutions for the presentation of the arts lies in providing the space and time for experiments of liberation.

### I. The Paradox of Liberation

(i) Liberation is Self-liberation. – What does it mean to be free? What kind of being is freedom? How is it to be free? The answer is that one never is free: freedom does not exist. Not because freedom is an illusion and because in "reality" – the reality which the sciences describe and explain – there are only mechanisms which determine us. Rather freedom does not exist because freedom is not a property or a quality. The being of freedom is (in) it's becoming: to be free means to become free. Freedom is not a condition but a process; freedom is the process of the becoming of freedom.

But how does one, or how can one, become free? One traditional answer is to think of freedom as something given to us: freedom then is (or would be) a gift. The paradigm case is the liberation of the slave by the master. The slave becomes free by being set free by its master. The master gives the slave free or the master gives freedom to the slave. The becoming free of the oppressed depends in this model on the oppressor's decision to grant it. The becoming of freedom is hence dependent on someone else's will and decision. The act of liberation does thus not break with the dependency of the slave on the master's will; the act of liberation repeats and hence perpetuates the dependency with which it pretends to break. The slave which has been liberated by the decision of the master remains unfree. Freedom can thus not be given by another, it can only be brought about by oneself. If freedom is the process of the becoming of freedom, then the becoming of freedom must already itself be the actuality, and hence an act, of freedom. Freedom consists in the act of making itself. We

only are free by making us free. Freedom consists in the act of self-liberation.

Another way of putting this is by saying that freedom is not positive – not a positively existing condition, something which is given. Freedom rather is negative, the endless repetition of the negation of unfreedom. That freedom is liberation defines its negativity: freedom is a negative power, the power of being able to negate conditions of dependence, domination, repression. Freedom only exists in the permanent revolt against unfreedom.

(ii) The Circle of Liberation. – The radical definition of freedom as self-liberation poses a problem which seems impossible to solve and thus threatens the whole approach with absurdity. This is the problem of circularity. The problem is the following: Liberation, in order to bring about one's freedom, has to have been be one's own deed; liberation means self-liberation. Any deed or act however presupposes freedom. Freedom is thus at the same time the result and the beginning, the product and the precondition of liberation. The thinking of liberation seems to be entangled in a paradox right from the start. We have to conceive of liberation as our own deed, yet that is precisely how we cannot conceive of it. If freedom means self-liberation – who then is the self, the 'subject,' capable of performing this act? The subject that is able to actually liberate itself does not need to do so (because it is already free), while the subject that is actually in need of liberating itself will be never able to do so (because it is not yet free).

(iii) Social Identity. – The way out of this circle leads through a better understanding of the condition of unfreedom, of bondage or domination (from which we want to break free). At first sight, domination seems to come from outside: the one (person, group, class) rules over the other. But as Michael Walzer has said about the Israelites trying to break free from Egypt slavery, "No ancient regime is merely oppressive; it is also seductive." It is seductive because it defines who we are: what we desire, will, know, and think. Domination is not only external but internal, the habit of servitude (or "voluntary servitude"). The basis for the reproduction of orders of domination is thus the habits that form us: our identity as social members. The socially defined identity of the subject is the basis of its domination. Or the basis for its domination lies in the dominated subject itself: in its having an 'identity.' This identity is produced by mechanisms of habituation: to have an identity which bounds us to our place in orders of domination (or to be unfree) means to be defined by habit.

This allows for a better understanding of the process of self-liberation. It has to be a break with habit: with what (or who) we habitually are, with our identities. Self-liberation hence is self-transformation: to become free means to become free from the self which one always already is. Self-liberation has to be conceived of as the liberation (by the self) of the self of its own identity. But how is such an act of liberation even conceivable if all a subject can do is an actualization of the capacities which define it socially constituted identity?

(iv) "Bildung." – The key to a solution of this problem is the analysis of the processes in which habits or identities are formed. I take this to be the crucial insight of Hegel's conception of *Bildung*. *Bildung* is the formation of the subject. Subject-formation is the acquisition of capacities in becoming a social member, a competent participant of social practices. These capacities define our identity to which we are bound and from which we thus need (or want) to liberate us. But the formation of the subject, the bringing about of its social identity, was itself already a process of liberation. With this insight, the circle of liberation thus takes on an entirely new (and less vicious or self-contradictory) form which promises a way out of the paradox. The insight of the concept of *Bildung* is: The social identity from which the subject needs to liberate itself, is itself the result of a prior liberation. There is already (or has always already been) a (pre-) history of liberation before the present act of liberation. The insight of the concept of *Bildung* consists in a radical historicization of liberation. The future of liberation (the possibility of self-liberation) depends on its prehistory.

(v) Negativity and Discipline. – *Bildung* as subject-formation is the process that leads from the state of nature to the state of culture or society; from human beings as natural beings to social participants. This is a double process.

On the one hand, it means to break free from natural necessity, from being determined by one's natural condition (instincts, needs, etc.). It means to acquire the power of negativity. As Hegel puts it: "spirit can abstract from everything external including its own externality, its very own existence [Dasein]."<sup>1</sup> This is the "polemical" freedom of the subject being able to distinguish itself from "external" determinations, that is, determinations that are naturally pre-given. The "facility" ["Können"] for negativity is the power to break with the power of nature.

On the other hand, the power of negativity over or against nature only comes with the acquisition of social capacities. "It is only through the training [Ausbildung] of his own body and spirit, [...] that he [i.e. man] first takes possession of himself and becomes his own property, opposed to others."<sup>2</sup> "The hard work of opposing [...] the immediacy of desire" (Rph, § 187A) can only be performed by actually working, through labour. Labour means social discipline. *Bildung*, the formation of the subject, consists thus in the subjection to the determining powers of social forms and norms.

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* [Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences], vol. III in: *Theorie Werkausgabe*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969-70), vol. 10, § 382. Cited hereafter as *Enz* with section number.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), § 7 § 57. Cited hereafter as *Enz* with section number.

*Bildung* thus has two sides:

(a) the bringing forth of the power of negativity (*vis a vis* nature); freedom from determination.

(b) the bringing forth of a new form of nature: second nature; a new social form of necessity

*Bildung* is thus negativity against necessity and the doubling, or reduplication, of necessity.

*Bildung* is the way from one necessity to the other. This way leads through negativity:

*Bildung* is the way from natural necessity through negativity to social necessity. It is discipline and liberation at the same time.

(vi) "Higher Liberation." – Hegel's claim is that this paradox of *Bildung* is at the same time the solution of the problem of self-liberation. He describes this as the dialectic of *Bildung* and calls it the "work of a higher liberation."<sup>3</sup>

The problem of self-liberation is: how can the subject break free from its socially defined identity if all that the subject can do is defined by the capacities that it has acquired in its social formation? The answer of the dialectic of *Bildung* to this problem is that we can only break free from our social identities by once again going back from our socially defined form to the step out of nature. This does obviously not mean to go back to nature; the higher liberation from social domination cannot be found in nature (for nature is an order of necessity). But it can't be found in society either. The higher liberation can only be found in between nature and society. *Bildung* does not only lead from one order of necessity to another. By doubling the order of necessity, *Bildung* also splits necessity into two. *Bildung* opens a gap between the one order of necessity and the other order of necessity. This is the potential of radical freedom that we gain by *Bildung* and that we can use for the "work of a higher liberation" from social discipline. It is the freedom of the in-between of nature and society. On the way from the natural form of bondage to the social form of bondage we gain the freedom of negativity which at first is the power of breaking free from our natural determinations but which can also be directed against the social forms of discipline which it engenders (or which engender it).

(vii) Higher Liberation is Second Liberation, or Liberation is the Repetition of Liberation. – The work of higher liberation consists in going on negating; in not limiting the power of negativity to the necessities of nature; in not stopping at the production of social forms and identities; in just not stopping – in continuing liberation. *Bildung* as higher liberation is endless liberation or liberation that has become permanent.

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<sup>3</sup> "*Bildung*, in its absolute determination, is therefore *liberation* and *work* of a higher liberation, namely, the absolute transitional point to the infinitely subjective substantiality of ethical life, which is no longer immediate and natural, but spiritual and thus raised to the shape of universality." (*Rph*, § 187 A)

Or higher liberation is self-reflective liberation, liberation which turns against itself. The higher work of liberation consists in working through the lower, the first act of liberation that led from natural to social necessity or bondage. "Working through" means to repeat. The higher liberation is a repetition of social formation, as discipline. The disciplinary replacement of natural necessity by social necessity could never have been carried out in freedom. For such a replacement is itself the detour that leads to freedom in the first place. In order to be able to lead to freedom, however, the formation of social discipline must be retrospectively re-appropriated by those who were subjected to it. They thereby retrospectively make the process of their formation into their own act; they re-perform their formation as (if it had been) an act of freedom (while in fact freedom only results from this process). In this liberating re-performance and re-appropriation of its own social formation the subject returns to the origin of the social in the moment of breaking with natural necessity. The re-performance of social formation is liberating because (or whence) it regains and re-enacts the originary power of negativity. Liberation means to dissolve social forms and norms into the indeterminacy of formlessness and to generate them anew out of this abyss.

The work of higher liberation is the experiment of freedom: the experimental re-enactment of the social formation of the subject as an act of freedom.

## II. Aesthetic Experimentation

I have followed Hegel's radical program of unfolding the dialectic of Bildung, of the formation of the subject, till the point where it made it necessary to introduce an idea which leads beyond the scope of dialectical thinking and hence of Hegel's philosophy as such. This is the idea of experimentation: the "higher liberation" of which Hegel speaks can only be conceived of as an experimental repetition of the formation of the subject. The repetition of its social formation is an act of liberation because (or if) it is the return of the subject to its point (or moment) of origin: to the gap between nature and society or culture. Lying between two different orders, between two different forms of determination the gap between nature and society or culture is a moment of radical indeterminacy or negativity: the time and place of the absence, of the negation of any determination. The "higher liberation", which is the true idea of Bildung, consists thus in the re-enactment of the gap, which is the origin of the subject, by the subject. This is the radical experiment without which no liberation is possible: the subject has to perform the dangerous, risky operation of going back behind itself, its social form, in order to go beyond itself. – How is such an experimental act even conceivable?

We find an answer to this question in aesthetics, in the specifically modern form of thinking about the arts: the idea of radical experimentation, and hence of liberation, is an aesthetic idea. My claim thus is the following: the "work of the higher liberation" can neither be understood nor can it be practiced and realized without the aesthetic practice of the experience of art; without the experience of art, no self-liberation. For the experience of art,

adequately understood and practiced, is a radical experiment; aesthetic experience is radical experimentation. – This holds in a twofold sense:

First of all, because every work of art is an experiment: it is an experiment in art, an attempt to see whether one can create art in such a way; indeed if one can create art at all. Every artwork is an experiment because every artwork starts from nothing—an artwork that does not start from nothing, but rather takes art to be assured and a given, is no artwork at all. Every artwork is an experiment because it tests the very possibility of art. It tests the possibility of creating something, a work, out of the state of nothing, of radical indeterminacy. Because this possibility is in equal measure an impossibility—for this is a state of formlessness and therefore of worklessness, of “désoeuvrement” or “un-working” (Foucault)—the existence, i.e., the bringing-into-being of the artwork is fundamentally uncertain. The artwork is in its essence an experiment because nothing can have guaranteed its having become real.

But aesthetic experience is not only the experience of the experiment which the artwork performs (or rather which the artwork is). Aesthetic experience is also an experiment in life. Those who make works of art and those who experience them, those who begin composing, playing, singing, writing poetry or painting and those who listen to them, watch them and follow them, are thus aesthetically active—but they put this aesthetic activity into practice in their lives. Those who create and those who experience artworks are faced with the question of how to live with and according to these works. They are faced with the question of what place in life they want to or can give to aesthetic activity—and of whether this activity can be confined to that place. They are faced, that is, with the question of what the aesthetic activity they do does to them.

Every artwork is an experiment because it interrogates the possibility of art, and every artwork is an experiment because, as an object of aesthetic activities carried out in someone’s life, it interrogates the possibility of living with or according to art. Aesthetic experience is the experience of an experiment, and it turns the life of the experiencing self into an experiment.

(i) The Experiment in Art. – The concept of experiment comes from the empirical, natural sciences. Here it means the technique of gaining knowledge: one conducts an experiment in order to find out what a thing is like and how it behaves. In order to find this out one has to do something: to experiment is to create constellations, situations, arrangements in which something then takes place and reveals itself. The experimenter actively creates an arrangement and exposes herself – passively, receptively – to an event. The experiment connects receptivity with activity.

In the scientific experiment, this connection takes on a hierarchical form: the experiment binds receptivity to activity. The scientific experiment organizes the experience in such a way

that its receptivity takes on the form of a subjectively controlled process, of an activity whose form is determined by the experimenting subject. As Kant puts it: the experimenter wants to be “taught by nature”, but he is not „to be instructed by nature [...] like a pupil, who has recited to him whatever the teacher wants to say, but like an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them.”<sup>4</sup> In the scientific experiment, the subject stays in control even of its own receptivity: like a judge, law in hand, a scientific experimenter registers reproduced events in a prescribed form. This is what it is, according to Kant, to do an experiment: to take the testimony of witnesses and put it into a form in which it can be subsumed under the law. The receptivity of experience thus either takes place under the conditions of the law—or it leads to no experience at all, but rather produces something merely coincidental, without meaning: noise. According to Kant, the scientific experiment is thus the act of exposing oneself receptively to an event in such a way as can establish the guiding role of subjective laws; receptivity is here a stage in the legislative activity of the subject—or better, a means of consummating this activity. In the experiment “reason has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own design” (Kant).

In the aesthetic experiment this relation is reversed: the aesthetic experiment is the experiment of a reversal of the practice of knowledge and its mode of subjectivity. For in aesthetic experience, the receptivity of the senses and the legislative activity of the subject stand in an entirely different, even opposite, relation to each other than that which Kant finds in empirical experience. This is why (and how) Kant understands the aesthetic state as a state of freedom: in aesthetic experience, the hierachical, subsumptive relationship between the lawful activity of the subject and its receptivity or sensitivity is suspended. In the aesthetic state, receptivity—and more specifically, the imagination—is free, because it is not led from without by the laws or the concepts of the understanding. Aesthetic freedom is the freedom of the imagination from the law-giving power of the rational subject.

In the following, I will interpret this (Kantian) definition of aesthetic freedom in a Nietzschean sense (and hence in a sense alien to Kant). Nietzsche’s radicalization of the Kantian idea of aesthetic freedom defines the aesthetic state as that in which our receptivity or imagination is not longer led by the law (as Kant’s metaphor of the judge claimed it to be the case in the scientific experiment) and can thus also no longer be understood as the subject’s self-determined activity, as a bringing-forth “according to its own design.” According to Nietzsche, the aesthetic free play of imagination is not the self-conscious and self-determined act of a subject anymore. The aesthetic freedom of the imagination is rather precisely the state which Plato described as enthusiasm and Nietzsche, following Plato, as “intoxication” (or “frenzy”: Rausch). The free play of the imagination takes place in the subject, however it is not guided by the subject, by the law the subject gives itself and follows; it is (as I suggest to say) not the realization of a capacity, but the unfolding of a

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<sup>4</sup> 4 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 108-109 (B XIII-XIV).

“force.”<sup>5</sup>

This explains why art is an experiment. Art itself is of course also a self-conscious, planned activity, pursued upon the basis of knowledge. The aim of art as such an activity is to bring forth forms, forms of representation (as representations of forms: the forms of life). But in art, the self-conscious activity of the production of forms passes all the way through the freedom of the imagination: it is a bringing-forth of forms from and through the freedom of the imagination. This freedom is without form. The freedom of the imagination is the play—infinite within itself—of creating forms, dissolving forms, transforming forms and re-creating forms. This aesthetic play brings forth no works (of art), because it brings forth nothing that is not dissolved and transformed in the same gesture. The activity of art thus consists in bringing forth forms from formlessness. This is the experiment which the activity of art, if it wants to succeed, must constantly conduct anew: in the process of formation, it must expose itself to that which exposes and questions its aim, the bringing forth of forms. The artistic experiment is always an experiment in the breaking of form—but not by another, new form; rather by no form at all, by formlessness or non-form as the grounding of form.

According to Kant, the scientific experiment should ensure that the subject in empirical experience is and remains productive according to its own laws. Art, by contrast, reveals itself as an experiment in the collapse of precisely this certainty, which the scientific experiment is supposed to supply. Art is at every moment, again and again, an experiment, for no other reason than because it never attains this certainty, even—or especially—not when it succeeds. This is the radical new meaning which aesthetics lends to the concept of the experiment. The experiment is an act of bringing forth that is subject to the loss of itself in the aesthetic freedom of the imagination: the experiment of form-giving out of the freedom of formlessness, the experiment of an act out of the loss of the ability to act.

(ii) Play-Acting, for Example. – As art, in every one of its works, is an experiment in freedom, so are the activities in which the work, whether bringing forth or receiving, realizes itself. It is thus that Nietzsche described the “process” (Prozeß) of the actor.<sup>6</sup> It is a two-step, Dionysian-Apollonian double process. The first step in acting consists in a “transformation” or “enchantment,” in which those transformed completely forget “their civic past, their social position.” This distinguishes the actor from the epic rhapsodist:

This dynamic [...] is the original dramatic phenomenon: to see oneself transformed before one’s eyes and now to act as if one really had entered another body, another character. This process stands at the beginning of the development

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<sup>5</sup> Christoph Menke, *Force. A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speiers, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speiers (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 42.



of drama. Here is something different from the rhapsodist, who does not fuse with his images, but, like the painter, sees them with an observing eye outside himself; in the dramatic process there is already a surrender of individuality by the entry into a strange nature. (BT, 43)

The “surrender of individuality by the entry into a strange nature [fremde Natur]” does not mean entering empathically into another individual. The “strange nature” into which the actor enters is rather his or her own. Play acting begins with a return to the pre-subjective aesthetic nature, an act of self-forgetting, a “surrender of individuality.” Nietzsche describes as a radical self-transformation. The actors become part of the choir of satyrs: “their god’s timeless servants, living beyond all regions of society” (BT, 43-4). The first and fundamental step in the “process [Prozeß] of the actor,” as in any truly artistic process, is “self-renunciation.” (BT, 30; translation modified)

But in order that the result be art, in other words a form, a representation (of something), this must be followed by a second step. “Enchantment,” or intoxication, is only “the precondition of all dramatic art.” (BT, 44; my emphasis) For there to be art, it needs the “redemption” from this state—the isolation, fixation and preservation of a single element out of the intoxicated “total unleashing of all symbolic powers.” In the second step, the actor, in her “enchantment,” has a “vision” (ibid.); she brings forth an image—something that can be viewed because it exists outside and independently of her intoxicated enchantment. If the intoxicated “total unleashing of all symbolic powers” which the actor experiences in the first step can be understood as a free play of the imagination in which an image, in the moment of its creation, is already transforming and developing further into another new image, in which therefore becoming and decaying merge into one—then it is part of the art, the skill of the actor to distill an image from this state of intoxication and preserve it as such: to fashion herself into an image that stands before others and is visible to them.

It is precisely in this that the experiment of the actor consists, or in this regard that the actor’s art is an experiment: the actor makes himself, his body, his speech, his movements into an image—of something, for others. But the actor can do so only on the basis of self-renunciation, of his self-surrender to an interplay of forces of which he is not conscious and over which he has no control. The image derives from the play of the imagination. The actor’s art is therefore double, even contradictory in nature: surrendering the self to the interplay of forces as well as extricating the self from the interplay of forces. The actor’s art is an experiment because it consists in enduring this contradiction. Art does not produce—as Kant says of scientific knowledge production—“according to its own design.” Art must be an experiment because its bringing-forth of form originates in the exposure to the formless.

(iii) The Experiment in Life. – One can relate in two different ways to the aesthetic experiment of art: one can either try to confine its power and effectivity to the realm of the

arts. The aesthetic experiment of bringing forth a form from the free play of imagination, from the abyss of the formless, would then be the privilege, or the peculiarity, of the separate cultural sphere which we, in Western modernity, call the arts. It would not have any further consequences. The opposite view is expressed by the programmatic formula which Nietzsche has coined at the beginning of his philosophical thinking. This formula claims that the most urgent "problem" lies in "finding the culture for our music"<sup>7</sup>; the problem lies in finding, or rather inventing, a culture, a form of life which does justice to the fact, gleaned from the experience of art, that form proceeds from the surrender of one's self to the aesthetic freedom of formlessness. According to Nietzsche, we need to think about how to change our life, our culture, in order to be true to what we experience in artistic experiments. This raises the question for how an aesthetic experimentation in, and hence with, life looks like. What, or how, is life in aesthetic experiments? Or what, or how, are we in aesthetic experiments? What is the shape of an (aesthetically) experimental form of subjectivity?

The aesthetic experiments in life transform how we act: to make aesthetic experiments in life means to act in an experimental way, to turn one's action into experiments. There are two meanings one can give to this program. The first is superficial. In this superficial reading the experiments in action refer to the most efficient means and ways of reaching a goal; they are experiments in efficiency. Capitalism of course is an experimental form of economy in this sense. Its fundamental imperative is: you must experiment; you must try out new, more efficient ways of behavior, of thinking, of desiring, of living.<sup>8</sup> In the second reading, which is indeed opposite to the first, the experiment does not refer to means of acting, but to the very form of action. Read in the second way, the experiment is not instrumental, but ontological (or it is not economic but aesthetic). It is a way of acting that, while acting, puts the very possibility of acting into question.

To perform an action experimentally thus means to perform it in such a way that its success becomes an open question. In ordinary acting, this usually is not and cannot be the case. We speak of an action only in cases where there is a subject who possesses the capacity to perform the action. These are the capacities which form our socially defined identities, as social participants (as described in part I above). For such a capable subject success is not an open question but rather in principle guaranteed (so long as nothing interferes). During the performance of an action and for the subject performing it, success is the normal outcome. For this is precisely what it means to be able to act, i.e. to be a subject: to be able to perform an action successfully. So acting can only become an experiment for the agent when the normalcy of success is shattered. But because the normalcy of success defines action, experimental action puts at stake not just this or that means or way of acting (as is

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<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente, Sommer 1872-Anfang 1873*, in: *Kritische Studienausgabe [KSA]*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich, Berlin, New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, de Gruyter, 1988), vol.7, p. 426.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Christoph Menke, „One Must Experiment. Art in Contemporary Capitalism,“ in: Stefanie Heraeus (Hg.), *Hélio Oiticica. Curating the Penetráveis* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), p. 78-94.

the case in the superficial, instrumental or economic understanding of experimental acting); rather it puts into question the fact, and hence the form, of acting itself. The question which someone who performs an act experimentally asks herself, which she must be willing to ask herself, is not just: can I act successfully in this manner? Will these steps lead me to my aim? But rather: can I act at all? Am I—still—the performer of an act and hence a subject? To act experimentally means to turn the possibility of action and thus the existence of subjectivity as such into an open question.

To act experimentally, to conduct an experiment on oneself, is to act without knowing whether one can act—to act in the obscurity of not-knowing. But this not-knowing about one's own ability to act, and therefore about the act's success, is at the same time a knowledge of knowledge, a higher knowledge: the knowledge, or more precisely the experience, that the action which thereby becomes an experiment is subject to an opposing force which undermines it and calls it into question. The experiment, the radical experiment with oneself, is likewise only possible and necessary—the experiment can only exist and is only then needed—where the capacity to act is faced with an opposing force that works against it and puts into question its exercise, and thus the success of the act—making it an open unanswerable question. To act experimentally thus means to act in life like the actor does on stage.

If the aesthetic experiment in life is thus an experiment with capacity to act, it is thereby an experiment with the form of subjectivity. For a subject is nothing but someone who can act; subjectivity means agency, agency means capacity. Ordinarily, the subject enacts the capacities which it has acquired, or which have been inscribed in it, by way of its disciplinary formation. In its ordinary way of acting, desiring, thinking and living the subject endlessly repeats, and thereby uncritically affirms, its socially defined capacities, its being a subject with certain socially defined capacities. Only in aesthetic experiments can the subject put its own social form into question. For to act experimentally means to act in acknowledgment of the pre-subjective counter-force, the force of formlessness or the formless force, which is always effective in the subject against its own form.

Nietzsche has analyzed this experimental act in which the subject acknowledges its non-subjective counterforce as showing a very special kind of virtue. This is a virtue he ascribes to Richard Wagner. He calls this virtue Wagner's "loyalty" to himself: "the two sides of his nature [Nietzsche writes about Wagner] remained faithful to each other, [...] out of free and unselfish love, the creative, ingenuous, and brilliant side kept loyally [faithfully: *treu*] abreast of the dark, the intractable, and the tyrannical side."<sup>9</sup> This loyalty or fidelity does not refer to what one is, to one's own identity; it hence is not a confirmation of one's own way of being, one's own nature or destiny. Rather it is loyalty to "the dark, the intractable, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 203.

tyrannical side” – to the opposing force the subject bears within. The aesthetic experiments in life, as experiments with the very form of subjectivity, are practices of this virtue of loyalty. To experiment with oneself means to be loyal to the force which works in oneself against oneself as a socially defined subject.

(iv) Experiment and Institution. – “It is only in order to provide his art with a place in this world that we see him busy and active,” Nietzsche has said of Wagner.<sup>10</sup> But “to provide ... art with a place in this world” can be understood and done in two very different ways. One way is the idea of a life lived in radical experimentation: in the attempt to lead a life with and according to art, life itself here become a trial—an experiment with the form of subjectivity, of agency. Wagner’s way was quite different: he attempted to reach the goal of inserting art into life by founding an institution: for Wagner, to provide art with a place in this world means to institutionalize it, to set up a fixed framework with no other purpose than to present art in public and to establish a locale reserved for aesthetic engagement with art. The place of art in the world, in Wagner’s conviction, must be an apparatus whose long-term function is defined as maintaining the continuity of the locale in which it finds itself, the continuity of the constitution that structures it, and a certain continuity of the personnel active in it. The model for this strategy of cultivating the place of art in the world, and its equivalent then as now, are the institutions of visual art, the museums and academies.

The institution—the museum, academy, the *Festspielhaus*—and the experiment are the two ways in which to legitimize art in the world. What is the relationship between these two modes? In what relation do institution and experiment stand to each other?

It is a highly complex, even contradictory relation. Only at an initial, far too quick glance does their relation seem to be a simple opposition. Understood in this (all too) simple way, the institution is determined by a functionally defined structure in which art likewise takes on a determined quality—the determinations of place, time, context, values, etc., which the institution applies to the works of art. The institution determines—and this means: it de-aestheticizes—art; it robs it of its aesthetic freedom. Or it makes aesthetic freedom into something outside of art and thus into something merely internal: the merely inward, inactive freedom of those who experience art within the institution. The institution of art always intends something by the art which it presents; the institution turns art into a rhetorical strategy and an instrument of power. The freedom of the aesthetic state is preserved only on the other side of the institution, in the withdrawn inner thoughts of the observer—while the experiment attempts to unfold and thus realize aesthetic freedom, to represent it outwardly, visibly, in life. In that respect the experiment is opposed to the institution.

But the institution that stands opposed to the experiment is at the same time presupposed in

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10 Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Anfang 1874-Frühjahr 1874, in KSA, vol. 7, p. 767.

the experiment. The experiment undermines the institution and the determined structure it lends to art; and the experiment also needs the institution. For the experiment is not the aesthetic state, but rather the attempt to remain true to the aesthetic state of freedom. The experiment's loyalty to the aesthetic state presupposes a difference between the two. Only in differing from the aesthetic state can one remain true to it (and only in this way, as a different state, is this an aesthetic state or a state of freedom). The total experiment is no experiment at all, but rather regression or barbarism. Therefore, the experiment of a life with art requires the institution of art: the experiment requires the institutions of presentation and education, of "formation" (*Bildung*), through which art takes on that determined quality which allows one to differ from the aesthetic state in the first place. The institutional interruption of the aesthetic state is the precondition for one's loyalty to it. The will to experiment with an artistic life paradoxically entails the will to preserve the institutions of art.

This applies vice versa to the institutions of art. Just as the experiment of a life with art can only exist if the institutions exist within which art gains determinacy and a "place in the world," these are only institutions of art insofar as they attempt to make possible that which they themselves, by their nature, cannot be and do not wish to be: the unfolding of the aesthetic state of freedom. The institution of art must be an institution of freedom, an institution of liberating experiments. That is: the institutions of art must enact a paradox—they must want the impossible.

#### Conclusion: The Task of a Museum of the Future

The idea of liberation is antagonist: it is torn by an inner conflict. Indeed, liberation or emancipation itself is a site of conflict. This is the conflict between the first and the second liberation, the liberation through work (as labor) and the "work of higher liberation" (Hegel). Liberation at first is the formation of the subject as a capable, valuable social participant. Liberation cannot stop at this point. It needs the liberation from (such) liberation. This second, higher liberation is a return to the origin, a repetition of the very act in which the first liberation broke free from the natural forms of bondage and necessity. The higher liberation revives, or rejuvenates, the force of negativity which lies at the ground of all social forms; it turns the ground – the force of negativity – against its results – the social form of the subject, its identity, its capacities.

I have claimed that the arts can provide a model for this liberating re-enactment of the gap of negativity between nature and culture or society. The experience of art then becomes the scene of a radical experiment. These are experiments of form, of the bringing forth of form from the formless play of imagination. There are however two very different, even opposite, ways of understanding and performing the experiments of art. In the first one, the experiments of art are performed in a restrictive way: they are restricted to the limits of the

sphere of art. In the second way, the experiments of form, which the arts perform are used for experiments of liberation in life. What are the conditions of such a liberating, emancipatory usage of the arts? These conditions cannot just be individual dispositions or decisions; whether to use the experiments of art in an emancipatory or a conservative way does not just depend on individual choice. At least the emancipatory use of the arts is a collective endeavor in which the institutions of art, the institutions of artistic educations, like the art academy, and the institutions of the public presentation of art, like the museum, play a decisive role. The museum of the future must be a museum which presents the experiments of art as a model and medium for the emancipatory self-transformation of the subject (which is always a transformation of society at the same time; for the subject is, or has, a social form). As I have indicated, this is a difficult task. For it demands of the museum of the future no less than to work against itself.