

## Philosophy, Art and Politics as *Interesse* Towards a Lyotardian post-kantian aesthetics

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This presentation has a programmatic character: it is a scetch in broad strokes of a Lyotardian account of the shifting borders between philosophy, art and politics.<sup>1</sup> As for the relation between philosophy and art Lyotard leaves behind modernism in his philosophical re-writing of Kants *Kritik der Urteilskraft* by projecting avantgardism into philosophical thinking. Additionally he broadens the concept of the political to a micropolitical level: *la* politique becomes *le* politique. But what does this micro-political dimension in art-practices mean? How 'inter-esting' are contemporary art-practices?

This question has to be explored productively. Productive in a sense that the interrelative effects of the three domains have to enrich humain relations and socio-political existence by tailoring them down to a world characterized by contingency and heterogeneity. Given the inherent tensions and conflicts in our globalized world socio-political behaviour of groups and individuals still needs motivation and orientation. Value relativism, multiculturalism, aesthetic pluralism and increasing 'glocalization' – the dynamics between global and local – demand a consistent appraoch. Inspired by this ethico-political 'imperative' one can asked how engaged philosophy and arts, how creative philosophy and politics and how selfreflective arts and politics nowadays are.

Lyotards philosophical entreprise integrates arts and politics but remains in the final analysis philosophical. It is a radical critique on modernist thinking as an identifying, totalizing, discursive rationality. While deconstructing the systematic philosophical projects of Kant, Hegel and Marx he gradually articulates his own philosophical project: a revaluation of differences or of the 'Différend' as a unsolvable conflict between cognitive legitimations and practical valuesystems that can no longer be reduced to each other. In doing this his project can be labeled as a rewriting – or in terms of his specific linguistic appraoch: re-phrasing - of the project of modernity. His philosophy does not aim at establishing a new identity or subjectivity, but at opening our minds for relational differences that resist final identification. These differences can only be *circumscribed* in terms of intensities, forces or - from a reception-aesthetical point of view - in terms of affectivity and sensibility. This is one of the reasons why art - or better: art-practices - come to the fore. In art the senses get hold of the world in a non-conceptual or - to use a notion of Deleuze/Guattari - in a 'sensational' way, sensation being a configuration of affects and percepts<sup>2</sup>.

This presentation consists of three parts.

1. In the first part attention will be given to an epistemological selfdestructive configuration of discursive thinking: an *aporia*. According to Lyotard thought is motivated heteronomously by

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<sup>1</sup> This research formally is a part of the research project *Intermediality* of the Centre for Philosophy & Arts of the Department of Philosophy in Rotterdam. Although in this article I concentrate on Lyotards analysis, this perspective can be broadened and deepened by using the writings of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Jacques Derrida.

<sup>2</sup> See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* London/New York 1994, p. 164.

forces that come from outside: the subject only comes into existence as a result of the 'anima' being moved by affects or 'aisthesis'. Once rational systematic thinking tries to get a hold on these external forces – in other words: once it tries to ground its own discursive groundlessness – it finds itself blocked.

The systematic rigor of Kants critical analysis of the aesthetic is gone once he starts analyzing 'das Gefühl' of the sublime and not the judgement of it as he does in his analysis of the beautiful. The sublime feeling is characterized by tension: the magnitude and dynamic power of the sublime can not be grasped by the judging subject. Nevertheless it forces coherency upon it by identifying it formally as an aesthetic Idea. Only by postulating this regulative Idea of the sublime Kant can restore the autonomy of the subject: as a result of this idealisation the subject can once again take its distance and become 'interesselos'.

This disturbing feeling of being blocked is Lyotard's point of departure to rephrase the relational tension between thought, perception and experience as Kant analysed in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in terms of his philosophy of phrases. The non-discursive sublime can not be phrased by philosophy. It can be visioned in a grandiose manner by art like Barnett Newman's. Or more integrated and 'hidden' in Daniel Buren's treatment of spatial environments, once we recognize the Heideggerian inspiration of Lyotard's later writings. For philosophy nothing is left but a dissensual phrasing of this overwhelming experience by using paradoxes, contradictions and antinomies. These inconsistent configurations block discursive thought by its own means: discursiveness. In using these discursive tensions Lyotard's writing gets an aporetic quality.

2. Of course, works of art 'understand' reality in a different 'sense' than philosophical text do. Kant's treatise on the aesthetic judgement implies an effort to rehabilitate a cognitive dimension of feeling (pleasure and pain) as a faculty that bridges those of knowing and willing, respectively explored in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. In the second part I will trace this tension within avant-garde and contemporary art practices referring to the Gesamtkunstwerk or total work of art. In its megalomaniacal form – much alike the philosophical system of Schelling and Hegel – the Gesamtkunstwerk presupposes the primacy of an identifying power. As an all-encompassing concept this power neutralizes a critical potential. But once one recognizes the historical failures of this grand scale political experiment and takes the impossibility of the Gesamtkunstwerk as a starting point the inner structure reflects an aporetic tension.

Then the failure of the Gesamtkunstwerk to facilitate sublimity reveals a medium-specific reflectivity within this project, that constitutes a politico-aesthetic *sensus communis*. This reflectivity results from an aporetic tension caused by the implementation of disciplines, media and domains within each other: interdisciplinarity, multimedia and aesthetic experiences of interactivity. To me these are aspects of what I coin as *intermediality*.

3. Finally I will focus on a (micro)political quality of the 'inter' of intermediality. I redefine Kantian notions 'Interesse' and 'sensus communis' by opening up three dimensions that demand further exploration: a philosophical, reception-aesthetic and existential in-between or inter. Confronted with the sublime the judging subject has already abandoned the 'interesseloses Wohlgefallen' that he could maintain towards the beautiful. Subjectivity appears to be *inter-esse*: a being-in-between. I use the 'inter' as a critical aesthetic category to evaluate contemporary art-practices, especially those that work within the public 'inter': public space, starting from Lyotard's analysis of Buren's artwork. Inter-esse or 'in-betweenness' as an experiential structure of aesthetic interactivity nurtures a sensibility for heterogeneity and contingency and reflects the present urge of individuals to project – always in a provisional sense - their lives as a work of art: Dasein becomes Design.

## I. Aporia and transcendental illusion

Aporia means ‘no way through’ or ‘no passage’. It is used in philosophical discourse to indicate a selfundermining configuration in epistemology and metaphysics. An aporia blocks further development of thought because thinking gets entangled in a selfdefeating logical construction: the outcome of the system negates the presuppositions it is based upon. Selfreferentiality is crucial for this configuration.

In his transcendental systematic exploration of the conditions of possibility of scientific, moral and aesthetic judgement Kant concludes that Reason has to postulate Ideas “to bridge” the gap between knowing and acting in order to produce continuity for rational behavior. The pivot of this ‘linking’ is the reflective judgement: can we communicate knowledge of a particular event or product when there are no rules at hand? Lyotard comes to the conclusion that this linking presupposes a transcendental illusion: a final discursive legitimation that automatically produces normative rules for collective and individual behaviour. According to him the presentation of this prescriptive illusion as a descriptive fact masks a unsolvable ‘differend’ and neutralizes a aporetic tension within the system.

### 1 Lyotard’s criticism on metaphysical aporia

Tracking down non substantiated metaphysical aporia and transcendental illusions in philosophical theories is one of the basic themes of Lyotard’s ‘philosophybook’ *Le Différend* (1983). He analyses metaphysical claims, from Plato to Levinas, from a phrase-philosophical perspective: how do philosophical systems ward off inconsistencies or paradoxes and by what transcendental illusion do they implement their systematic thought in moral and political practices? He shows that discursive thought cannot represent its own foundation *within its own medium* – philosophical discursivity - without presupposing transcendent(al) instances: Myth, Logos, God, Cogito, Subject, Geist and History.

In contrast with empirical or logical illusion transcendental illusion, Kant argues, can never be solved by Reason itself. Transcendental illusion is the pitfall of any philosophical system that links descriptive phrases - what really is – to prescriptive phrases - what reality ought to be - uncritically. This linking of 'what is' into 'what ought to be' presupposes a transcendental illusion. Illusion – or fiction – appears to be the core of political theory. Taking up this problem in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* while speaking about the reflective judgement – how can we say something general about something that is unique in itself like a work of art - Kant already concludes that Reason can only claim an “*Anspruch auf Totalität*”<sup>3</sup>. Although the totality has become highly problematic, the ‘claim’ remains crucial for consistent collective and individual behavior.

Unlike Schelling and Hegel Kant accepts a factually unbridgeable cleavage between the subject and object: this tension takes revenge in the form of an uncritical transcendental illusion once the subject tries to get all inclusive knowledge of the Soul, the World, God and its future as Mankind. Kant counters this problem on a transcendental level. In the second section of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, dealing with transcendental dialectics and transcendental illusion, he focuses on judgements that claim knowledge of the forementioned all-encompassing totalities. Once reason claims knowledge of for instance the world as the totality of all phenomena that it contains, reason gets entangled in paradoxes or – as Kant qualifies them – antinomies. Whether the world is limited in space and time, as some materialist philosophers before Kant claimed, or unlimited, as more idealistic philosophers stated, cannot be decided upon from an epistemological point of view: we have no empirical

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<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, B85/6;A84/5.

evidence for the existence of the World as a whole.<sup>4</sup> The antinomies are part of Reason itself, Kant states. They cannot be solved by Reason. The transcendental entities can only be grasped as regulative Ideas, not as empirically founded constitutive concepts of understanding. Once we cognize them antinomies appear.

Lyotard returns to the first systematic principles of dialectics, phenomenology and aesthetics that are explored in a modern sense for the first time coherently in Kant's transcendental dialectics. His main opponent however is not Kant but the dialecticians Hegel and Marx. They legitimate collective political action – of citizens or of the labourclass - by a theory on Worldhistory that is motivated by 'Geist' or 'Capital', two transcendental illusions: "Phrases from the dialectic of reason do not have as their object (or, as we would say, as their referent) something that could also be the object of a designation, of a phrase that says 'here it is'."<sup>5</sup> In the worldhistorical development of these illusions the subject-object opposition is systematically 'aufgehoben' as a result of the anticipation of the Ideal of the civil state or of the socialist Utopia. But these illusions can only be deduced from their own history, while at the same time they give this same history its rationale. As a result of which description and prescription are mixed up and the system becomes aporetic.

The very moment these Ideas are uncritically applied to real situations to legitimize collective action, terror lies in wait. By factually implementing a transcendental illusion the Great Narratives as closed systems become totalitarian: they repress differences and translate every critique on the system as a whole in terms of the system in order to reinforce its grip on reality. So to Lyotard Hegel and Marx's speculative genres mask aporia and transcendental illusions. They do not accept the principal conflict of differend between the descriptive and the prescriptive.

This criticism is also applied to Nietzsche's philosophy, although Nietzsche has been an important influence on Lyotard's 'libidinal' philosophy. Like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari Lyotard understands the process of thinking as a libidinal 'economy' of intensities. However, after *Economie libidinale* (1974) Lyotard concludes that this libidinal flow does no longer produce politically and ethically justifiable attitudes and behaviour. He criticizes Nietzsche's philosophy of being aporetic as well: although Nietzsche tries to demolish metaphysics and its identifying principles, he himself finally falls back into a metaphysical position once Will to Power is made into an all determining principle: this can no longer be critically analysed because it motivates that very critique.

## 2 Supposed aporia in Lyotard's thesis on postmodernity

Contemporaries turn this critique of producing an aporia against Lyotard. In *La pensée 68: Essai sur L'antihumanisme contemporain* (1985) Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut qualify postmodern thinking - concerning the style of writing - as a "cult of the paradox". In Habermas' simultaneously published *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (1985) French philosophy of differences is repudiated as a self-dementing, aporetic form of thinking: the outcome of their critique leads to an impasse, because they can not legitimize their presuppositions without falling back into the metaphysics they criticize. Lyotard's critics aim their criticism usually at three aspects: a history-philosophical, a normative and a performative aspect.

### a. paradox

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<sup>4</sup> These cognitive judgements on totalities only *seem* to contradict each other: in fact they are only incompatible. The judgement on the limitedness of the world focuses on the world as a phenomenon, its apparant opposition on the noumenal foundation of the world.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, "Judiciousness in dispute, or Kant after Marx" in: *The Lyotard Reader*. Andrew Benjamin (ed.), Oxford 1989, p. 335.

The first criticism focuses on an implication of Lyotard's suggestion that postmodernity is a break with modernity. By doing this, they conclude correctly, postmodernity can be attributed exactly intrinsic characteristics of modernity: a principal break with the past, made possible by a specific concept of history. Ergo: postmodernity is still modern, the concept of postmodernity is aporetical, i.e. selfundermining.

But this episodic interpretation of 'post-modern' as a period *after* modernity is misleading. As a reaction on this critique Lyotard replaces the prefix 'post' by 're'. The postmodern - and no longer: postmodernity - proves to be a re-reflective mode of the modern: "Rather we have to say that the postmodern is always implied in the modern because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself"<sup>6</sup>. Retrospectively spoken the postmodern is the unthought of modernity. 'Re-écrire' of re-writing modernity - as a kind of Freudian *Durcharbeitung* - implies at the same time a transformation of modernity. It is a form of de/con/struction.

### **b. double bind**

The second criticism concerns Lyotard's account of the Great Narratives. By criticizing the politico-philosophical discourses of Kant, Hegel and Marx he would implicitly presuppose another postmodern meta-narrative:

"In fact, Lyotard is caught in another double bind vis-à-vis normative positions from which he can criticize opposing positions. (...) This move catches him in another aporia, whereby he wants to reject general epistemological and normological positions while his critical interventions presuppose precisely such critical positions. (such as the war on totality)"<sup>7</sup>.

Lyotard's earlier subjectcritical, 'libidinal' writings are conveniently disregarded, as is his criticism on the concealed subjectcentric presuppositions of the language games of Wittgenstein. It is more adequate to say that he does not develop a new legitimization but a 'working hypothesis': "this scenario has not the pretention to be original not even to be true". It is not about the prognostic value but about "the strategic value related to the posed question"<sup>8</sup>

### **c. performative contradiction**

Other critics state that in its radical criticism on rationality Lyotard is guilty of what is called a performative contradiction. Indeed, whilst criticizing, he does undermine his own criticism: the rejection of all-encompassing rationality is still expressed by means of a rational argument. But his critics miss the point that Lyotard does not want to abolish rationality as such. He only rejects the idea of rationality as the last resort for critique. Once it is enforced in every situation by rules that one can apply without any knowledge of the context, in other words once the descriptive and the prescriptive coincide, rationality becomes a transcendental illusion. Lyotardian rationality is more heuristic: phrase-situated subjects search for rules, because reflective thinking is 'in essence' rule-less and has to renew itself again and again against a background of forces and intensities.

Paradox, double bind and performative contradiction are pejorative terms used by Lyotard's critics to disqualify his insights. In spite of the insufficiency of their arguments a fruitful observation lies enclosed in their analyses: Lyotard's text indeed contains a specific aporetical

<sup>6</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on time*. Cambridge 1991, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> S. Best and C. Kellner, *Postmodern Theory. Critical Interrogations*. Basingstoke 1991, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> I cite the French version: Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*. Paris 1979, resp. pp. 11/18.

tension. But he uses this discursive tension in a productive way: he wants to reach and transgress the limits of discursive thinking. In phraseological terms: there is no last phrase, the deliberation is unlimited. Lyotard chooses for paradoxes out of a methodological need. This need for the “impasse of incommensurability”<sup>9</sup> instigates a sensible reflection upon the boundaries between philosophy, aesthetics and politics.

### 3. Lyotard's affirmation of an aporetical tension

Given the impossibility of ‘a last phrase’, the principal cleavage between descriptive and prescriptive phrases and the critically recognized fact that nevertheless a transcendental illusion is needed in order to judge, Lyotard rephrases in *Leçons sur l'Analytique du sublime* (1991) meticulously §§23-29 of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. The positive appreciation of the experience of the sublime as a selfundermining discursivity and consensus as a non-discursive experience of limits was already unfolded at the end of *La condition postmoderne* in 1979: “But we have showed in the analysis of scientific pragmatic that consensus is a condition of discussions and not their goal. Rather their goal is paralogy”<sup>10</sup>. Paralogy is “the search for the limit between the tolerable and the intolerable by way of moves lacking any given model”<sup>11</sup>

#### a. sublime as a paradoxical reception-aesthetical category

Paralogy as a search for the limit implies a positive aporetical tension: it focuses on the thin borderline between what one can bear and one cannot bear any longer. The instruments are ambiguous: moves lacking any given model. As a context the model contains no rules: it is comparable with the ‘as-if’ construction of Kant's regulative Ideas. In this sense these moves are arti-ficial. He uses transcendental illusions in a productive way. The aporetical tension becomes a bridge as a self-conscious ‘as-if’. It is the Anspruch as a ‘fictional’ movement of an aesthetic Idea. Like “a form of passage” “this ‘as-if’ is the generic name of this differential” (D, Kant 2.3). His phraseological moves are intensified by the awareness that they have to testify of a differend in every new discussion. Lyotard is post-Kantian in his dwelling on the threshold: he remains in-between.

The search for the limit between the tolerable and the intolerable is, after the Great Narratives being dissolved, the driving force of Lyotard's art of philosophizing. A kind of philosophizing announces itself that is not guided by prescriptions, but by the search for its own rule within its own medium – philosophical language - while being aware that this endeavour can never be definitely completed.

The productive aporetical tension that forms the outer limit of this sensitive and sensible art of thinking lies herein that it ‘knows’ that the knowledge of general principles is principally impossible: they are at most shared in a sensible way: *sensus communis*. But once made discursive they are phrased in dissensus. This first ‘knowledge’ has the non-discursive quality that Lyotard recognizes in Kant's analysis of the reflective judgement in relation to the experience of the sublime. We have to realize that the sublime is a function of selfconsciousness and not a substantial ‘fact’ unrelated to the subject. Sublimity is an reception-aesthetic category.

It can also manifest itself as a collective experience: enthusiasm as an affect, “even as a dementia”<sup>12</sup>. Within all those that did not participate in the French Revolution enthusiasm can be aroused. They can ‘picture’ the sublimity of the events as a ‘negative Darstellung’ or

<sup>9</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*. Manchester 1988, p. 167.

<sup>10</sup> *La condition, o.c.*, . 106.

<sup>11</sup> See: Jean-François Lyotard, “Presentations” in: *Philosophy in France today*. Alan Montefiore (ed.), London 1983, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> *The Differend, o.c.*, p. 166.

the presentation of the infinite, just because they are not biased by pathological affects and interests. To Lyotard this “supremely paradoxical presentation (...) is the most inconsistent possible “passage”, the impasse as “passage”<sup>13</sup>. It is a historical sign like nowadays after Auschwitz sorrow could be this shared sensibility.

The quality of the aporia has changed: its pathology as dementia is productive. It has become a experiential structure, comparable to Derrida’s transformation of the aporia<sup>14</sup>:

“It had to be a matter of the nonpassage, or rather from the experience of the nonpassage, the experience of what happens (se passe) and is fascinating (passionne) in this nonpassage, paralyzing us in this separation in a way that is not necessarily negative: before a door, a threshold, a border, a line, or simply the edge or the approach of the other as such”<sup>15</sup>.

Derrida transforms aporia into a ethico-political attitude that transgresses the opposition between the active and the passive and qualifies this pathic activity as ‘endurance non-passive’ wherein the limit between the tolerable and intolerable once more resonates.

### **b. aporia: passibility and eventuality**

As a result of a shift from an epistemological to a experiential level – level of experience - the blockade has become a passage to a non-discursive ‘knowledge’: feeling that makes discursiveness possible. This feeling creates ‘understanding’ as non-discursive consensus. This passage cannot of course be ‘planned’ in advance: there is no guarantee for consensus. Lyotard uses a neologism to express the quasi-transcendental quality of this aporetic tension: passibility. After being criticized and internalized aporia finally has been transformed into an ‘passible’ limit experience, that on a discursive level implies the search for paralogy.

Gradually Lyotard’s interpretation of the sublime shifts from a Kantian to a Heideggerian inspiration. Around 1980 he is still projecting the sublime into the Ideas. During the following years - as a result of his philosophy of phrases - the sublime becomes a quality of discursiveness or phrasing itself. Sublimity then is immanent to phrasing. The displeasure one feels once language does not allow him any longer to express for instance sorrow is transformed into pleasure aroused by the invention of new idioms to express this sensibility within phrasing.

After 1983 the sublime finally becomes a non-subjective experience: an event – Ereignis – of phrasing itself. Sublimity is an eventuality: a limit experience of the here and now that is implied by every phrase: at the same time it signifies something beyond itself, it happens and triggers effects that cannot be reduced to its signification. Every phrase has a ‘quasi-phrase’, ‘phrase-matière’ or ‘phrase-affect’.<sup>16</sup> In terms of sublimity: although it is impossible to represent the sublime discursively it can be experienced as a *pathos* Lyotard explains in *Heidegger and ‘the Jews’* (1988).

The experience of this rupture is selfreflective or ‘tautegorical’: “a term by which I designate the remarkable fact that pleasure and displeasure are at once both a ‘state’ of the soul and the ‘information’ collected by the soul relative to its state”<sup>17</sup>. This ‘information’ is at the same time affective - “for thought, to be informed of its state is to feel this state – to be affected” – and reflective: “pure reflection is first and foremost the ability of thought to be

<sup>13</sup> Idem note 10.

<sup>14</sup> See: Henk Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen. Naar een hyperkritiek van de xenofobe rede*. Kampen 1996, pp. 456-473.

<sup>15</sup> See; Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*. Stanford 1993, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *The Differend, o.c.*, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Stanford 1994, p. 4

immediately informed of its state by this state and without other means of measure than feeling itself”<sup>18</sup>. Reflection and affectivity do no longer exclude each other.

### c. time and place of the sublime: achronic and atopic

How do we experience the sublime when it is an experience of the limits of our comprehension? How do we experience its presence beyond any representation? If it has a tautegorical quality when and where does a passible reflection take place? Here Lyotard’s revaluation of the aporia touches upon the very concepts of time and space. Does the phrase-affect ‘precedes’ the phrase as a prescription or as a passibility? Where does the eventuality of the phrase – its contingency and heterogeneity – occur or happen? “The phrase considered as occurrence escapes the logical paradoxes that self-referential propositions give rise to”<sup>19</sup>. To make explicit the specific quality of the event of the phrase - its ‘arrive-t-il?’ – this can only, given the linear character of discursive thinking, be achieved in retrospect after the phrase has already taken (its) place.

This is where we encounter an immense problem. The event of the phrase exists only after one reaches out in vain for this abyssal ‘ground’ in a linked-up phrase, which can never be a meta-proposition: the presentation as such can never be re-presentated. Lyotard makes use of Freud’s concept ‘Nachträglichkeit’ to clarify this move. The moment the event of the phrase is made conscious this is “a diachronizing (...) of what occurs in a non-diachronic time” or “a-chronic time”<sup>20</sup>. Or as Deleuze and Guattari qualify this eventuality:

“It is no longer time that exists between two instants; it is the event that is a meanwhile (*un entre-temps*): The meanwhile is not part of the eternal, but neither is it part of time – it belongs to becoming”<sup>21</sup>

Like the Lacanian ‘Unbewusste’ the event is atemporal and atopic: as becoming it takes (its) place in language. It ‘happens’ but we are not aware of its influence but afterwards, like a smell, taste or sound that suddenly reminds us of long gone events. As soon as discursive thinking re-reflects on this atemporal, atopic, extra-discursive passibility, it can only recapture this experience in paradoxical terminology in which this experience resonates: precisely this is the aporetic quality of Lyotard’s ‘écriture’.

## II Aesthetics

Can we trace this aporetic tension in the aesthetic domain? Can notions as ‘passibility’ and ‘tautegoric’ be used to recognize a sublime sensibility within avant-garde art practices? Lyotard’s writings on art practises are not theoretical in the sense that he writes *about* art: his texts are literally arti-ficial. He uses specific rhetorical constructions: dialogues between a ‘vous’, ‘toi’ and ‘lui’, ‘question’ and ‘reponse’ and short discontinuous statements. His ‘écriture’ is in tune with works of art in which he recognizes a reflective sensibility.

In circumscribing aesthetic experiences of a passible sublimity Lyotard switches from a Kantian to a Heideggerian perspective. For instance in *Moralités postmodernes* (1993) he suggests that all great works of art are avant-garde: “the motive of their endurance resides in the aporia of that immaterial ‘presence’ that is suggested by their matter”<sup>22</sup>. This aporia – an ‘immaterial materialism’ - transcends spatio-temporal conditions in its expression of an

<sup>18</sup> Idem, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *The Differend, o.c.*, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> I cite the Dutch version: *Heidegger en ‘de joden’*. Kampen 1990, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> *What is Philosophy? o.c.*, p. 158.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Moralités postmodernes*. Paris 1993, p. 204.

“alertness to nothingness”.<sup>23</sup> In *Heidegger and ‘the Jews’* Lyotard has a less euphoric approach: “What art still can do is testify, not of the sublime, but of this aporia of art (the insufficiency to present the sublime, ho) and the pain it causes. She does not speak about the unspeakable, she rather speaks about that impossibility to speak about it”<sup>24</sup>.

### **1 Gesamtkunstwerk: pathos of the sublime**

In order to show that this failure to represent sublimity still contains a sublime dimension I would like to reinterpret some developments within avant-garde art practices. As a point of departure I take a politico-aesthetic phenomenon: the experiment of the Gesamtkunstwerk. Very briefly I focus on a collective and an individual expression: the cultural-political Gesamtkunstwerk and the existential work of art, expressed by the individual artist.

#### **a. collective Gesamtkunstwerk: aesthetico-political sensus communis**

The late 19th century gave birth to experiments in which artists try to bridge the gap between art and life. The Gesamtkunstwerk can be understood as the expression of a cultural-political project to present the reflective and synthesizing powers of the arts as coherently and poignantly as possible in order to represent a collective identity. In philosophy Schelling’s system can be seen as a aesthetico-philosophical Gesamtkunstwerk.<sup>25</sup> The experiment in the arts takes shape in Wagner's megalomaniacal project which is philosophically legitimized by the young Nietzsche who attempts to charge the worn out Christian culture with Apollonian/Dionysian élan. Its target is a politico-aesthetic consciousness.

From an reception-aesthetic perspective not only the senses and the consciousness of the audience are exposed integrally, in this ideologically founded, multisensory cultural-political environment, the community-forming function of art comes to the fore. The creation of a ‘sensus communis’ gives the Gesamtkunstwerk a sublime quality in a Kantian sense: the public performance activates a passibility that unites its participants. Wagner, inspired by an aesthetic theatricality wanted to transform the Festspielen of Bayreuth into a public event and transformed the theatrical time-space into a political arena. The combination of artistic disciplines and media, overdetermined by a Great Narrative – a mixture of christian and Teutonic myths - triggers a feeling of sublimity in both participants and audience, that gives their collective life meaning and their behavior direction.

Other more egalitarian and democratic Gesamt experiments focus on an aesthetization of daily life: from the Arts & Crafts movement in England to the Austrian Wiener Werkstätte and in the interbellum from Bauhaus and the Dutch Gemeenschapskunst to experiments of the Surrealists. The totalitarian seductive powers of these aesthetico-political sublimity have finally led to the failure of the Gesamtkunstwerk. The political overdetermination worked out as an identifying power that smothered all aesthetic and political criticism. Walter Benjamin analyses in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) the political perversion of the Gesamtkunstwerk as an politico-aesthetic project that turned out totalitarian. Despite the influential artistic experiment between 1917 and 1920, Lenin’s ideological descendents in the USSR reduced art completely to ideological propaganda, while in Nazi-Germany avant-garde art was proclaimed de-generate or ‘ent-artet’: stalinism politicized art, whereas fascism aestheticized politics.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Apart from Derrida (endurance) and Deleuze/Guattari (entre-temps) a strong zennistic influence is noticeable. See: Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, p. 509-514/646

<sup>24</sup> *Heidegger en ‘de joden’, o.c.*, p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> See: Odo Marquard, “Gesamtkunstwerk und Identitätssystem” in: *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk. Europäische Utopien seit 1800*. Harald Szeemann a.o. (ed.) Frankfurt a/M 1983, pp. 40-51.

<sup>26</sup> See the concluding remarks of: Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

### **b. individual Gesamtkunstwerk: life as a work of art**

On an individual scale the Gesamtkunstwerk has had more impact, given the romantic overtones of the 19th century cult of the suffering genius. Whereas Wagner tried to inspire collective life, in that same period artists like Charles Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde focus on an aesthetization of the individual life. Does Wagner integrate all sorts of artistic media and disciplines, in his poetry Baudelaire aims at an interplay of all senses: a synaesthesia. While the theatrical composer Wagner projects a mythical and heroic past into the future, the dandy poet Baudelaire affirms modern city life with its excessive, dark and sublime aspects and its specific public performance: strolling the Parisian boulevards. Although the scale and the content of Wagner's and Baudelaire's Gesamtkunstwerk differ, both endeavor to reconcile life and art.

The 20th century life as a work of art becomes more public than the century before. Marcel Duchamp 'politicizes' the museal space and art institution by transforming banality and conceptuality into fundamental characteristics of a work of art: a urinal. This unparalleled artistic gesture nihilates the aesthetic judgement on the beautiful. The shock of sublimity becomes the normative criterion of art practices. The most important question is from then on: "Is this art?"<sup>27</sup> Duchamp's main work of art finally is his entire life. This goes for artists like Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol and Hermann Nitsch. They all have their 'bedding' in large scale projects, that form a critical potential and no longer strive for totalization in a political sense: Bauhaus, Fluxus, The Factory and Orgien Mysterien Theater. For Schwitters life is a Gesamtkunstwerk: Merzbau. Beuys' social sculpture – everyone is a artist - Warhol's Factory – everyone is a star – and the Aktionen at Prinzenhof, all these experiments have a common approach: a cooperative enterprise between media, disciplines and artists wherein the audience is incorporated as a constitutive part of the work of art and everyday life is taken as point of departure. As a result the borders between art and life are problematized.

### **2. Hang (urge) zum Gesamtkunstwerk: intermediality**

Western avant-garde artists criticize the totalitarian urge by individualizing the Gesamtkunstwerk and problematizing the representative functions of art. As non-totalitarian art practices they refuse to present art in political terms or represent politics in aesthetic images. This refusal implies a critical distance towards political power and respect for the Kantian aesthetic Idea in its regulative inspiration. Or in Lyotardian terms: they affirm the necessity of the transcendental illusion in artistic terms. It is within this tension between the aesthetic Idea of the artist and his subservience to a political ideal that an indecisive politico-aesthetic sensibility is developed, characteristic for avant-garde art practices that focus on the Gesamt.

Can we recognize the Kantian and Heideggerian sublime in these practices? Is Kant's "Anspruch auf Totalität" perhaps aesthetically translated in what Bazon Brock calls a 'Hang' (urge) towards the Gesamtkunstwerk? According to Harald Szeemann all the Gesamt-experiments of the last 150 years manifest this "urge towards" as "the wish for salvation" and "fantasies and ideas of intended coherency."<sup>28</sup> Is this urge their affective raison d'être, their passibility? But what is their tautological quality?

I think that this quality manifests itself in the artistic efforts to use different media and transgress disciplinary borders within one work of art. A medium-specific reflectivity is the result. This multimedial and interdisciplinary intention triggers a reflective sensibility on a

<sup>27</sup> See: Thierry de Duve, "Kant nach Duchamp" in: *Kunstforum* 1989, pp. 186-206. See for a critique on De Duve's interpretation of the aporetic quality of Duchamp's work: Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, pp. 535-541.

<sup>28</sup> See: Harald Szeemann, "Vorbereitungen" in: *Der Hang, o.c.p.* 16

reception-aesthetic level within its audience. The grafting of words and images onto each other gives rise to a selfreflective interaction within the work that sensibilizes the spectator. He is forced to give consideration to the interaction of words and images. This multimedial and interdisciplinary tension transforms the spectator into an active observer who becomes an active participant in the production of the work's meaning.

Around the turn of the century especially poets and visual artists experiment with this interplay. By mixing traditional images with words, and later with photographs, film, video and computeranimations, by combining this with a public performance their art develops a critical selfreflectivity that sensibilizes in a micropolitical sense its audience. Physical publicity - performance - is crucial to the work of the avant-garde. From the newspaper fragments in the cubist paintings of Braque and Picasso, via the word pictures of Ernst and Magritte up till the neon texts of Nauman and word installations of Holzer a material reflectiveness enriches works of art.

Although images and words do relate to reality the autonomous work no longer mirrors reality in a representative sense, but via its own medial reflectiveness. Again Marcel Duchamp plays a crucial role in the development. Multimedia gradually integrate interdisciplinary activities. In 1917 Picasso, Apollinaire and Satie put on the multimedial and interdisciplinary spectacle *Parade* together with the choreographer Léonide Massine. This total theatre *avant-la-lettre* is another expression of an urge towards the Gesamtkunstwerk.

What interests me, as a philosopher, in the relationship between media and disciplines is not the painterly incorporation of an ostensibly foreign medium - language - into visual arts, but the specificity of the reflective tension that incorporation of different media generates in the spectator or recipient of the work. I call this reflective experience, this experiential dimension: *intermediality*.<sup>29</sup> To my opinion the politico-aesthetic core of the Gesamtkunstwerk is precisely this 'inter'play between artistic media, disciplines and a will to 'publicity'. Once we reject the totalitarian urge to identify and totalize a community politically with artistic means, this intermediality as a coherent practice of multimedial, interdisciplinary and interactive elements comes to the fore. In intermedial experiments of avant-garde artists criticism towards society as a given reality becomes explicit as a mediumspecific reflectivity.<sup>30</sup>

Let us return to Lyotard. Although Lyotard pays attention to artforms such as cinema and music, his main interest bears upon visual arts, especially the work of Duchamp, Buren, Arakawa, Adami, Newman and Monoroy. He was also involved in the Centre Pompidou exposition *Les Immatériaux* in 1985. It is no surprise that Lyotard favors Duchamp's art practice and the deconstructive art of Daniel Buren.<sup>31</sup> The book on Duchamp from 1977 opens with a 'Declaration' wherein the main issue of *The Differend* is anticipated:

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<sup>29</sup> The term 'intermedial' or 'intermedia' is brought up only occasionally in art but was never examined systematically. Coleridge used the term at the start of the nineteenth century. After this it was developed by artists who wished to politicize their interdisciplinary and intermedial activities by undermining institutional contexts and ideas. Via Duchamp and Cage, the term is passed on to the Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, who uses 'intermedia' in 1965 with artworks that can be situated, in a conceptual sense, between two or more artistic media. In a recent interview Peter Greenaway speaks about 'intermediality'. Greenaway's work is pre-eminently multimedial and interdisciplinary. If anyone is conceptual, multimedial and interdisciplinary in his work, it's Greenaway.

<sup>30</sup> See: Henk Oosterling, "Intermediality. Art between Words, Images, and Actions" in: *Think Art. Theory and Practice in the Art of Today*. Symposium under the direction of Jean-Marie Schaeffer. Witte de With, Center for contemporary Art, Rotterdam 1998, pp. 89-100.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs DUchamp*. Paris 1977; *Que peindre? Adami Arakawa Buren*. Paris 1987

“I won’t say that all that follows is false or true, even less that it is not false nor true, nor false-and-true, nor a little false or a little true. But could it be that Mr. Duchamp or Miss Sélavy has looked after and found, in the field of space and time en en in the field of matter and form, the *contrariety*? Or do you prefer to say *incommensurability*?”<sup>32</sup>

And on Buren who started to visualize what normally is hidden but presupposed in art exhibitions - the limits of museal space - Lyotard comments: “But this paradox is visual, and not linguistic. It consists of making visible what on a visual level (especially in the art institution) is invisible, and this thanks to a simple mark, that of the material”<sup>33</sup>. Can we say that Buren ‘installs’ a passibility by reflecting on the limits of museal space by covering walls with coloured stripes? Does Buren’s interventions in museal and later on in public spaces allow a analysis of sublimity in terms of a passibility: sensitizing us for the limits of our perceptive system?

Given the sensational impact of art, passibility and tautology as reception-aesthetic categories concerning the mutual limiting of media and disciplines might be used as analytic tools. But more important than this analytical instrumentation of Lyotard’s reception-aesthetics is its production of a ‘invisible’ reality: does not he direct our attention to a specific experience that is cultivated within avant-garde art, an experience that is characterized by a aporetic tension and paralogy: the ‘inter’ or ‘in-betweenness’?

### III. Politics

At our juncture in time, more than ever the political and critical reflective power of art may lie in an ‘inter’ or ‘in-between’. If art and life have a suspenseful relationship with each other, if art and politics cannot be mutually reduced, if interactivity between various media within the work trigger a reflective experience that cannot be reduced to one media, what, then, is the ‘ontological’ status of this ‘inter’medial dimension? What is the ‘esse’ of the ‘inter’? What is inter-esse? I finally raise the question as to whether this intermedial tension could be a basis of an experience of self in postmodern times.

Lyotard’s definition of ‘le politique’<sup>34</sup> incorporates the ‘inter’: “By showing that the linking of one phrase onto another is problematic and that this problem is the problem of politics, to set up a philosophical politics apart from the politics of ‘intellectuals’ and of politicians. To bear witness to the differend”<sup>35</sup>.

Given the programmatic character of this text I restrict myself to three tentative orientations for further exploration: a philosophical, a politico-aesthetic and an experiential dimension of the ‘inter’. The question is how we transpose Kants ‘Anspruch auf’ and Brock’s ‘Hang-zum’ to a micropolitical level?

#### 1 Kant’s Inter-esse: a linguistic or ontological approach?

In his famous lecture “Discourse on Thinking” (Was heißt Denken?) (1950) the philosopher of Being Martin Heidegger makes an interesting remark on ‘Interesse’:

“Inter-esse means: being with and between the things (Dinge), being in between and enduring this. However, nowadays ‘Interesse’ deals with what is interesting.

<sup>32</sup> *Les TRANSformateurs, o.c.*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Que peindre? o.c.*, p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> Kants historical-political writings are coined by Lyotard as his 4th critique. See: Henk Oosterling, “Kritiek van de politieke rede: Lyotard’s (af)tastend denken” in: Jacques Tacq (red.) *Een hedendaagse Kant. De invloed van Immanuel Kant op hedendaagse denkers*. Amsterdam 1997, pp. 139-164.

<sup>35</sup> *The Differend, o.c.* p. xiii.

Something that enables someone to be indifferent the next moment, something that is followed by something else that is as indifferent as what preceded it.”<sup>36</sup>

It takes the transformative activity of French post-structuralists or philosophers of differences like Derrida and Lyotard to further explore Heidegger's 'esse' of the 'inter'. Although Heidegger too acknowledges that “language is the house of Being”, to my opinion Lyotard and Derrida draw more radical conclusions: we are no longer “Unterwegs zur Sprache” (On the Way to Language) but we are haunted by it. Language – Lyotard's phrase, Derrida's textuality – is the medium of the inter. One translation of Kant's 'Anspruch' en Brock's 'Hang' is this 'Unterwegs zur': on the way, en route, in transit.

After semiotics Lyotard and Derrida can only situate the 'inter' in language as intertextuality. The 'being' or 'esse' of socio-political relations and of the intra-individual intensities is to a great extent determined by texts and discourses. Not by this or that text, this or that discourse, but by their mutual interactions. Intertextuality does not only constitute social relations between individuals, but also the experience of the self, that is the reflected coherency of one individual. Texts, according to Barthes, invade individuals from all sides. The outside is in, the inside is out: intertextuality is – in Kantian terms - intersubjective and intrasubjective.

Philosophically this inter is not a substance but a movement, a *being*. Derrida's circumscription of his methodological notion 'différance' gives an indication for further interpretation of the inter. In Kantian terms *différance* is a quasi-transcendental operative force, grammatically expressed with the ending 'ance'. This ending “remains undecided *between* the active and the passive”:

“And we will see that which lets itself be designated *différance* is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like a middle voice (la voix moyenne). Saying an operation that is not an operation, an operation that cannot be conceived either as passion or as the action of a subject or an object, or on the basis of the categories of agent or patient, neither on the basis of nor moving towards any of these *terms*.”<sup>37</sup>

This medial of between 'pre'cedes the subject-object relation or the mind-body duality. But, as we have already seen, the problem is that one can only articulate this 'precedence' afterwards in deconstructing those dichotomies: *différance* 'itself' is atemporal and atopic. Only after a reflection it can be inscribed as an experience in time and can it take (its) place.

But is there only discourse or text? Although this can no longer be identified unambiguously, there still remains an 'outside' to language. All discourses need at least 'something' to inscribe themselves upon: Foucault's 'body', Lyotard's and Deleuze/Guattari's libidinal intensities or affectivity. A 'plane of consistency' as Deleuze and Guattari qualify it in *Mille Plateaux* (1980) at the end of their introduction on the 'rhizome'. This rhizome is “made out of plateaus” and a plateau is “always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end”<sup>38</sup>. This 'middle' or milieu is an 'inter' (*entre*), like in the mentioned 'entre-temps':

“The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* (*entre*) things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to another and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement

<sup>36</sup> I cite the German text in: Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Tübingen 1954, p.131.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The différance” in: *Margins of Philosophy*. Brighton/Sussex 1986, p.9.

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalism & Schizophrenia. A thousand Plateaus*. London 1987, p. 21.

that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle”.<sup>39</sup>

Like the *différance* this inter as milieu ‘is’ ‘before’ definite positions or oppositions articulate themselves. The inter is also atemporal and atopic: as a *nowhere* it is now/here as well as no/where.<sup>40</sup>

It is obvious that in a political sense this is not a ‘radical-middle’ à la Tony Blair nor a neo-aristotelian golden middle à la Alisdair MacIntyre or Charles Taylor. This inter has a passible quality. In *What is Philosophy?* (1991) it becomes clear that it can only be articulated in a cooperative enterprise of philosophy and art: philosophy as a creative experiment with concepts needs art practices to convey affects and percepts. As such philosophy can become ‘sensational’. All of this may explain, to a great degree, the recent interest in art - and on the ‘arty’ fringes of architecture - for the philosophical writings of Bataille, Lyotard, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari. This recent *liaison dangereuse* between philosophers and artists reflects an experience in-between conceptuality and affectivity.

## 2 Politico-aesthetic sensibility: the micropolitics of public space

Can this inter be articulated as a politico-aesthetic sensibility? When Buren marks the invisible museal and public space he problematizes our indifference towards a passibility. Is the result an awareness in his spectators of a ‘publicity’ that they took for granted? Contemporary developments within art practices that focus on the public space can be revalued using the inter as a point of departure. Of course the opposition of museal and public space has yet been deconstructed in many ways: new built musea problematize their own spatial structure and sensitize their visitors for an spatial experience that goes beyond the exhibited works of art.

Public space has been transformed: “The notion of ‘space’ has lost its fixed meaning, through the mobility and constant changes of the modern urban environment, and through the highly ‘nomadic’ character of art”<sup>41</sup>. The private-public space dichotomy is deconstructed: not only the inside of the body is made public via medical technology as Donna Haraway has showed by means of her notion of the cyborg, the interiority of the private space is opened up to all sides by massmedia and digital devices. The ‘glocalization’ and the implementation of new media as public space – WWW – give new impulses for the contemplation of ‘intermediality’. In *Mythos Internet* (1997), in which the specific character of the interactivity on the World-Wide Web is explored, Sybille Krämer launches the term ‘intermediality’ though without any explanation. Krämer sees the web - following in the footsteps of French thinkers such as Derrida and Kristeva - as an intertextual medium in which information can be conveyed at the speed of lightning: “This intertextuality is transformed in the electronic network in an ‘intermediality’”<sup>42</sup>.

The increasing integration of new media into socio-political relations and the discussions on the similarity between the human brain and the computer raise, at the least, the question of the status of the inter. The discussion on the political function of digital art - *Eyebeam* as an extension of the Documenta X net discussion – is haunted by the idea of a new *Gesamt* in terms of Marshall McLuhan’s Global Village. What ‘is’ a virtual community, if not

<sup>39</sup> Idem, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> See: *What is Philosophy? o.c.*, p.100. See also: Henk Oosterling, ‘No(w)here as the Ideal Place. On the Relations between Concepts, Percepts and Affects’, in: *Art & Design* nr.42, Theme issue: The Ideal Place, 1995, pp.20-26.

<sup>41</sup> See: *Place Position Presentation Public*. In: Gevers (ed.), Maastricht 1992, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> Sybille Krämer, “Vom Mythos ‘Künstliche Intelligenz’ zum Mythos ‘Künstliche Kommunikation’ oder: Ist eine nicht-antropomorphe Beschreibung von Internet-Interaktionen möglich?” in: *Mythos Internet*. Stefan Münker & Alexander Roesler (eds.), Frankfurt a/M 1997, p. 100.

a constantly changing politico-aesthetic network that incorporates fiction – role playing, chatboxes – and suggests a *sensus communis*?

But there is still another explorative route to be taken: can we, given the expansion and acceleration, redefine the relation between art and public space? At least four options are available: the traditional option of works of art in public space, public space as a work of art that implies the integrative function of architecture and cityplanning, the art of public spacing that is a more sophisticated implementation of grand scale manifestation with for instance a multicultural character. The fourth option is probably the most interesting because the whole categorical system of modern aesthetics starts shifting: the working of art as public space. The aim of this working of art is the interaction between a specific location, a global orientation, the inhabitants and the artists. The latter facilitates the process and in doing this his autonomy is restricted to a initializing autonomy. Art becomes a interactive politico-aesthetic processing, in a philosophical sense comparable with Derrida's *différance* and Lyotard's *sensibilizing*. Perhaps this processing articulates the in-betweenness in a more subtle and interesting way than the traditional art in public space. It is not emancipation that is the final goal, but a sensitizing. It is not edu-tainment or info-tainment, but a selfreflective entertainment.

### **3 Het experiential inter-esse: *sensus communis* and aesthetics of existence**

Are the above mentioned notions of 'aporia', 'intermediality' and 'interesse', by means of which I tried to reformulate the Kantian aesthetics in a Lyotardian sense, are these notions applicable on an existential and experiential level? Or to state it more bluntly: do multimedial and interdisciplinary interactivity, does this politico-aesthetic sensitizing make its 'consumers' more sensitive to a life in the in-between? By now it should be clear that, for an intermedial existence this sensitization does not require docile, passive consumption but a high degree of participation - selfreflective interactivity and intermediality – that can be induced by artistic processes.

According to Peter Sloterdijk we are 'Zwischenmensen': people living (in) the in-between. But between what? Between modernity and what will come after it? Between an implausible world and an envisioned paradise? Between art and politics? Between form and content? Between understanding and sensibility? Between pleasure and displeasure? At first glance it looks like this in-betweenness is simply provisional, ready to be transformed into a definitive 'new' identity. In my opinion this is too linear and rational a view of the in-between or inter. The inter as micropolitical experiential sensibility balances between sheer presence and a kind of absence. It is a movement in which positions inevitably have to be articulated in the awareness that they are principally provisional. The aporetic tension appears to be a moving, being or flux that cannot be reduced to the positions that allow us to take a stand or make a point. Kant's *sensus communis* can be translated in terms of sensibility and passibility:

"*Sensus communis* isn't *intellectio communis*, *Gesunde Verstand*, good sense, sound understanding, that of communication through the mediation of the concept. Even less is it *intellectio communitatis*, the intelligence of a community. It's a question of a community which is unintelligent still ... proceeding without intellect... This *sensus* and this *communis* appear to be ungraspable at their exposition. It is the concept's other".<sup>43</sup>

Lyotard does not try to find new ground for the *sensus communis*, he 'grounds' it in an experience that is mind and matter. However, "it has to be said clearly: the *sensus* doesn't give

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<sup>43</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, "Sensus communis" in: *Judging Lyotard*. Andrew Benjamin (ed.), London 1992, p. 1.

rise to an experiencing, in the Kantian sense".<sup>44</sup> The experiential quality of *sensus* is non-conceptual. As such it requires another notion of time and space. *Sensus* as affectivity implies interactive materiality as well as an unspoken surplus, because, according to Lyotard, *sensus communis* is no longer tracable by systematically analysing judgements within the coherence of consciousness as Kant did. It is rather an affective receptiveness, a passibility. Maybe it is similar to what Jacques Derrida characterized as "non-passive endurance". *Sensus communis* in a technical sense has a 'pathological' character.

The "communis" does no longer presuppose a project. It is neither a regulative idea nor a distant political goal. The projectiveness of a "communis" is only sensed and can only be rationalized and finalized afterwards. Only in retrospect, *sensus* is transformed to reflectivity and hopefully shared as a judgement. As such Lyotard's *sensus* as a capacity to judge is also an in-between: "A go-between in the process of coming and going, transmitting no message. Being the message. A pure movement which compares, which afterwards we put under house arrest in a seat called *sensus*".<sup>45</sup>

In the Kantian perspective this capacity mediates between transcendental faculties of knowing, willing and feeling or between understanding, reason and *Einbildungskraft*. In Lyotard's perspective it is an process of coming and going, a movement that animates the subject that he finally prefers to call "la pensée-corps", the thinking or sensible body. This *sensus*, as we have seen, 'precedes' any temporality in the Kantian sense.

Is the present selfreflective consistency, coherency and continuity of individual lives – Descartes' *cogito*, Kant's subjectivity, Lyotard's sensible body - pre-eminently reflected as an in-between? Does intermediality make the audience more sensitive to this experience? Perhaps Foucault's criticism of the western subject gives an indication. His criticism culminates into what he coins: an 'aesthetics of existence'. Subjectivity is no longer an unshakable universal fundament, but a design or stylization of a collective existence that has to be reshaped and rephrased again and again. This collective practice is constituted by an alert consciousness of the absence of any metaphysical, religious or ideological *Gesamt* or Great Narrative. It is a process of becoming wherein authenticity has become a regulative fiction that can only exist as a collective politico-aesthetic practice. Let me finish with a citation of Alessandro Ferrara's *Reflective Authenticity* (1998) where the Habermasian perspective is transgressed and the affinity with French thinkers of differences is undeniable:

"Finally, the *authenticity-thesis* cannot accommodate a domesticated view of aesthetic as a sphere specialized in expressiveness. Rather, it takes the aesthetic as a realm in which a specialized sphere of cultivated expressiveness coexists with a "principle of validity" whose relevance encompasses the whole spectrum of decentered Reason, including science, morality, law and politics".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Idem, p.3.

<sup>45</sup> Idem, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Alessandro Ferrara, *Reflective Authenticity. Rethinking the Project of Modernity*. London 1998, p.18/9. Along this line the problematic of inter-esse and *sensus communis* can be explored more extensively. Especially notions as 'interpassivity' developed by Slavoy Zizek in and 'inter-esse' and 'sensus communis' developed in the last writings of Hannah Arendt in *Judging* and *Vita activa*.