

Resonance

*A Sociology of Our Relationship
to the World*

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central spheres of resonance – nature and art – come into contact with, affect, and mutually reinforce each other. The latter also represents a distinct, genuinely modern sphere of resonance, to which we now turn our attention.

3 The Power of Art

It has often been remarked that art, in its emancipation as an autonomous sphere, has functionally taken the place of religion in modern society. This is undoubtedly true in a number of important respects, though it pertains less to our need to *make sense of life* – art, unlike religion, cannot provide a cohesive cognitive horizon of meaning or blueprint of the world – than to our *desire for resonance*. Art – almost simultaneously with nature, and in a very similar way – has become one of the most important spheres of resonance in modernity, gradually coming to penetrate all aspects of everyday life.

As I have sought to show, the belief and institutionalized experience that we are faced with an entity that is capable of speaking with “its own voice” is a constitutive property of any axis of resonance and thus of resonant relationships. One indication for the establishment of such a belief and experience in the field of art is the fact that over the course of the eighteenth century, *the arts*, plural – e.g. the *septem artes liberales* – gave way to *art* as a collective singular. As in the case of nature and history, which I will come back to in the next section, here entirely heterogeneous practices and phenomena are transformed into a collective subject that can *demand* things of us and at the same time *command* power over us. Art touches and moves the inmost souls of modern human beings as recipients like nothing else – and commands us as producers, i.e. as artists or creators of art, by asserting and enforcing its own laws against all instrumental, political, or economic reason. From this power, from these dictates and commandments of art, emerges the modern imperative of creativity and originality, which, like the religious dictates of earlier epochs, now penetrates every aspect of (late) modern subjectivity.⁶⁶ In this way, capacity for aesthetic resonance has taken the place of capacity for religious resonance as a collectively binding social demand.

Establishing a social sphere of resonance requires, first, that a subject area or segment of world be conceived as capable of speaking with its own voice and functioning as a source of strong evaluations and, second, that it be institutionalized and made experienceable through corresponding cultural practices. The claim that art constitutes a constitutive sphere of resonance for modernity must therefore be verified with respect to both of these dimensions. How

does modern culture conceptualize the *power of art*, and how does it allow us to experience this power?

Providing a comprehensive answer to these questions would require a fully elaborated philosophy and sociology of art, which I neither can nor wish to present here. A cursory look at predominant theories of art and aesthetic practices should, however, suffice to legitimize my claim that art represents a central sphere of resonance in modern life. The belief that in the process of creating art, artists draw on or are inspired by sources that exceed their own creative powers did not first emerge with the Romantics. As Christoph Menke shows in his book *Die Kraft der Kunst* (The Power of Art),⁶⁷ it can be found even in Plato's philosophy of art,⁶⁸ particularly in the Socratic dialogue with Ion, in which Socrates sees in artistic forms the influence of the gods or the muse.

The belief that the creation of a work of art requires the “breath” of a muse, of genius, of spirit, or of God – i.e. that it requires a *source of inspiration* – has continued to operate from the Age of Romanticism up through the present day, and it still satisfies two essential criteria of a resonant relationship. First, the idea that art can demand something from the artist even against his or her desires and aspirations, understanding and intentions, lives on particularly in the biographical writings, artistic statements, and self-conceptions of artists themselves – not only in the realm of high culture, but also and especially in the arena of popular culture. *I wanted to record a commercial album, but I couldn't do it. The music commanded me to leave my band and start over again with just my guitar, even if this meant disappointing the expectations of my record label, the public, and the press and giving up the money, fame, and perks of the rock star life.* This is the standard narrative of countless rock musicians, particularly “frontmen” who have left their bands to begin their careers anew on less-traveled paths.⁶⁹ Wrestling with the *demands of art* is of course also a constitutive element of the self-conception of many novelists and poets, composers, painters and sculptors, etc.

Second, the modern conception of art, much more so than that of religion or nature, is rooted in the belief that the element of artistry is essentially *inaccessible*. Contrary to the notion that art is the product of “ability,” of trained and practiced technique and corresponding skill, the modern understanding of art fundamentally resists on the idea that art exceeds the accessibility of skill and technique. Hence the “true” artist is not only a brilliant virtuoso and technician but must also be possessed of the soul or spirit of art itself. And this ensoulment or inspiration can of course always be lost or simply fail to materialize; by no means can it be forcibly acquired through practice.⁷⁰

This *inaccessibility* is manifested not only on the productive side, but also on the receptive side of aesthetic self-conception. A person

who isn't in the right "mood" or doesn't have an "eye" or "ear" for it is incapable of grasping or comprehending the depth – or, more precisely, the particular individual voice – of a work of art (whether a concerto, poem, painting, or sculpture). An element of the inaccessible adheres even to the appreciation and enjoyment of art.

The nature of the source of this inaccessible something, which can suddenly and unexpectedly "call upon" us both as producers and as consumers of art – e.g. when we find ourselves standing rapt before a painting or sculpture, like Rilke before the torso of Apollo that commanded him to change his life, or when a poem or melody enters into our life like an irresistible force⁷¹ – remains utterly unclear and ambiguous; in my view, it represents a peculiar gap in the modern conception of art. As ubiquitous as testimonies of artistic epiphanies are, what exactly is manifested in a work of art remains notoriously hazy and ill defined.⁷²

Christoph Menke has convincingly suggested that according to modern thought, this source is no longer to be sought in an extra-human muse, in divine winged horses (Pegasus) or Aeolian harps, or among the gods or spirits, but rather is a power that resides within us as human beings. Yet the source of this power must be pre- or extra-subjective, precisely because it remains inaccessible to us. The *subject*, Menke writes, is the thinking and acting product of discipline and training and has acquired techniques and abilities, skills and assets,⁷³ but in the artistic act (by which Menke means primarily the creation of art) the subject encounters a force and is spoken to by a power that turns out to be distinct from and resistant to it. "This aesthetic conception of art is based on the experience that in art, a force emerges which drives the subject outside of itself, back from itself, above and beyond itself, a force that is unconscious, a 'dark power' (Herder)."⁷⁴ The inability of the artistic subject to master or control this power is what led Thomas Mann in *Doctor Faustus* to describe music as "demonic territory." As Peter Sloterdijk notes, this demon is "a power that responds to invocation. Anyone who calls the dark spirit by name has already invoked him, and the invoking person should be aware that he can be confronted with an authority that will be stronger than he is."⁷⁵

If there can thus be no doubt that the creative artist is confronted with an authority that speaks to him (that lies within him as an individual, but not as a subject), it also seems just as certain that what we understand as a work of art is not simply the voice of this demon or extra-subjective force. Rather, art emerges from the conflict or conversation between the capable and forming subject, who has at her disposal instruments, knowledge of form, and expressive abilities, and the independent source that confronts her. Art is a precarious call and response between these two authorities which the creator experiences as struggle, and she is always in danger

here either of being overpowered and losing her own creative voice or of losing her powerful source of inspiration. Menke, drawing on Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, thus sums up: "Art exists only where delirium and consciousness, the play of forces and the building of forms work together and against each other. [...] The artist is divided in herself, split between confident self-conscious ability and delirious unleashed power."⁷⁶

If this interpretation is correct, then the event of art is nothing other than an event of resonance: a precarious responsive relationship between two independent voices that are constantly contradicting, often diverging from, and transforming each other in creative struggle, meeting all the criteria of a resonant relationship as elaborated in Chapter V.3. This means that it can also fail in any or all of the four ways also described there: through too much openness or too much rigidity on the part of the capable subject, or through the creative impulse being too narrowly defined or too vague and ill defined. Because art in this sense is an uncontrollable balancing act, it remains inaccessible and improbable,⁷⁷ it can fail, and the creative process is often experienced and described as a tale of suffering and woe.

This productive, art-generating resonance event is duplicated or reflected, according to the modern conception of art, in the more strongly receptive act of appreciating or enjoying art. "Temples of art" in fact represent paradigmatic, cultic spaces for ritualized experiences of resonance in modern society. In museums, theaters, and concert halls, as well as in cinemas and other comparable spaces, modern subjects repeatedly seek and find moments in which their understanding of themselves and the world is shaken and made fluid, in which they are touched, gripped, and moved. Whether the art forms involved belong to high culture or popular culture is immaterial. That proponents of one are inclined to discredit a priori the experience of fans of the other confirms only that the development of a resonant relationship depends not on the object as such, but rather on whether subject and object, or the two entities involved in this relationship, are a good fit – and that cultural practices, as ever, are fertile ground for struggles for distinction. This of course does not mean that subjects, as consumers of art in the sense described above, cannot confuse being sentimentally affected or sensually overwhelmed for resonance, or even simulate resonance, perhaps without even being aware of it. The former, as I sought to show with Plessner, occurs when subjects ultimately react only to themselves, to their own emotions; they are not existentially *addressed*. Resonance is merely simulated, meanwhile, particularly when a desperate, collectively reinforced desire to be emotionally affected (perhaps because one purchased a highly sought-after ticket at an enormous price) creates an *echo chamber* that occludes the

absence of fluidity and adaptive transformation. This can of course happen at the Met in New York or La Scala in Milan just as well as at Germany's Wacken Open Air and Rock am Ring music festivals. But the quest for an experience beyond mere entertainment, in which one is addressed authoritatively by a strange power and transformed by the encounter, continues to be a driving force, including in the culture industry, and the awareness that such experiences cannot be manufactured in a controlled manner and are not guaranteed, that they cannot be forced, that they are not only inaccessible, but also rare and unlikely, may well be a fundamental aspect of art's appeal.

What Rilke expresses in his poetic treatment of his encounter with an archaic torso of Apollo – *You must change your life*⁷⁸ – Paul Valéry describes in his inaugural address on poetics at the French Academy as follows:

On the one hand, we feel that the work which affects us is so precisely attuned to us that we cannot imagine it existing in any other form. In certain especially satisfying cases we even feel that we are in some profound sense transforming ourselves, in order to become the person whose sensitivity is capable of such fullness of delight and immediate apprehension. But we also feel, no less strongly and with an entirely different organ of perception, that the phenomenon which induces and cultivates this condition in us, allowing us to sense its power, somehow could not be, almost should not be. It belongs to the category of the improbable.⁷⁹

Rob Trujillo, bassist for the heavy metal band Metallica, articulates this same experience in an article for the British magazine *Prog* in which he describes attending a concert featuring the cultishly adored prog rock musician Steven Wilson:

I came down absolutely not knowing what to expect and I came out of there a different person! It was really amazing and inspiring, and it touched a place in me creatively that was really powerful. [...] When I saw *The Raven* [*That Refused to Sing*] live, I had tears in my eyes, it was so powerful. Steven certainly opened that door for me again.⁸⁰

Similar reports about books, films, paintings, or musical works that *changed my life* are part of the basic semantic arsenal of modern subjectivity, attesting to the fact that aesthetic resonances are an inseparable part of its structure. An aesthetic encounter, being addressed or spoken to by a work of art, is the privileged, predominantly institutionalized, ritualized form in which modern subjects experience vertical resonance in the sense of the inaccessible but meaningful voice of the *Other*. But in what exactly does the structure of this experience consist? *What* is it that is experienced here?

The various positions of aesthetic theory are not at all in agreement on this point. As Menke notes, these positions can be distinguished by their answer to the question of whether the experience of art can actually produce *happiness* in the sense of the enhancement, fulfillment, or even perfection of human life, or whether it can offer only an unfulfillable *promise* of such happiness.⁸¹ According to the latter interpretation, the experience of beauty suggests a joy that cannot be had or experienced in real life; in this case (per Stendhal and Schopenhauer, at least) beauty is only an illusion. "To posit the unity of happy and beauty is to understand that true happiness exists only in beholding the beautiful and *not in living life*."⁸² In fact, it seems to me that it can hardly be disputed that beauty is not a quality of the world or of works of art, not part of the "order of the real."⁸³ The experience of the beautiful rather denotes a certain relationship between subject and object.⁸⁴

Unlike Menke, however, I do *not* believe that this relationship represents "the joy of the overflowing of our practices under the condition of their [playful] suspension,"⁸⁵ whereby said practice succeeds only in the realm of illusion. Rather, I propose that *what we experience as beauty is the expression of the possibility of a resonant relationship to the world, a possible mode of being-in-the-world in which subject and world respond to each other*. Beauty denotes a form of relation. And even if the concrete forms of aesthetic experience change over time and across cultures, and are received differently by different individuals,⁸⁶ wherever subjects experience beauty, they always experience the possibility of a successful relationship to the world and thus *real happiness*. Yet because this relationship does not describe their lived, quotidian, practical/active relationship to the world, it also remains at the same time an *illusion* that generates sorrow and longing. As Menke rightly notes, "[T]here is [...] no experience of beauty in which the joy of fulfillment is not mixed with sorrow over its unreality."⁸⁷ The supposed opposition between beauty and happiness can therefore be resolved thus: Beauty is happiness, because it is pure resonance – and it remains an illusion, because human beings' relationship to the world as a whole can never become pure resonance.

As I sought to show in the passages above on the effect of music, however, what is specific to art is that, beyond the experience of pure resonance, it is also capable of recreating, giving expression to, and thus making palpable the whole spectrum of historically and culturally possible relationships to the world. What drives modern subjects to visit museums and movie theaters, concert halls and opera houses, and to read novels, poems, and plays as if their lives depended on it is the fact that these activities allow them, at least at a pathic level, to test out and rehearse in a playful, exploratory way widely different modes of relating to the world – solitude

and abandonment, melancholy, attachment, exuberance, anger and rage, hate and love – and thereby moderate and modify their own relationships to the world.

Aesthetic resonance is thus an experimental field for adaptively transforming different models of relating to the world. These find their purest expression – uninfluenced and undistorted by specific content – in instrumental music as well as in poetry that deals with existential relationships between the world and the self rather than depicting any particular activities or interactions.⁸⁸ *Dance* meanwhile also makes potential modes of relating to the world immediately visible and physically palpable, often without touching the level of meaning; here the body itself becomes a resonant space. Sounding out the possibilities and limits of different relationships to the world is likewise the subject of the great *Bildungsromane* or coming-of-age novels.⁸⁹

Hence experiences of resonance and alienation in all three dimensions (vertical, horizontal, and diagonal relationships) frequently constitute the *theme* of many artistic works, whether explicitly or implicitly. Longing for resonant relationships to the world and the processing of often extreme experiences of alienation are the major driving force behind both the production and reception of art. This can be seen, for example, in Franz Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*), a congenial setting of poems by Wilhelm Müller, the enduring popularity of which in my view essentially rests on the fact that here music and text assiduously negotiate the opposition between a resonant relationship to the world, which shines forth in images of love and springtime, and abandonment in a hard, cold, pitiless, and relationless world, expressed in images of faithlessness and winter. The song "Frühlingstraum" ("Dreams of Spring") is emblematic of this; its first three stanzas read as follows:

I dreamed of colorful flowers,
As they bloom in May;
I dreamed of green meadows
And merry birdcalls.
And as the cocks crowed,
My eyes awakened:
It was dark and cold,
And the ravens shrieked from the roof.

But on the window panes,
Who painted the leaves there?
Do you laugh at the dreamer
Who saw flowers in winter?⁹⁰

No particularly bold interpretation is necessary here in order to identify the painter of leaves and flowers here as art itself. It is

art that makes possible the experience of a resonant – blooming, expressive – counter-world in a real world that is otherwise frozen and silent.

Here a mute, alienated form of relating to the world defines the real world of the winter wanderer, while the dream of resonance remains a longed-for illusion. The structure of aesthetic experience elaborated above – i.e. the shining forth of the possibility of a resonant relationship that does not correspond to one's actual relationship to the world – thus in a way becomes the poem's theme, and doubly so for the listener, as what she hears thematically and what she experiences aesthetically also form a responsive or resonant relationship. The resonance structure of aesthetic experience is thus extremely complex.

Resonant relationships in art also emerge by virtue of the fact that a work of art of whatever kind is capable of touching and affecting those who receive it. Just as in prayer or in experiencing nature a peculiar, characteristic axis of resonance forms from the fact that the praying person turns both inward and outward, immersing himself in himself and at the same time addressing an external *You* (the actual existence of which is irrelevant in the present context), or from the fact that the voice of nature seems to connect our own inner depths with "outer" nature, so too does a work of art – an image, a statue, a poem, a film, a piece of music – establish a connection between a constructed phenomenon of the external world and the inner world of the person who perceives it.

In fact, particularly in the case of music, it is almost impossible to say whether it exists inside or outside of us. It is both in space and in the listener.⁹¹ The resonance that emerges between work and recipient is primarily established independent of the work's content – not only its meaning, but also the relationship to the world that it expresses. To listen to Schubert's *Winterreise* or Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (or to immerse oneself in Edward Munch's *The Scream*) in a mode of dispositional resonance is therefore to experience two modes of relating to the world at once. One is touched, gripped, moved precisely by the forms of existential alienation that are aesthetically generated and negotiated here. One thus experiences both resonance *and* alienation, not blended into some hybrid form, but in a relation of mutual escalation.⁹² The deeper, more "authentic," more believable, and more compelling is the alienation here depicted – or, better yet, modeled – the greater is the resonant effect.

Even simple pop-culture productions take advantage of this inter-relationship. Recall Beinda Carlisle's "La Luna," cited in Chapter II.6. The main part of the song, blissfully resonant and filled with romantic lyrical images and trembling minor chords expressing that the singer is in love and the *heavens filled with the sound of violins*, is followed by a musical shift, a key change one half step up from

F# minor to G major, the music here becoming more intense and "hardened." This is further amplified by a textual shift from past to present tense, the singer's love having come to an abrupt end, leaving only a mute, alienated relationship to the world: "Now I walk along the streets of Marselle / The winter sky is cold and gray / And I don't know why I left you that day / And I don't know where you are."⁹³ Thus in this commercial pop-culture product, as in Schubert's high-culture *Winterreise*, a real present experience of alienation is juxtaposed with an aesthetic promise of resonance and memory, and it is this very juxtaposition that gives the song its intensity.

Musical and textual elements can thus interact with and against each other in various contrasting ways to produce resonant effects. When Leonard Cohen and Jeff Buckley, each of whose recordings of the former's "Hallelujah" has by now deeply moved multiple generations of listeners, arouse the desire for mysterious deep resonance in the song's very first line – "I heard there was a secret chord / That David played and it pleased the Lord" – only to immediately follow this with a repudiation – "But you don't really care for music, do you?" – the disclaimer only serves to intensify the resonating listener's longing. Yes, yes, *I do*, they want to reply. And as the song reaches its climax – "And it's not a cry that you hear at night / It's not somebody who's seen the light / It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah" – it arouses in them both resonance and alienation simultaneously.

The "resonance of alienation" thus produced generates the aforementioned double emotional structure of pleasurable pain or painful pleasure, often resulting in tears and only really experienced in an aesthetic relationship to the world. The grief involved here pertains to the alienation experienced, which may express the recipient's dominant mode of relating to the world in escalatory modernity, while the pleasure applies to the simultaneous experience of resonance, which overcomes this alienation according to its structure, thus allowing the possibility of resonant relationship to the world to shine through. Theodor W. Adorno articulates a highly similar idea in his *Aesthetic Theory*:

Although artworks offer themselves to observation, they at the same time disorient the observer who is held at the distance of a mere spectator; to him is revealed the truth of the work as if it must also be his own. The instant of this transition is art's highest. It rescues subjectivity, even subjective aesthetics, by the negation of subjectivity. The subject, convulsed by art, has real experiences; by the strength of insight into the artwork as artwork, these experiences are those in which the subject's petrification in his own subjectivity dissolves and the narrowness of his self-positedness is revealed. If in artworks the

subject finds his true happiness in the moment of being convulsed, this is a happiness that is counterposed to the subject and thus its instrument is tears, which also express the grief over one's own mortality. Kant sensed something of this in his aesthetic of the sublime, which he excluded from art.⁹⁴

The resonant effect here is of course strengthened by the proposition of horizontal, narrative resonance. Lovers of *The Wall* or *Winterreise* tend to empathize and identify with Pink, the protagonist of the former, or the first-person speaker of the latter; both overcome their own existential detachment and alienation from the world by encountering in music an Other with which they resonate.⁹⁵ A fragile, always precarious and temporary axis of resonance based precisely on the resonancelessness of the world is thus established between artist or performer and listener. This becomes particularly evident through the image of the hurdy-gurdy man in the final song of *Winterreise*:

There behind the town
Stands a hurdy-gurdy man
And with stiff fingers
He turns what he can.

Barefoot on the ice
He teeters back and forth
And his small plate
Is always empty.

No one wants to hear him,
No one looks at him,
And the dogs snarl
Around the old man.

And he lets it all happen,
Whatever happens,
Turns, and his hurdy-gurdy
Never stops.

Curious old man!
Shall I go with you?
Do you want to turn
Your hurdy-gurdy to my songs?⁹⁶

The hurdy-gurdy man can do nothing but send his music out into the world, yet he finds no response. His bare feet on the ice, the snarling dogs, the empty plate, the townspeople's refusal even to look at him all make the ultimately lethal material and social repulsion of the world almost physically palpable in Schubert's setting. The implied

triangle between composer or performer, poetic speaker, and listener thus forms a musical triangle of resonance against the world, against the predominant form of relating to the world.

This again establishes why listening to abysmally sad music is more likely to lift people out of depression than push them into it. Indeed, only from this perspective does it make sense why sad music is far better suited to this task than "cheery" music. Depressed people know that they are really in a bad state when *no* art or aesthetic experience is capable of touching them any longer – when their relationship to the world has become so ossified that it can no longer be modulated, modified, or transformed.

Such "hardening" can otherwise be eased, even if only for a moment, by the brief emergence of an aesthetic relationship to the world, an aesthetically generated momentary glimpse of a resonant mode of being-in-the-world. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann's poem "Einen jener klassischen" ("One of Those Classics") exemplifies this experience.⁹⁷ Here again, the real situation of the speaker is an alienated, mute relationship to the world. In the "cursed, hazy deadness of Cologne," shortly after the stores have closed, when even refilled social interactions come to a standstill, a solitary man wanders a "street that no one loves and leaves [everyone] breathless" and passes by a "dark tavern." But then comes "a surprise," "almost a miracle," a momentary transformation of his relationship to the world induced by the sounds of "one of those classic black tangos" emerging from the tavern's open door. Once more, there is a doubling of the structure of aesthetic experience, as ideally what the reader experiences in his or her reception of the poem is also the theme of the work itself.⁹⁸

Art is not only a sphere of resonance in terms of the production and reception of *works*, however. Resonance manifests just as frequently and intensely as a dynamic process in the carrying out of aesthetic practices. This applies primarily to artistic – theater, dance, or concert – *performances*. Resonant relationships emerge here when a *spark* is felt between the artists themselves as well as between the artists and their audience, producing a collective resonance event. As noted above, nearly all musicians are familiar with those moments when their own volition recedes and they seem to follow a "power," working at once within them and without them, that creates a connection and lets them know intuitively what to do. Most concert- and theatergoers likewise know such moments of transformation, when they no longer need to concentrate in order to follow the music or the plot, when they themselves in a way spontaneously become part of the aesthetic event. A form of self-efficacy is experienced in such moments, as there is something *at work* here, at least in the heart and mind of the recipient. These two forms of collective resonance are often mutually contagious,

as resonance among the artists is transferred to the audience and vice versa.

While these axes of resonance realized through aesthetic practices are, strictly speaking, not vertical, but horizontal in nature, they consistently connect the work of art and social relationships – although perhaps in different ways and under changing dominant conditions. Here may lie a key difference between high-culture and pop-culture aesthetic experiences. When the world-famous German baritone Christian Gerhaher sings (say, Schubert's *Winterreise*), he generates tremendous resonant effects not by synchronizing *his own* feelings with those of the audience, but by expressing as perfectly and genuinely as possible the relationship to the world manifested in *the music*, along with the experiences associated with it, thus causing it to vibrate in the listener as well. At least, this is the view Gerhaher espouses in an interview for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* with journalist Tobias Haberl. Asked how he manages not to become overwhelmed by his own feelings on stage, Gerhaher answers: "Very easily. It's not an issue for me. [...] I do allow feelings to flow through me – provided they come from the piece and not from me. My feelings are unimportant. They are even disruptive [...], because the point is the idea expressed in the music, not my relationship to it."⁹⁹ Shortly thereafter, he adds: "When I listen to Bach's music, I sense in every note the desideratum of an eternal truth. [...] Music can never be completely comprehended. It's not about unambiguous clarity, but about sharing in an idea."¹⁰⁰ By "idea," Gerhaher here means different forms of relating to the world, as can be seen from his answer to the question of whether music is consoling:

I don't listen to music either to be consoled or to be entertained. The music of Bach, Beethoven, Schubert – these are not amusements. [...] It's about death, loss, solitude, the absence of ideal perfection, problematic mental and emotional states, and deficiencies that I find interesting, and not necessarily because they are near to my own life. It is often music which produces the shock that leads one to long for consolation – and miraculously, it can also deliver that consolation.¹⁰¹

For Gerhaher, music is about contemplating, comprehending, and classifying relationships to the world like melancholy and sorrow – this is the source of aesthetic happiness. According to this conception of art, a triangle of resonance is formed between work, artist, and public when they agree in their perception and understanding of a particular figure molded into aesthetic form.

Generating resonance in the other direction, meanwhile, seems to be an established, perhaps even dominant principle and strong motivation in rock music. Here the desire for and the effort to create horizontal resonance, a vibrant and sustainable connection

between artist and audience, determines the form and shape of the artistic work. This is expressed succinctly in the autobiography of Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards, who explicitly describes this relationship as a resonant relationship, an unspooling of axes of resonance:

What is it that makes you want to write songs? In a way you want to stretch yourself into other people's hearts. You want to plant yourself there, or at least get a resonance, where other people become a bigger instrument than the one you're playing. It becomes almost an obsession to touch other people. To write a song that is remembered and taken to heart is a connection, a touching of bases. A thread that runs through all of us. A stab to the heart. Sometimes I think songwriting is about tightening the heartstrings as much as possible without bringing on a heart attack.¹⁰²

Following this conception of artistic practice, the resonant relationship between artist and recipient defines even the form and color of the work, which gives shape to a collectively experienced relationship to the world, a contemporary, collective form of experiencing the world. Where performance practices allow this – e.g. in so-called “jam sessions” consisting of long improvisations – the dynamic of the interactive event can even be directly expressed in the aesthetic material.

What can be gained for a critique of relations of resonance from this definition of the structure of aesthetic experience? Insofar as our interpretation is correct that what art does is to allow the possibility of resonant relationships to shine forth in the midst of alienated conditions, then the widespread aestheticization of the late modern world could well be understood as part of a desperate effort to at least cover over the petrified conditions of this world with Schubertian frost flowers, if not quite to make them “dance,” as Marx hoped.¹⁰³ The attempt to make all surfaces colorful and musical by filling even parking garages, elevators, concourses, and shopping malls with the sounds of sighing violins would then at least *also* be an expression of increasing despair over prevailing, institutionally implemented forms of relating to the world.

This desperation is particularly evident in the now pervasive practice of systematically closing off our senses from the world as soon as we walk out the door and enter the public sphere. Our eyes are lowered and fixated on the colorful animated surfaces of our phone screens, while the earphones hastily shoved into our ears are meant to facilitate experiences or inklings of resonance that have nothing to do with the physical and social relationships of the real world. Such behavior makes it abundantly clear that we systematically and habitually expect *no* resonance from the world's actual surfaces: the

people, things, spaces, and relationships that make up our actual lifeworld. We close ourselves off in order to make ourselves insensitive to repulsion and capable of enduring indifference. Yet through these forms of aestheticization, we risk creating our own “echo chambers” that systematically obstruct resonance by foreclosing possible encounters with the vexing, contradictory Other.

It would be premature, however, to reduce art as a sphere of resonance to such a purely compensatory function in our analysis of (late) modernity. For one, aesthetic experiences keep our senses open to the possibility of a different way of relating to the world. This may be why so many modern artistic productions strike us as forbidding, alienating, repulsive, and disturbing at first glance. In order to be able to offer a believable promise of resonance, they must begin with the *petrified conditions* of modernity themselves; they cannot deny or falsely reconcile them. This basic insight of Adorno's could well serve – entirely against his own intentions and convictions – to explain or justify forms of musical expression such as punk or heavy metal. These genres' often excessively brutal aesthetics, the gloomy lyrics of existential alienation, distorted guitars, and relentlessly thundering rhythms, initially reflect only mute, cold, rigid, and repulsive relationships to the world. But a closer listen not infrequently reveals time-honored classical harmonies and chord progressions behind the “noise.” Behind punk's furious singing and particularly metal's walls of guitars, we seem to be able to hear the idea, the promise of other ways of relating to the world. The difference between punk and metal is that the former hints at this idea only *ex negativo*, through furious protest against alienation, while the latter frequently seeks, through erupting, transcendent guitar solos or melodic interpolations, to allow something like a promise of healing to shine through.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the distortions of the guitars and amplifiers are precisely expressions of an attempt to force resonances in a world gone deaf and numb. As the American punk intellectual Henry Rollins describes his experience of the power of music at the annual heavy metal musical festival in Wacken, Germany: “Once it gets to you, you don't get un-got. That's it. The music speaks to you as your next breath speaks to you. It is humanity at its highest point.”¹⁰⁵ The demonic power of invocation through music discussed above in connection with Thomas Mann, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Peter Sloterdijk is still celebrated today in millions of ways even and especially in these genres. The commodifying institutionalization of this power tends to undermine it, however, by making it accessible, a phenomenon to which I will return shortly.

Late modern subjects – particularly those with educated middle-class backgrounds – have also long since discovered the power of art as an arena for modulating and exploring relationships to the world

in an actively appropriative sense. They paint and make pottery, play music and write poetry, and especially dance and sing in order to feel sensory, bodily, cognitive, and social resonances, to be able to hear their pre-subject voice and so enter into dialogue with an inaccessible Other – even if it is *their own Other*. We have seen, in the section above on the voice as a medium of resonance (Chapter II.4), why the practice of *choral singing* in particular is well suited to activating axes of resonance in all three dimensions at once. It generates physical or bodily resonances in space, establishes horizontal resonances among the singers, and as an aesthetic practice is vertically anchored. Such interferences and mutual reinforcements are also part of dancing or playing music together. Trained dancers and musicians have a fine sense for when they have successfully established a responsive relationship with their collaborators, or when their axes of resonance have fallen mute or been obstructed. In the latter case, there may well be no technique capable of opening these axes. Fundamental inaccessibility remains a constitutive feature of resonance events even in art. Experiences of alienation can be intensified in collective artistic practices not least for this reason, if physical, cognitive, or social indifferences or repulsions predominate.

In the realm of aesthetics, as in that of experiencing nature, there is always the risk of undermining the possibility of encounter with a fundamentally inaccessible Other, i.e. of genuine resonance, by commodifying it and making it limitlessly accessible. This applies to both the productive and the receptive side of art. At the beginning of this chapter, I drew on Christoph Menke to describe the creation of art as a precarious call and response in the form of a struggle between subjective ability and a *pre-subjective*, often dark and intoxicating *Other*. While modern smartphones all have apps that allow every user to become a composer, since the default settings restrict the potential harmonic and rhythmic combinations available so as to ensure listenable compositions, this places massive limits on both sides of the resonant relationship. As the side of *ability* is reduced to a *one-finger touch technique*, the quality and breadth of one's experience of self-efficacy is likewise extremely reduced, de-sensualized and dis-embodied. At the same time, the possibility of *being affected* is jeopardized or even thwarted by the fact that the Other here no longer speaks with its own inaccessible voice, but rather can be technologically generated and controlled. It can be appropriated, but not adaptively transformed.

It seems to me highly unlikely that a transformative relationship to the world can develop in this way, even if there is nothing here that absolutely precludes it. The inaccessibility of complex, tactile, bodily, sensory, narrative, affective, and cognitive resonance events implies both that they can occur under the most unlikely condi-

tions, even under torture, and that they can fail to materialize even under the most favorable circumstances. The growing tendency toward limitless, instantaneous accessibility in the realm of aesthetics nonetheless makes establishing resonant relationships more difficult. When guided, timed streams of spectators are provided twenty seconds on average to encounter Mona Lisa's smile, or when viewers are even led past exhibits on conveyor belts (as they are past the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London), then there simply is no time for any sort of adaptive transformation. Even attempts to deliberately induce resonances by means of manipulative simulation techniques are more likely to inhibit than facilitate them. When theater shows and musicals advertise themselves as *overwhelming* their audiences with *gigantic light shows and spectacular audiovisual effects*, this sensory overload is offered as a simulacrum of resonance. But this is an error: overpowering an audience in this way is more akin to *violating* them than *resonating* with them, inasmuch as it impedes accommodating, responsive self-efficacy, and so is more likely to lead subjects to close themselves off than to effect an adaptive transformation of world. Here subjects encounter not the power of art, but the violent force of entertainment.

The general tendency of (late) modernity to make resonant relationships passive and relegate experiences of resonance to extraordinary, oasis-like special zones (museums, theaters, concert halls, etc.) can thus be observed in the sphere of art just as in those of nature and religion – nor is the situation any different when it comes to how we encounter the power of history, as we shall soon see.

The risk of draining art of its power exists not only in its commercialization and commodification, but (even more seriously) may also follow from the logic of its own formal laws. I have sought to show, in connection with Menke, that a creative resonant relationship emerges when a subject's artistic capacity enters into a precarious relation of response with the perceived dictates or demands of "art" as such. This can be understood to mean that artistic creativity manifests as a struggle, on the one hand, to fulfill and perfect traditional formal aesthetic rules – the subject's "ability" – and, on the other, to transgress and even explode these rules through the invocation and potency of dark, demonic, extra-subjective forces. Hence the history of high art can tentatively be understood as a history of the interplay between increasing formal rigor and technical abilities (e.g. in music or painting) and their transgression, the latter playing out as precisely that responsive struggle between these two conflicting principles which I have identified as the basic principle of the event of aesthetic resonance. Thus we might draw a line from Bach or Telemann through Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, and Mahler on up to Schoenberg and serialism, the high points of which always represent both perfection

of a given form and liberation from its constraints. The history of the development of painting from the Renaissance up through Cubism or twentieth-century conceptual art could well be described in the same way. The inaccessible, distinctive, contradicting voice of art is heard not in traditional formal laws, nor simply in their delirious violation, but in the often painful *struggle* between the two.

If all formal elements are cast off, however – as perhaps in atonal music, totally abstract art, or fragmentary, non-narrative storytelling – “art” loses its power to make contradictory and contradictory demands. All potentially available compositional techniques then appear to be equally *accessible*. The artist perceives only his own voice, his own creative desire – he no longer encounters an Other. The “postmodern” condition consists precisely in the supposition that the internal exhaustion of the evolution of form and the dissolution of all formal boundaries have robbed art of its power to dictate or command.¹⁰⁶ *Anything goes* is the watchword; all possible modes of expression are equally valid.

This may well be why various genres of art have witnessed repeated attempts to *artificially* reintroduce limiting, formative frameworks (even including novels that get by without using certain letters of the alphabet). It may also explain why the aforementioned popular music genres of punk and metal often strictly limit themselves by rigidly adhering to traditional formal guidelines, particularly with respect to harmonics.

In any case, as the historical contingency of aesthetic resonance makes clear, resonance events are always embedded in a historical and beyond that biographical context, from which alone they can be properly understood. Resonance also has an ineluctable temporal dimension, and this is the subject of the next section.

4 The Mantle of History

Vertical axes of resonance are characterized by the fact that they allow subjects to experience a constitutive connection with a power that concerns or encompasses their existence as a whole. Following Karl Jaspers, such a power can also be understood as “encompassing” to the extent that it exceeds its own individual manifestations.¹⁰⁷ Thus concepts such as *nature* or *art* always refer to more than just the phenomena associated with them – and more than the sum of these phenomena, too. The corresponding force involved is experienced as a constitutive Other that can never be adaptively transformed as a whole, but rather is always in some aspect inaccessible and thus speaks with its own voice. The corresponding experiences involved, as Hans Joas demonstrates, can be defined as experiences of self-

transcendence, as they always describe an encounter with a force that exceeds or goes beyond the subject.¹⁰⁸ As I sought to show through the examples of the power of art and the voice of nature, this experience need not be religious in nature, i.e. it presupposes neither belief in nor even the existence of a transcendent or meta-physical power. Even vertical axes ultimately concern relationships to the *world*, not otherworldly transcendence, although what is at stake here is our relationship to the totality of what confronts us – what encompasses us – as subjects.

The culture of modernity allows and facilitates such experiences not only in the realms of art and nature, but also in the dimension of historical temporality, which likewise comes to be conceived as a conceptual totality expressed by the collective singular noun *History*. This is presumably why, at least in the European cultural sphere, experiences of historical resonance are often given the prefix “world.” References to *world-historical events*, *world history*, or *world-changing moments*¹⁰⁹ in which the breath of history can be felt conceive of History as an encompassing power that weaves through the world as a whole. That this conception of history is (or at least for a long time was) rigidly Eurocentric is a different matter. Contemporary efforts to replace *world history* with a *global history* that presents historical interactions as complex, contingent chains of interrelated events without any trace of optimistic, progress-oriented philosophies of history¹¹⁰ can be read either as the expression of a crisis within this sphere of resonance (*History* seems dead and no longer responds to us) or as a continuation of this crisis by other means¹¹¹ – history will be the judge.

As Reinhart Koselleck has convincingly argued in great detail, since the “saddle period” of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *History*, at least in a European context, has not only been much more than the sum or result of individual *histories* as they have played out over time, but has also come to be understood as an inexorable formative power, one that is in many respects initially incomprehensible and inaccessible and that, moreover, is perceived as a moral authority capable of passing judgment on or deciding what should stand the test of time.¹¹² History has since then no longer been a static space or neutral background against which various checkered histories play out, but rather is experienced as itself *moving*. More than this, it appears as itself a *movement*, one whose voice or call must be heard and understood – or, in the language of Bismarck, whose “coattails” must be snatched¹¹³ – but whose unfolding courses ultimately remain inaccessible.

[H]istory no longer occurs in, but through, time. Time becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right. Presupposed by this formulation of experience is a concept of history which is likewise