

Aesthetics and *Bildung*

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Understanding and misunderstandings between groups and individuals should be seen as one of the ‘grand challenges’ today,¹ since it affects domestic violence, social equality, and aggression between states. One aspect of this problem is the willingness or lack of it to approach other persons or groups as worthy of understanding. Whether willfully or not, lack of understanding contributes to violence, aggression, fear, and unhappiness, and may become a hindrance to finding and implementing solutions to crises. Understanding other individuals and groups is however also about understanding oneself. The role of the arts in processes of understanding both oneself and others has been recognized in the philosophy and theory of art from ancient times until today. Yet in contemporary policy discussions, the instrumental value of the arts in promoting health, learning, or economical growth² is much more strongly on the agenda than the hermeneutic and aesthetic power of the arts in articulating the human condition.

My contribution to this issue of *Diogenes* is situated at the junction of aesthetics and education, which is also a junction for aesthetics and ethics and art and politics. I want to revive the notion of education as *Bildung*, which is far more hermeneutically fruitful than a view of education as merely teaching, training, or schooling (Biesta 2006; Prange 2004). I suggest that *Bildung* be understood as a social and dialogic process where human relationships are crucial not just for the exchange but also for the birth of insights. One central point in the following is thus to move the emphasis in *Bildung* from the individual towards the social sphere.³ The second emphasis is aesthetic. Whereas classical views of *Bildung* focused on the formation of a beautiful soul, I stress the role of images (*Bilde*, broadly understood) as intermediaries and points of reference in expressing, communicating, and negotiating cultural values. According to this interpretation, the process of *Bildung* is not primarily about becoming a civilized person, but about engaging with the human condition with the help of what I shall refer to as *Bild*/images.

The educational perspective highlights certain dimensions of aesthetics: especially the social processes of making and appreciating art. The arts are an important field of cultural creation; and aesthetic means are central in affirming, transforming, and sometimes betraying cultural and existential values. Through my examples I show that the power of art to communicate and make real a sense of shared humanity is still a topical and fruitful resource. But alongside this, art often implicates a strong articulation and affirmation of singularity and difference; one that allows and even invites differences in background, perspectives, experiences, and worldviews of its audience to

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come to the fore. In creative or receptive aesthetic processes, our interdependence and reciprocity with other people typically become evident.

I use Immanuel Kant and Wilhelm von Humboldt as interlocutors in developing the idea of aesthetic *Bildung*. In my reading of Kant I follow Hannah Arendt (1982), who suggests that Kantian aesthetic judgment has a fundamentally social character. Aesthetic judgment is compared to Kant's short text on enlightenment and its demand for a public use of reason. I then examine the idea of *Bildung* in Humboldt, where its aesthetic-expressive and social dimension – including human plurality and difference – is present. This provides the material for articulating the challenge that is my focus: aesthetics as education, as a process precisely of *Bildung*. Rather than historical reconstruction, my interest is in what it can mean today.⁴ Thus I end with a discussion of two examples that demonstrate the deep aesthetic and political relevance of art in our time.

Aesthetic judgment, values, and community

In Kant's critical philosophy, aesthetic judgment – the judgment whereby we find something beautiful or sublime – has a mediating role between reason and imagination. The aesthetic relationship is indeterminate, ruled neither by the laws of nature (science) nor by the maxims of morality. This gives aesthetic judgment a unique position as a reflective judgment, where the individual has no given principles to rely upon. There is no logical necessity to end up this way or that, and no universal criteria that could always be applied. The mind is, instead, set in motion, or, as Kant puts it, play.

Although Kant is careful to show that no necessary connections exist between aesthetics and morality, his analysis of the judgment of taste opens up towards both ethics and community in many ways. The very indeterminacy and reflectivity of pure aesthetic judgment has inspired philosophers to interpretations that emphasize its general axiological relevance. Hannah Arendt (1982) offered a reading of the judgment of taste as a fundamental example of a political value judgment. Kirk Pillow (2000) takes this argument further by claiming that it is the judgment of the sublime rather than the beautiful that brings about the reflective state which is the central instance of evaluative judgment and understanding. As a source of disharmony and puzzlement the sublime stirs the subject into reflecting on his own moral stature.

Some passages in the *Critique of Judgment* quite explicitly point to community and morality. Kant for example (1990: §§ 6 and 32) states that I can expect others to share my judgment. In a sense we therefore do not judge just for ourselves, since there is an awareness of having a share in a larger community of creatures that are like us. This is particularly the case with respect to human beauty and to art. The beauty of human beings is a case of dependent or adherent beauty, where aesthetic judgment is influenced by ideas and understanding (Kant 1990: §§ 16–17). With fine art, on the other hand, we are aware that it is made by humans although it has the appearance of nature, that is, of having no particular purpose; and our awareness of the object's human origin is relevant for judgment (§ 45). But also free beauty is described by Kant as a 'symbol of morality,' since it reminds us of our intellectual and moral capacities and their harmony. Further, our aesthetic characterizations, such as 'majestic,' 'happy,' or 'modest' exhibit an affinity with states of mind caused by moral judgments (§ 59).⁵

Towards the end of the analysis of aesthetic judgment, Kant emphasizes the cultivation of our capacities through knowledge of the humanities and places taste in the larger context of human society. Humanity is described as the feeling of community and the capacity to communicate one's thoughts adequately. Art has a central role in the cultivation of sociability, in enabling communication between different individuals; and it is closely connected to the cultivation of moral feeling

(§ 60; see also §§ 20–22).⁶ In this context, Kant mentions aesthetic education and the role of taste as a field of communication in society, but there is no reference to moral maxims.⁷

I have mentioned these aspects of Kant's aesthetic theory in order to indicate the role of morality and sociability in it; a role that is often overlooked. This does not undermine the autonomy of aesthetic judgment. In the following I want to defend both the social character of art and the autonomy of aesthetic judgment: that it is free and non-coercive. There is reason to think that the broader axiological (educational, social, political) relevance of the aesthetic has to do precisely with its irreducibility to any given set of values. Beauty can resist norms that we explicitly adhere to. The aesthetic sometimes goes deeper than any value system that we have taken for granted; and one function of the aesthetic may in such cases be to put in motion petrified moral judgment.

Kant's aesthetic theory has been criticized for distorting our understanding of human existence as particular, historical, and embodied. Such criticism tends to portray Kant as a system builder with scant concern for the historical reality in which he lived. But if we remember his emphasis on the particularity and irreducibility of aesthetic judgment and his suggestion about the relationships between aesthetic and other values, and read his aesthetic theory together with some of his other writings, the possibility of a more critical and political interpretation appears.⁸ If the relationship between moral ideas and aesthetic judgment is actualized only in individual experience, we can expect it to be influenced by social and historical contexts and ideologies.

Kant's text on enlightenment, if read together with the *Critique of Judgment*, provides some relevant observations. In his analysis of enlightenment, Kant (1784) emphasizes the public use of reason in ways that are illuminating with respect to art and the community. Enlightenment is a state that requires certain societal, educational, and individual conditions. The enlightened person is able to judge for himself; he has left the state of childhood or tutelage and come of age. This mature, enlightened individual further uses his reason in public and does so in an autonomous manner rather than being led by others. Two similarities between enlightenment and aesthetic judgment merit attention in this context.

The first is the impartiality of judgment. Kant's text on enlightenment focuses on public life rather than on theoretical questions of moral philosophy. The most important condition of enlightenment is freedom, and the most important form of freedom is to use one's reason in public (Kant 1784: 484). Enlightenment appears most of all as a concern and a benefit for people as community: in a state of enlightenment the individual's public judgment serves the whole rather than himself. Also, it is difficult for a single person to attain majority by himself. Not any group counts however as public: Kant makes a distinction between the public and the private use of reason. In the public use of reason, the learned address anyone and everyone (the world) in their writings (ibid.: 487). The private use of reason refers to a limited sphere, such as that of a civil servant in his work, where the use of reason is regulated in order for things to run smoothly. Ultimately however to be a learned person (an intellectual) is a role that anyone can and should take on at times in order to speak out on issues that are of general interest. It would for example be paradoxical if a priest, who is responsible for a congregation, would keep himself under tutelage (ibid.: 487–488).

Now the matters of public interest that Kant has in mind may partly be of a general nature, but partly they seem to belong with the practical organization of society. By emphasizing the latter dimension we might update the idea of enlightenment towards an interpretation that does better justice to human difference. Often fair discussion and reasonable solutions to ideological and social disputes require knowledge of traditions and situations; an understanding of the lives of the people who are involved. A judgment on such matters needs to be context-sensitive at the same time as it is public in Kant's sense: subject to a general rather than partial debate and critique. But, in addition, it can only be fairly assessed when the social situation comes into the open; that is,

when enough different voices are heard. Ultimately we cannot speak in place of others, although we certainly can and often should speak for others.

Like the enlightened use of reason, aesthetic judgment is not centered on the individual although the individual here too acts in a way that both presupposes and establishes her autonomy. Although subjective, the judgment is not about what *I* find aesthetically valuable, but about what I take, in a particular case, any person to find aesthetically valuable. Yet my judgment cannot be but influenced by my background. Challenging debates about aesthetic judgment, in particular art, occur, and they often demonstrate different human histories and sets of values. Kant (1990: §§ 56–57) asserted that although the questions cannot be solved by argumentation such discussion is meaningful. The autonomy of aesthetic judgment means that my judgment is formed without force, but also without glancing at what others expect, think, or find appropriate.⁹ Importantly however, autonomy does not mean separation from or lack of awareness of fellow human beings and their concerns. On the contrary, to engage in a debate on taste – or a public issue – is a sign of concern about a matter of common interest. As there are no given criteria, the debate can sensitize us to the character and status of social or moral norms.

The second point of convergence between aesthetics and enlightenment in Kant that I want to draw attention to is the public character of art. Art was always made for a community; for appreciation. Art is articulations, suggestions, and interpretations of the human world. Since modernity, art has been established as an object of criticism and become fundamentally public precisely in Kant's sense: made for anyone, for the 'world'.¹⁰ In *Vita activa* (1960: ch. 23–34) Hannah Arendt gives art a particular role in relation to action and freedom. Political action is where values are articulated, made public, become real. This is the realm of freedom, where novel ideas can arise. Art belongs to the realm of making or fabrication, where values articulated in political action acquire presence and permanence. In this perspective, the role of art, 'the most permanent and therefore most worldly of all things,' is not primarily to create values but to give them a concrete, real presence through sensible form (*ibid.*).

Art may also be considered a form of action, especially today. Whether we grant it the possibility of creating values or not, its role in incorporating values and making them public and shared, and therefore open to appreciation and criticism, is indisputable. Art is a public, cultural practice that involves ideas and values and uses aesthetic means of expression. What gives it a special place in processes of education is precisely its public and aesthetic character.

Aesthetic and social dimensions of *Bildung*

The classical idea of *Bildung*, with roots in the Christian idea of man as an image (*Bild*) of God, is contemporary with the rise of modern aesthetics at the end of the eighteenth century. The focus on the formation of the individual is retained in Enlightenment discussion, but the emphasis changes: instead of becoming like God, man should form and develop his own powers in the service of humanity. Among the German thinkers that engaged with this idea I find Wilhelm von Humboldt's analysis of the role of imagination and art in the self-understanding of humanity fruitful as a starting point for a contemporary understanding of art's educative potential.¹¹

For Humboldt, imagination has a central role in human life. When we imagine, our world is no longer limited to what actually exists, but we become aware of other possibilities. Imagination is a creative power (*Kraft*), and art is its foremost area (Humboldt 1904a, 127). As the true artist is a man of spirit (*Geist*), the work is imbued with life and intensity; and only such work can educate its audience rather than merely teach (1904b). In his aesthetic essay Humboldt writes extensively on the subjectively effective, sensuous and affective qualities of art. It is evident that he gives a

significant role to them in his understanding of subjectivity. As one commentator writes, '[t]he path to self-determination that Kant had demanded ... must ... proceed through the cultivation of man's sensuality' (Mueller-Vollmer 2007: ch. 3, § 1).

The work of art is created by an individual, and our interest in it is linked with our interest in the individual.¹² But while Humboldt describes the true artist as an exceptional person, his ultimate focus is not the individual as such but how art can guide us to realize more about the different ways in which people of different dispositions and in various social circumstances develop relations and world views. The individual artist contributes to a deeper and more encompassing understanding of humanity through expressing himself; and the focal point is *Bildung* ('Dieser Mittelpunkt ist nemlich: *die Bildung des Menschen*,' Humboldt 1904a: 117). In a fragment on *Bildung*, Humboldt likewise emphasizes the need for each person to connect with and interact with the world. Our inner selves need the outer world; but this world is not homogeneous, for it is mirrored differently in different individuals (1903: 287). The education of humankind cannot proceed along one line, but is like a network where the nodes of interaction are crucial. Human self-fulfillment is only possible in a concrete social and political reality, where citizens are able to enter freely into relationships of association and cooperation with one another, since 'humans can realize their potential as individuals only in society' (Mueller-Vollmer 2007: ch. 3, § 2). And understanding human agency is possible only against the complicated web of history where it takes place (Humboldt 1904a).

In his thinking on art Humboldt's emphasis was on the generation of something new, not on reproduction or mimesis. Thus art is not primarily cultural capital that one acquires and possesses; it is a means of expression, communication and creation.¹³ The aesthetic, creative and political undertones of *Bildung* are easily lost from view if it is translated simply as civilization or education. In addition, while the individual is a central object of *Bildung*, humanity as a manifold and even heterogeneous whole is at least as important. What I want to do now is to follow up this change of focus of *Bildung* from the human individual to society, and to the role of arts and aesthetics. In the understanding of aesthetic *Bildung* that I propose, the emphasis is not on a participating individual or on self-education, but on the articulation of an 'image' (*Bild*), its interpretations, and their reverberations. Although those who participate in the process have key roles the main aim is not to form good (or ideal) human beings, but to produce a better understanding and possibly better practices in a shared world. The focus is shifted, in other words, from the moral and other personal qualities of the individual to a consideration of the moral functions of producing and interpreting images; a process that takes place in and in relation to a community.

Before proceeding, there is need to qualify the notion of *Bild* or image without, however, reducing its richness of associations. To begin with, the main point of underlining the *Bild* within *Bildung* is to draw attention to the role of made perceptible objects in the mediation of cultural meanings and values. Such objects are shared potential foci of agreement as well as disagreement: produced, perceived, and interpretively remade. To underline the concreteness of the image, I shall use the technical term '*Bild*/image.' Second, the distinction between image and picture is helpful. If a picture is a two-dimensional visual image, the *Bild*/image is not restricted to any particular sense. A piece of music or a poem counts as a *Bild*/image; and a *Bild*/image can also combine many senses. Third, an image in general can be mental and not perceptible to more than one person. But although the *Bild*/image is not necessarily identical to any one material thing (painting, statue), it is perceptible and concrete; presented or performed – as in music, dance, theatre and other performing arts; or iterable, as pieces of literature.¹⁴ Fourth, this implies that the *Bild*/image is created, that is, intentionally made by one or several individuals. Fifth, by being made the *Bild*/image necessarily reflects human understanding, values, customs, ideas.

Being made is an important property of the *Bild*/image. The German verb *bilden* can be interpreted into English as forming, building, patterning, shaping, framing, generating and, of course, educating in addition to a number of other verbs. Common to many of these is that they point to creation: to the bringing into existence of a particular constellation that did not exist before. At this point, we might think of works of art as *Bild*/images and call into mind Arendt's understanding of art as artefacts that give meanings and values a concrete and particular existence, often meant to be permanent.¹⁵ In fact, the meaning is seldom permanent: rather, it is subject to negotiations, and sometimes oblivion. None the less, through the sensuous existence of works the existence of particular values and beliefs is established (or challenged) as part of a shared world. Artistic agency – which can be shared by several individuals, including commissioners and interpreters – is central in this process for two reasons. First, it decides the particular aesthetic form of the work; second, it is significant already as an effort to bring something into being. But once brought into existence, the work of art as *Bild*/image continues to influence and be influenced by networks of cultural, political, and social artefacts and narratives. Being perceived, interpreted, and discussed is as important for the cultural life of the *Bild*/image as being produced.

On this understanding, the work of art is a formation or an articulation (*Bild*/image) that gathers certain meanings and makes them perceptible, thereby enabling them to be felt as real and shared between people. Art also allows new meanings to be attached to it. It should go without saying that the process involves many uncertainties, especially when it comes to describing what actually is or is not shared. Artworks are particular, and so are the situations in which they are presented. It can be hard to analyze, from any one position, what meanings are involved in the work and its situation. This demands, rather, that different views are articulated: they include art criticism but also less professional, formal and informal discussions and reactions, and may be extended over time and open-ended.

Bildung as shared aesthetic agency

A large part of contemporary discussions on art deals with examples that are challenging and difficult. They include politically, religiously, or sexually provocative works that some find tasteless, others critical or eye-opening. Leaving aside the possibility that there are works which on moral grounds are not worth appreciation, the difficult objects are typically ones that do not harmonize with the value system of some group. They do not fit into acquired tastes, or they break taboos. This can mean that the object is treated on the basis of prejudice and rejected. At the same time, works that are fruitful from the point of view of aesthetic *Bildung* are more likely to be found among works that demand cognitive, moral, or aesthetic effort than among works that are easily appreciated. Also positive and affirmative appreciation may however be socially and politically important; and it by no means implies passivity.¹⁶ But particularly in the difficult cases appreciative work often demands time. This is because it may involve changes on many levels: in how to perceive the object; in how to understand the world; and in where to place oneself. The slowness is not due just to processes in the recipient; it may also be due to changes in the context, or to how others respond to the work, and to what interpretations arise over time.

The difficulty of challenging works of art is not typically about personal and idiosyncratic views, but about what we think the world is actually or ideally like. Art can have a significant role in changing human relations or views on some issues. To substantiate this claim, I shall look at two examples of the role of art in situations of explicit or implicit conflict. In both examples the change brought about through art is not a solution to the conflict but rather a fuller perception of other people that might provide a better ground for solutions than was previously the case. Neither

example is centered on a particular work as in itself an interpretation of the world; neither focuses on what an individual can learn from art by herself; both instead foreground the relational character of art in particular contexts, and the plurality of audiences or participants.

The first example is the West-Eastern Divan workshop, initiated by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said in 1999.¹⁷ The idea was to bring young professional Arab and Israeli musicians to Weimar in Germany, which in 1999 held the title of Culture Capital of Europe, to play music during the daytime and in the evenings to discuss music, culture, and politics together. The name of the workshop echoes Johann Wilhelm von Goethe's collection of poems from 1819, inspired by the Koran and Persian poetry; and Weimar was a significant place to gather, since it was Goethe's city and close to Buchenwald.¹⁸ Initially, there was much resistance and animosity among the participants, but this gradually changed. Since its inception the workshop has gathered every summer and the orchestra has given concerts both in Israel and in the Palestinian territories.

The meaning of this workshop depends heavily on its context. What could in another place be seen in purely musical terms here inevitably has other meanings as well. But if the experience of music may deeply touch existential questions, such as freedom and human possibilities, as Barenboim suggests, then these meanings, which become emphasized in a society where violence and force are paramount and freedom scarce, are not external in relation to performance and appreciation. Part of the music that Barenboim rehearsed and played with the orchestra, such as Beethoven's, was in addition composed in a society where freedom was more of an idea than an actuality for most people – much like the Prussia which Kant (1784: 491) described as having yet attained only the spirit and not a fulfilled state of enlightenment.

There is much testimony to the power of art in totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian societies. An atmosphere of violence suppresses the very humanity of life and is intolerant of ambiguity, plurality, and irony – of everything that is less than univocal. In such a situation art can become a necessary escape and affirmation of human dignity and aspiration. The situation between Israel and Palestine is closer to war than to peace, with propaganda and suggestions about the other party as evil and dangerous. To play music with people from the side of the enemy and aim at excellence; to produce sound together in harmony and with passion in unique performances where the whole is dependent on each musician and yet is much more than its individual members, is in such a political situation strange, even miraculous. The very existence of the orchestra keeps faith, beauty, freedom, goodness, and the ideal of humanity alive. Yet as Barenboim says: 'They were trying to do something together. It's as simple as that. ... having achieved that one note, they already can't look at each other the same way, because they have shared a common experience' (Barenboim and Said 2004: 10).

The West-Eastern Divan has demanded a commitment to producing something that can only come about through each person's wholehearted effort to play in collaboration with each of the other players. That this process is artistic and aesthetic; that it demands sensuous, affective involvement and technical and expressive skills, is of key importance. The affective and aesthetic engagement together with the ephemeral nature of music underlines the undeniable reality of the moment when music is played. There is a community of feeling but also of acting and making. As a process of *Bildung*, what is created in the West-Eastern Divan apart from the musical performances is the orchestra itself, which becomes an image of hope. Note however that this does not imply that the players are good individuals in every respect; what it shows is that they are admirable when working together and capable of such performances in such a historical situation. Significantly, as Saïd points out, the performer is 'an artist concerned not so much with the articulation of the self, but rather with the articulation of other selves' (Barenboim and Said 2004: 11).

My second example is a play, *Medea's children*, that had its premiere in Stockholm in 1975. It was directed by Suzanne Osten and co-written with Per Lysander after thorough research with children, who are the main protagonists of the play and its main target audience. The play is based loosely on Euripides' *Medea*, where the heroine, after being betrayed by her husband, kills his mistress and then their children. Osten's version is a play about divorce, seen from the children's perspective. The mother kills her children only in their dream, and the betrayal is one of parents against children. The play was well received by the child audience but it caused a scandal among adults. The debate centered on the use of a foul word pronounced by one of the children in the play, but the director's analysis of the actual problem is more revealing. She suggests that Jason's and Medea's simultaneous responsibility and lack of empathy with their children produced feelings of guilt. 'It became evident that the adults ... wanted to have total emotional control over the theatre that children see ... The plays should not arouse any critique against parents or create "anxiety" in the children' (Helander and Osten 2008: 4).

Medea's children seems a more slight example compared to the previous one. Yet only apparently, for children's rights are continuously offended in many countries; even in affluent parts of the world their freedom of speech and cultural rights are regularly not respected. Culture for children (by adults) is often produced with a rigid idea of the target audience in mind, which is supposed to understand only so much. The audience is, in other words, diminished from the outset, downsized to the level that is believed appropriate. This maneuver was never adopted by Osten who, instead of offering diversion or consolation gives the actual feelings, fantasies, and thoughts of children artistic form in public performances. Instead of victims, she makes the children protagonists. They are invited to share artistic and interpretive agency in a way that temporarily frees them from the tutelage that is otherwise inevitably part of their everyday lives. Following Osten's practice, the performance of *Medea's children* is accompanied by discussion afterwards. The play then functions as a *Bild*/image, whose meaning is constituted by the audience in conversation but without aiming at one final interpretation. The interpretations are allowed to remain ambiguous, with such ambiguity as real life situations can have.

Although I have moved the focus of *Bildung* from self-education towards social and aesthetic processes, the willingness to change is certainly one condition for *Bildung*. In art and education with children this brings to the fore the question of the level at which artistic and interpretive agency is shared. With young people, limits on what they can know, do, and say are often taken for granted, but these may be unrealistic with respect to their life-worlds, which are as full of existential, social, and political problems as that of adults. If the limits are rigid the audience is put under tutelage, but this applies to the tutors as well who miss their opportunity for thinking and understanding another perspective. The difficulty of *Medea's children* is that it teases adults into seeing themselves from the children's perspective, and suggests that children have interpretive competence and can influence the power balance in a family.

If children's lack of voice in questions of their own lives is in itself a problem, it deserves even more emphasis in a discussion of aesthetics and *Bildung*. First, it is particularly children who are subject to education, and an important difference between education or *Bildung* on the one hand and training or schooling on the other is in the reciprocity of the process. A genuine educator is himself subject to education.¹⁹ In art, a model of producers/artists vs. consumers/audience may even be fundamentally misguided. With aesthetic *Bildung*, which is largely about human experience, the question about how much the child/audience is allowed to contribute becomes even more important. Second, also because of their openness, curiosity and imagination, which are by nature socially directed, children hold an exemplary position as subjects of aesthetic *Bildung*. Third, aesthetic resources (imagination, story-telling, image-making, singing, playing) are crucial in human

development, and various arts have a central cultural role in societies worldwide.²⁰ The question about how deeply and seriously education takes aesthetics and the arts is therefore central.

Conclusions

The traditional ideal of *Bildung* has been criticized as an idealized and narrow view of the human (Biesta 2006: 2–8). With this in mind, to redirect *Bildung* with a focus on the capacity for reflectivity and communication through sensuous, material representations or works (*Bilde*) indicates a different and less compromised strategy. In order for aesthetics to fulfill its educative potential, it is necessary to recognize and respect the legitimacy of different points of view as well as actual disagreement in political and existential conflicts. The West-Eastern Divan did not aim at political consensus; nor did *Medea's children* liberate parents or children from the pain of divorce. If art is to work in the process of *Bildung*, it requires that we accept heterogeneity in the interpretive and appreciative process. Instead of aiming at the establishment of a correct interpretation, a readiness for critique and self-critique, debate and disagreement is useful. As my examples indicate, whether art is about situations of conflict or not, conflicts exist in the world in ways that influence its experience. Both examples however also point to how art can unite groups that actually look from contrary perspectives. A temporary community can be established around a particular work or performance, replacing at least for a moment the old groups. The coming into being of such a community no doubt requires interaction and dialogue. The hope is that the new community, although temporary, may change how individuals perceive themselves and others, how they speak and perhaps even how they act. Philosophers of *Bildung* have traditionally emphasized self-education. This element – the willingness to engage in self-criticism and change – is necessary, but what changes is ultimately our relation to the world, not a supposed inner self.

My proposal is that we look at the coupling of aesthetics and education as a process of increased awareness and communication with the world, whether the world refers to nature or to other human beings, or even to the artefacts that stand as messengers and constituents of shared practices, histories, and ways of thinking. This process may be dialogic and benign, but often it is difficult rather than smooth and includes elements of resistance, dissonance, and even agony. At the same time, the redirection of *Bildung* away from the self indicates a more aesthetic and artistic understanding of the formative process. If the focus is put on works of art as *Bild*/images, the process of *Bildung* can become more open to contesting views. This is a strength particularly in our time, when human difference and its understanding are both a challenge and a value.

A reflection on aesthetics and education along these lines certainly still focuses on the subject; yet the subject is not the primary end of the process. In other words, the foremost concern is not that a particular individual becomes a good or even a better person. What is at stake is rather the articulation, affirmation, and establishment of practices and values that may be conducive to better living conditions for all – even beyond the human species. The ultimate goal of *Bildung* is not the individual but the human and the natural world. In the interpretation that I have suggested, *Bildung* implies a readiness for a fundamental renewal of culture rather than merely the passing on of inherited values. In terms of enculturation, the individual grows into a potential agent of cultural recreation rather than remaining a passive servant or consumer of high culture. The role of art and aesthetic experience is central in this process because art, as it has been understood in modern aesthetics, is a practice that allows and even invites free and indeterminate reflection. It is also a sphere where we can more radically than in many other cultural and social institutions free ourselves and our children, or other supposedly less knowing individuals, from tutelage.

Notes

1. ‘Grand challenges’ are presently on the agenda in discussions about the future science policy in Europe. From a humanist point of view, the lack of consideration of cultural issues is striking. See, for example, The Lund declaration and its addendum, www.era.gv.at/space/11442/directory/11495/doc/12942.html.
2. *Art in hospitals* projects have been run at least since the early 1990s. On art and education, see Bamford (2006). On art and business, Darsø (2004). Many of these initiatives are to be welcomed, but their reporting tends to focus on outcomes in a way that is often slightly mechanistic.
3. ‘*Bilden*’ is still today mostly used as a reflexive verb (‘*sich bilden*’), referring to self-education. See Nuissl (2010).
4. My reasons for engaging with Kant and Humboldt are threefold. First, although both strongly influenced their own time as well as later philosophers, their thinking contains interesting and still topical ideas and suggestions that have not gained the attention they deserve. Second, ideas and concepts – not least on aesthetics and education – have a historical dimension and an effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) which cannot be disentangled from them but should be addressed. Compare here Merleau-Ponty (1995) who emphasizes the interdependence of thinking and history and the materiality of thought. Third, historical distancing is one way towards realizing the common, the different, and the singular, which are central for aesthetic *Bildung*.
5. The analogy is, however, at most a *possible* resource in moral education.
6. The twofold meaning of *sensus communis* as indicating community and communication exists already in Shaftesbury; see Escoubas (2004: 20–21).
7. This pragmatic focus is exactly what Arendt (1982) sees as central to Kant’s late thinking; emphasizing however that these ideas were never fully articulated.
8. For a reading that emphasizes the critical and normative character of Kant’s aesthetics, see Crowther (2010). Morgan (2000) places Kant in his historical context and pays attention to his ‘blind spots’ but sees them as signs of the vitality of his thought rather than faults.
9. The appropriate can be taken to refer to taste in Pierre Bourdieu’s (1979) sense. To have good taste then means to have learnt a way of perceiving and appreciating objects where the freedom of judgment is actually given up.
10. The public character of art is arguably more than a matter of the Western tradition. In his naturalistic theory of art, Denis Dutton observes that art in all cultures is appreciated and discussed among members of the culture; Dutton (2009: 54–55).
11. Central names in the discussion besides Humboldt are Johann Gottfried von Herder, Moses Mendelssohn, and later Georg Wilhelm von Hegel. Humboldt was a close friend of Goethe and Schiller, whose views on aesthetic education he influenced; see Escoubas (2004: 89–98). Humboldt’s aesthetic essay (1904a) is an exposition of Goethe’s ‘Hermann und Dorothea’.
12. On this point, a comparison to Mikel Dufrenne’s discussion of the world of the work of art could provide fruitful; see Dufrenne (1992: 221–257).
13. Humboldt was even critical towards the concept ‘culture’; a cultivated person is one who is only mechanically trained, without personal engagement (Humboldt 1904a: 304). The emphasis is similar to that of the young Walter Benjamin: see Docherty (2003).
14. Oral poetry is especially interesting here. It is articulated and has a given form, although it need not exist elsewhere than in the minds of people whenever it is not performed. Yet it is crafted language: with rhythm, mood, tensions, and other aesthetic qualities.
15. Compare also Paul Crowther’s definition of art, cross-culturally, as ‘a *formative power of artifactual imaging*’ (2004: 37).
16. See Kester (2004) for an interesting discussion of the contrasting aesthetic strategies of modernist avant-garde (shock) vs. community-oriented (dialogue) art.
17. See Barenboim and Said (2004, esp. 3–13), as well as the orchestra’s homepage www.west-eastern-divan.org.
18. Buchenwald was intentionally built near Weimar; an example of the betrayal of cultural values.
19. A point emphasized by J.A. Hollo (1959: 77–78).
20. See, e.g., Dutton (2009) and Dissanayake (1995).

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