

**Peter Alheit, Morten Brandt: Autobiography and Aesthetic Experience.
Development and Change of the Self in Modernity, Campus Verlag,
Frankfurt am Main 2006**

Preface	9
Introduction: The relationship between biographies and aesthetics in modernity	
1. The development of autobiographical formats in the process of modernity (Alheit)	11
2. Aesthetics as a tool of self-reflexivity	22
 Chapter 1 The Beginning of an Autonomy of the Aesthetics.	
The Aesthetic Dimension of Autobiographies around 1800	
1. A painful search for self in Karl Philipp Moritz' <i>Anton Reiser</i>	29
2. The contrast with the classic: Goethe's <i>Dichtung und Wahrheit [Truth and Poetry]</i>	90
3. Typical contemporary modes of reflection	98
4. First interim result: Aesthetic experience as a chance to distance oneself	113
 Chapter 2 Aesthetics and the Social Relam.	
Patterns of Mediation between Aesthetic Experience and Social Identity in Autobiographies around 1900	
1. The aestheticised autobiography: Emil Nolde's <i>Das eigene Leben [A Life of My Own]</i>	120
2. Aesthetics and society: Lu Märten's <i>Torso</i>	151
3. Lust for reading and politics: Adelheid Popp's <i>Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin [A Working Woman's Adolescent Years]</i>	165
4. Aesthetic aspiration and reality in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's <i>Meine Kinderjahre [My Childhood Years]</i>	170
5. Belonging to others and to oneself: The autobiography of Isolde Kurz	178
6. The rivalry between aesthetic and scientific perspectives on biographies	188
7. Second interim result: Resources of a mediation between aesthetics and sociality	201
 Chapter 3 Aesthetics and Civic Virtues.	
The Erosion of Aesthetc Reflexivity in Autobiographies around 2000	
1. Autobiographical delusions of grandeur: Hanns-Josef Ortheil's <i>Das Element des Elephanten [The Elephant's Element]</i>	209
2. The "a-social" autobiography: Martin Walser's <i>Ein springender Brunnen [A Gushing Fountain]</i>	229
3. The autobiography as "calculated schizophrenia": Fritz Rudolf Fries' <i>Diogenes auf der Parkbank [Diogenes on a Park Bench]</i>	242
4. The lonely autobiographer: Fritz Zorn's <i>Mars</i>	257
5. Third interim result: Postmodern anachronisms (Alheit)	277
 Chapter 4 Openings and Closures of Modern Self-Awareness. A Preliminary Result	
1. Civilization and isolation	281
2. The configuration around 1800	286
3. The configuration around 1900	289
4. The configuration around 2000	294
5. Patterns of imaginary wholeness	298
6. Progressions of aesthetic reflexivity	302
Bibliography	305

Abstract of the Doctoral Thesis

This thesis was written and published in the context of the research project “Ästhesiologische Komponenten von Bildungsmilieus. Eine Untersuchung von Wissensordnungen des Alltags um 1800, um 1900 und in der Gegenwart“ [Aesthesiological Components of Educational Milieus. An Examination of Knowledge Orders in Everyday Life Around the Year 1800, Around 1900 and Around 2000] that took place during 1999 and 2004 under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Dr. Peter Alheit (University of Göttingen) and Prof. Dr. Hans Rüdiger Müller (University of Osnabrück).

It examines autobiographical texts and focuses on the question if and to what extent a) aesthetic experience becomes effective in everyday life and b) aesthetic experience can help to create new patterns of the autobiographical self-representation.

One background of the thesis is the aesthetic theory of John Dewey in which the experience of works of (fine) art is contextualized in everyday experience – without postulating basic differences between them. Another is the classical (German) tradition and its contemporary interpretations that describe aesthetic experience as a “play” of different knowledge orders – developed (among others) by Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller and in contemporary aesthetic theory reconstructed, e.g., by Martin Seel.

As this thesis understands aesthetic experience it refers to already existing knowledge orders, like those of religion, science, or common sense, but cannot be subsumed to one of them. Instead it creates a “free play” between them and relates abstract concepts to concrete situations, to sensual and corporeal experience. Thus new possibilities of living and acting are created – here the thesis again refers to Dewey’s terms who distinguishes “potentialities” from mere “possibilities”.

The theoretical background to compare texts of three centuries is Norbert Elias’ theory of civilization in which he describes the civilizing process as a closing of the gap between formal and informal realms of society. His important term “Selbstzwang” [self-restraint] is understood in a decidedly non-Foucaultian manner, i.e., not just as an internalization of society’s structures of power. Self-restraint creates, by postponing the realization of impulses, the chance to develop new ways of acting or, even more, to act in a meaningful way in the first place.

The thesis shows with regards to Karl Phillip Moritz’ “Anton Reiser” (an exemplary text) and other texts “around 1800” (by Salomon Maimon, Johann Gottfried Seume, Ulrich Bräker, Friederike Bruns, Wilhelmine Eberhard, Caroline Rudolphi and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) how aesthetic experience begins to emancipate itself from other knowledge orders, but how, at the same time, the authors fail to re-connect it to them. The reasons are, among others, the fundamental gap between formal and informal education in Moritz’ ”Anton

Reiser”, the unbridgeable difference between Bräker’ literary experience and his rural surroundings in a small Swiss village or Maimon’s position as a poor Jew from Poland in the bourgeois Christian German society.

Texts “around 1900”, by Emil Nolde and Lu Märten (which are understood as exemplary), by Adelheid Popp, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Isolde Kurz, Jakob Wassermann, Ernst Haun, Franz König and Otto Körner, indicate an important development. Now the authors manage to re-connect aesthetic and non-aesthetic knowledge orders, and even more, they create new and unique patterns of the autobiographical self-presentation – which are substantially different from traditional types like the autobiographies of intellectuals, artists, workers, social climbers et al. Nolde and Märten in particular mediate between different knowledge orders masterfully and refer them convincingly to particular, concrete, sensual and corporeal experience.

Nevertheless, there is a huge difference between both texts: Whereas Märten integrates sophisticated political reflections into her text, Nolde’s (otherwise) subtle and sensitive self-presentation collapses, when he tries to reflect his position politically, into a very problematic simplicity that even includes chauvinist and Anti-Semitic stereotypes. This theses understands both texts of typical representations (“Idealtypen”) – Nolde’s text as a closing, Märten’s text as an opening of aesthetic experience.

The texts “around 2000”, by Hanns-Josef Ortheil, Martin Walser, Fritz Rudolf Fries and Fritz Zorn share a greater resemblance with the “Nolde-type”. This is understood as an hardening of aesthetic reflexivity, compared to the distinct development between 1800 and 1900. But texts of Ruth Klüger, Uwe Timm or Laura Waco show that the “Märten-type” is still important, too – a mediation between aesthetic and non-aesthetic modes of knowledge that creates substantially new, and unique, ways of the autobiographical self-presentation.