

## **A limit of the world**

At the center of all our philosophical efforts is the theoretical need for an understanding of the world in order to identify the initial center that brought the world to its existence in the first place: the human being.

At the center of all our artistic efforts is the ethical-aesthetical need to repeatedly render the whole understanding of the world problematic in order to save the initial center that brought the world to its existence in the first place: the humaneness.

At the center of all our whole life-world efforts is the need to lose oneself as a center of the whole world as far as possible in order to be able to live this life.

This is a human, all too human narration about both the first mentioned, which – in the best case – implicitly come up/come undone in the letter.

### **1. A rough reconstruction of the history of metaphysics**

I understand the history of humankind (at least in the western tradition) as a development history from nonage to maturity. One basic assumption that underlies this assertion is that the humankind gradually removed metaphysical assumptions in their development history and transferred it into worldly affairs/secular spheres. By doing this, there was a gradually growing power and responsibility of humans that came with this transfer of metaphysics into physics, which then could be described in a materialistic way and could be influenced.

To illustrate this understanding briefly: while the Egyptians, Greeks and the early Romans were still polytheistic, in which every part of everyday life was captured and structured by respectively one god that arranged the conduct/behavior of the people, there was only one powerful god required in Judaism to structure the people's behavior. By Christianity, the divine teaching/doctrine got humanized more and more, so that it was possible to institutionalize the Christian doctrine in long terms in form of the Church and the Pope, who were thought of as God's representation on Earth. The Kings and Emperors, in turn, secularized the divine entitlement of power completely by legitimizing their monarchies through the churches. The Middle Ages are characterized by the philosophical legitimization of the Christian doctrine and its claim to power, which finds its turning point in the Renaissance. This is supported by the invention of printing, the Copernican revolution, the conquest of Constantinople, the discovery of America and the Reformation.

With Descartes, the subject as a concept is considered or at least comes to view to the philosophers for the first time and this is the beginning of the modern era to some degree (even if Descartes himself wrote a proof of god to embed the "cogito" in the world). With Thomas Hobbes and the Leviathan, this subject is given a political theory which pushes back the claims of the church and those of the nobility. But it was the dictum of Nietzsche that "God is dead" that led to a collapse of all metaphysics, which more or less is founded on a god as a metaphysical being and all the power legitimizations that came with this thinking of god have also collapsed. The vacuum that emerged by this collapse was filled by Nietzsche with the concept of the so-called "Übermensch", which now can

be understood as a metaphysical subject, which has given up on a metaphysics that – till then – is (also or only, depending on the underlying belief system) to be found outside of the subject. The metaphysical subject in the sense of an “Übermensch” fills the power vacuum and takes the responsibility for its own actions. The “Übermensch” is the subject that acts self-sufficient or self-determined and takes the full responsibility for this self-sufficiency or self-determination. Modernity in this brief sense is to be understood as a human’s world- and self-determination (and the responsibilities that come with this determination) from within itself and only from within itself. With this determination of men as self-determination and self-determining in the wake of Nietzsche, the way to existentialism as a humanism is paved<sup>1</sup>.

With the removing or dismantling of metaphysics during the history of mankind, a former set of metaphors was replaced by a newer set of metaphors, which then was able to describe the world in a more precise way. Furthermore, by this replacement, more and more of formerly metaphysical areas were released, which had to be incorporated in the world by finding a description and taking the responsibilities for these metaphysical areas.

That means: the deeper our recognition of the world without becoming metaphysical and in a specific way speculative (there is another specific way of talking about a non-speculative metaphysics, which is the metaphysical subject), the more responsible are we as humans for this recognized world. More on that later.

All sets of metaphors have in common that they constitute not only a limit, but also a “decree”: they structure and legitimize the actions within a collective for this collective. And in this sense, these sets are always relative to their use, which can change anytime. The use is dynamic and changes with the self-understanding of each individual of the collective and their understanding of their collective. We could assume Thomas S. Kuhn’s notion of “paradigm” that we not only use for scientific collectives, but extend it to collectives in general: depending on the paradigm, different sets of metaphors would apply. And there is also a hint of how to understand words like “conservative”, “liberal” and “avant-garde”: in the set of (non-subjective) metaphysics and sometimes heteronomous guidances of action in the world that were assumed and accepted. And I hope to show the complexity, if it is also considered that a person can be part of different partial collectives. And also the possibility that these partial collectives can be conflicting among each other: not only within a community, but also within a person who feels to belong to different partial collectives.

But these are only preparatory, cryptic remarks for a narrowing down to the man of the 20th/21st century, which will then lead to my notion of the metaphysical subject. A last remark is due to the fact that in the course of a lifetime, each person undergoes more or less exactly the above described de-metaphysicization and thus in the end even determines how far each person is willing to go: each person relives or experiences – in a certain sense – the history of man and defines itself as conservative, liberal or even avant-garde, depending on how far the respective human being is able to go in his knowledge of the world (and thus of non-subject metaphysics). Avant-garde, e.g. is a person who drives their own historicity without lagging behind world history.

The absurd life in the writings of Camus, for instance, still testifies as to how a Christian metaphysics is secularized with a dead god and universalized as a way of being on the cusp of (post-)modernity:

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<sup>1</sup> Of course – and this should not be kept secret – the way to existentialism is done first via Kierkegaard, who is the pioneer of existentialism.

the absurd is here a generalized and democratized Passion of Christ, in which every single human has to carry sisyphos-like his own cross and still think of himself as a fortunate human being. Seen as such, the human being of Camus cannot fully free himself of the impediments of fate and still has to take the responsibilities that came with these impediments of fate. Directed by others/heteronomous and fully responsible. In a truly godless world, the people are endlessly free and endlessly self-responsible. That is a step that not many want to go.

Therefore, the history of humankind is a – based on Cassirer – “form of world orientation that conducts our actions” which are characterized by sets of metaphors and which change in time from heteronomous sets towards self-structuring sets with all its hypercomplex and sometimes overstraining consequences. Additionally, we can hold fast that some confusions about notions and guidances of action are due to different concurring sets of metaphors (with more or less severe shifts in meaning) that is being brought in to a discussion by different agents’ and their belief systems. We could describe these confusions as “babylonian” or labyrinthine. And the clarification of this confusion is at the core of all philosophy<sup>2</sup>.

Like I indicated before in terms of the history of humankind, there is a tendency to push the reduction of things forward concerning speculations and thus of metaphysics. In a simple sense, this is something concerning every single person and every group of people, because it is her or them, who are pushing this reduction forward and transform it into the next narration of humankind which then again needs to be overcome<sup>3</sup>.

In the next chapter, we are looking closer into the notion of the metaphysical subject in philosophy with the aid of a heterodox interpretation of Wittgenstein.

## **2. The early Wittgenstein, the metaphysical subject and...**

Wittgenstein once wrote, that “the subject [...] is not part of the world, it is a limit of the world”<sup>4</sup>. In this context, according to Wittgenstein, we can’t say anything about what is outside of the world. The limits of the world are the limits of logic, are the limits of what can be said, are the limits of what can be thought<sup>5</sup>. The attempt to say something about things that are beyond the limits leads to nonsense, however Wittgenstein himself locates himself philosophically exactly at the edge to this nonsense in the Tractatus<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> A hermeneutic approach is the foundation of this clarification concerning this matter. But there is also a critique that comes with this clarification which is more than just a hermeneutic approach.

<sup>3</sup> This also applies to this essay, which is just another narration.

<sup>4</sup> I will translate the following quotes myself.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig: Tractatus logico-philosophicus (which will be referred as „Tractatus“ in the following), 5.632. In 5.641, this subject is described as a „limit of the world“ and then furthermore as „philosophical ego“ and as „metaphysical subject“.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5.6 – 5.62.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 5.557 – 5.5571. I think that exactly this is the wit of the whole Tractatus. 6.54 in the Tractatus also indicates for this interpretation, when Wittgenstein wrote: “My sentences explain thereby, that the one who understands me, will recognize them at the end as nonsensical, if he works through these, – on them – climbing out of them. (He has to throw out the ladder after climbing up on it, so to say)”. It is exactly this context that Wittgenstein understands his approach as “therapeutic philosophy”.

But that would also mean that the theory of logic – how it is designed in the Tractatus – itself is not a part of the world, but rather a part of the metaphysical subject. The application of logic itself in turn, is a contingent

What Wittgenstein describes as [metaphysical] subject and situates as a limit to the world, *shows itself*<sup>7</sup>. One of the questions which arise, is: whom does this subject show itself to? To all the subjects or only to the respective subject? The latter seems to be the case, because, on the one hand, Wittgenstein writes that “*the limits of my language* [...] [mean] the limits of my world”<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, a subject shows itself to another subject only as an object in the world who is capable of speaking, that means the subjective of the subject is a “black box” for the subject that is a limit of the world<sup>9</sup>.

Now the subsequent question is legitimate to ask, why Wittgenstein designed the subject as a partially metaphysical one. There are several reasons: 1.) Wittgenstein wanted a general determination of what makes it possible to live a meaningful life in the first place<sup>10</sup>. 2.) If the design of the subject solely one that is only *in the world*, it would be contingent in terms of truth and therefore possibly also falsifiable. Because Wittgenstein seems to be – in a certain way – interested in conditions of possibility of world in his design of the subject, he has to situate these conditions itself outside of the contingent world, in order to emphasize its universal nature.

Conceived as such, Wittgenstein’s concept of subject seems to be similar in character to Heidegger’s notion of “Dasein” or Benjamin’s notion of the “radical translator”. And at the same time, here too is the attempt to save the subject from a misconstrued objectification/reification, while – as far as I know – Adorno, for example, saw a danger for the subject in any attempt of its reification<sup>11</sup>. Since – and this shall not be forgotten – in the enlightenment, the myth is made to disappear through distinction, and some kind of freedom is starting to sprout in the first place, but myth can change suddenly to determinism and by doing so, the sprouting freedom vanishes, if the subject is not protected from being objectified by a false determination.

However, such a way of talking about a metaphysical subject itself – it is highly probable that Wittgenstein himself would agree on that – is nonsense in a specific way. Because any statement about a metaphysical subject itself should be verifiable, that means it should be stated as true or false in terms of a contingent fact in the world. At the same time, it is a limit to the world and as such not a part of the world and because of that a condition for contingent statements in and about the world. And in order to make sense out of this nonsense, the last part of the *Tractatus* deals with this

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part of the world. That means, the rules of logic are situated in the metaphysical subject and always more or less used implicitly, if there are sentences uttered about the world, which can be indeed contingent. The talk of the “right method of philosophizing” here is an additional evidence for an implicit application of logic through the metaphysical subject and how it came to be applied in the “Philosophical investigations”, for which I will briefly be arguing for in the further course.

<sup>7</sup> *Tractatus*, 5.62. Another translation, I could have used, would have been: “makes itself felt”.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 5.6.

<sup>9</sup> For Wittgenstein, it is barely possible to be a physically existing subject in the world and therefore to be an (additionally contingent) object in the world to other subjects.

<sup>10</sup> That’s why Eilenberger writes about Wittgenstein’s logical analysis und philosophical approach: „All that gives the life and the world we live in a meaning in the proper sense is situated beyond that which can be said directly. Wittgenstein’s approach was a strictly scientific one, but his moral was existentialistic. In: Eilenberger, Wolfram: *Zeit der Zauberer. Das große Jahrzehnt der Philosophie 1919 – 1929*, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> At least, Adorno criticizes the reification of the subject, if by this reification the subject is made to disappear, which I think is quite a legitimate criticism. Perhaps we could situate Sartre with his sentence “Hell, that’s the others” in between both the philosophers.

It is this physical aspect of the subject in the world, amongst other things, why I criticized Heidegger notion of “Vorhandenheit” during my studies.

very problem, which is, according to Wittgenstein, – if understood in the right way – no problem at all. The last part of the Tractatus also indicates the “right method of philosophizing”<sup>12</sup>.

In the next chapter, we are looking closer at the philosophy of language of the later Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical investigations”, in which the “right philosophical method” of the Tractatus is being applied.

### 3. ...the later Wittgenstein and language: following the rules, language games and...

The later Wittgenstein of the “Philosophical investigations” is interested in ordinary language acquisition and the accompanying philosophy of ordinary language. In this, he uses a dialogue structure, in which at least two people seem to talk to each other. The wit of the “Philosophical investigations” is, that the dialogue partners are criticizing each other in their language acquisition theses and therefore are correctives to each other, which, on the one hand, corresponds to the description of the “right philosophical method” of the Tractatus. On the other hand, the dialogue structure also corresponds to the notion of “Regelfolgen”, which is mentioned for the first time in the “Philosophical investigations” in the first place<sup>13</sup>. That also means that the method of following the rule is a variation of the right philosophical method. I personally would and will locate the transition

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<sup>12</sup> Tractatus, 6.4 – 7. It consists only of three pages, which are very dense in information. There are sentences about ethics and aesthetics, about happiness, death, about skepticism and a right philosophical method. The right philosophical method consists on the one hand according to 6.53 in that “every time a person wanted to say something metaphysical, that you prove this other person that this person didn’t give some of its symbols used no meaning”. On the other hand, the right philosophical method consists of uttering philosophical nonsense and to sense the inexpressible existentialistic sense that shows itself/makes itself felt. I have already argued for this in my final thesis (although I wouldn’t write it now the way I wrote it then, even if the direction of impact was and is important and right).

In these last three pages of the Tractatus, ethics, aesthetics and logic (opposing to their application) are described as out of the world and the meaning of life is situated outside of the world. And the end of the Tractatus is an existentialist one in its unutterable, for there is the question that still remains: “How should I live now?” which is never answered by Wittgenstein.

Furthermore, there is no reason to hide the fact that there are sentences about god in the Tractatus, who “doesn’t [reveal] himself not *in* the world”: “The Supreme is completely indifferent for *how* the world is”.

<sup>13</sup> A very brief explanation of the terms: “Regelfolgen” (“following the rules”) is practiced by the so-called “Sprachspiele” (“language games”) respectively by speaking. By doing so, the one who learns a language is being “drilled”/“abgerichtet”, that means his use of the sentences is being supervised how he uses them and is corrected or adjusted, if necessary. The rules, which the speakers ought to follow and to which the speakers are drilled to, are in turn implicit in the linguistic practice. By being drilled, the use of language of the speaker becomes more and more precise.

“Sprachspiele/language games” are characterized by implicit rules, which are applied in using the language. The one who drills is the one, who criticizes and adjusts the use of language of the one who gets drilled. Drilling, on the side of the one who drills, is some kind of language criticism.

Then again with the metaphor of „game”, Wittgenstein introduces a very powerful concept into the philosophy: by introducing this metaphor, Wittgenstein now has the philosophical possibility to subsume different types of language practices and linguistic rules under the notion of “language games”, which are connected by so-called “family resemblances”. “Family resemblances” are, briefly explained, a set, whose subset always exhibits at least one common property, without the whole set exhibiting one common property. An example is the set of football, water polo and swimming. As sportive activities, the first two have the property to be played with a ball, the last two have the property to be played in the water. But swimming and football have no common properties. But still we can subsume these three as “sportive activities”.

from immaturity to maturity exactly there: at the end of successfully following the rule, because there the transition from language use to language criticism can take place/occur<sup>14</sup>.

For my purposes in this essay, other passages are more important for me: there are several paragraphs, in which Wittgenstein deals with sensations and which are known in philosophy as the “private language argument”. There, he makes it plausibly clear that the use of expressions for our sensations (the sensations themselves are also known in the philosophy as qualia) can be observed on how we behave and the use of these expressions is learned in intersubjective language games. There is an additional paragraph, in which these sensations are described as follows:

“»And yet, you always come to the conclusion that this sensation itself is a nothing«

-No. It is no something (in the world; author’s note), but it is no nothing either (in the world; author’s note). The result was solely that a nothing would do the same service as a something, about what there is nothing to be stated about. We just rejected the grammar here that forces itself on us.”<sup>15</sup>

The remarkable thing here – opposed to the expressions for our sensations – is that the sensations themselves are not contingent for the person who has these sensations, although these sensations can be a contingent and thus truthful fact for others. The person to have these qualia simply *has* them and does not have to doubt them<sup>16</sup>, that means these qualia are self-evident.

I solely want to say here that these qualia of Wittgenstein are in their presentation as private sensations close to the presentation of what he has been written about the metaphysical subject in the Tractatus. The own qualia of oneself are not contingent facts in the world: you have them, they are self-evident and accompanied with certainty. The sensations are located in the metaphysical subject and thus on the border to the world. I’m interested in the private language argument of Wittgenstein insofar as I am more interested in Wittgenstein’s understanding of the privacy of the sensations/qualia.

#### 4. Again and again: Newman

American artists and Clement Greenberg – an art critic and theorist from New York and the godfather of Abstract Expressionism – were aiming at searching and finding their own American narration in the midst of the 1940’s. Aspired to contrast from the contemporary artists of European

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<sup>14</sup> First, this equivalence also contains the thought that language analysis in general can be a common practice of language criticism, because either a potential possibility of a refining distinction of a better usage of language or the establishment of a whole new language practice is conceivable. Language is not static and refines again and again (at least this text is based on this hypothesis). Wittgenstein himself uses the metaphor of an old city to describe his conception of language (Philosophical investigations, § 18).

Second, there has to be the possibility for someone, who gets drilled, to become someone who drills others, if this person masters a language in a way that he could take corrective action as needed. It is this way, how I understand the transition from immaturity to maturity.

<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig: Philosophical investigations, § 304.

<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein writes in another paragraph (Philosophical investigations, § 246) in the context of the privacy of these qualia:

“It can’t be said that the others learn my sensations/qualia *solely* through my behavior, - because it can’t be said of me that I learned them. I *have them*.

That’s right: it makes sense to say about others that they doubt whether I am in pain; but it makes no sense to say that about myself (to doubt that I am in pain; author’s note)”.

modernity (who emigrated to the United States for historic reasons and brought their European influence, for instance Grosz, Beckmann, Albers, but also much earlier by Arshile Gorky) on the one hand<sup>17</sup>, absorbing their works and influences in order to prepare their spiritual and artistic successors and still insisting on the autonomy of their own works on the other hand, their narration will be nowadays known as American Modernism in art history.

Clement Greenberg understood modernism as a way of art tending towards reduction within the chosen art form: every single art form tries to show their nature within their art form. Painting, for instance, deals with the medium of canvas and paint to reflect on form, colour, and line. The artist's work reflects on the "flatness" of the canvas and paint and in which the fore- and background are played off against each other.

By understanding modernism like this, he also plausibly tried to legitimate the narration of art towards modernism as a historic tendency of every single art form and the artist's goal to a more and more reduced expression<sup>18</sup>, in which the materiality also played a role.

Probably due to lack of conceptual clarity (but also because of his insistence that the abstract-expressionist works have to hit the recipient visually direct and without a mediating instance), Greenberg gave with his texts still-to-be minimalists a possibility to emphasize the materiality of their works<sup>19</sup>. As a critical reaction to the Modernism of Greenberg, in 1951 Rauschenberg painted the so-called "White Paintings", which are considered as precursors of both minimalism and conceptual art. With Duchamps, there was additionally and indirectly an early critic of modernity<sup>20</sup>: he called and criticized modern paintings as "retinal art". Duchamps himself wanted to "put the idea back into the service of painting". Because of that, he is also referred to as the grandfather of postmodern art and amongst other things as a precursor to conceptual art<sup>21</sup>.

Within the modernism, Barnett Newman is in many ways one of the main representatives of Abstract Expressionism, but his writings (and works) are more than just a modernism in the mode of how it was and wanted to be understood by the minimalists and their way they criticized it.

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<sup>17</sup> Barnett Newman, for instance, criticizes Mondrian's works – by unjustly reducing his works to the later ones and probably in order to provoke – as formal patterns, even if they justifiably – as well as Newman's works nowadays – can be seen as complacent and beautiful.

<sup>18</sup> Opposed to Greenberg, Robert Rosenblum – another art critic and curator from New York – saw the existentialist aspects in the artworks of artists from New York, which he tried to fit into an according art historic narration, beginning from Caspar David Friedrich and ending with Rothko. The corresponding title of his book was: "Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko".

<sup>19</sup> The notion of minimalism is used in an ambivalent way: sometimes it refers to the object-likeness of the work, other times it is an aspect that comes with the object and that is being reflected on (i.e. space).

<sup>20</sup> Indirectly, since Duchamp had criticized modernity even before the emergence of American modernism. As far as I know, Duchamp himself never directly criticized American modernism. But his criticism towards modernity was updated later. See also footnote 21.

In terms of art history, it still has to be analyzed in-depth whether and to what extent Duchamp, who lived and worked in New York from 1915, influenced the work of subsequent artists from the modernist scene very early on.

<sup>21</sup> I had written an essay about Duchamps' critic of modern art, in which I analyzed his last work „Étant donné", on which he worked 20 years and which was installed posthumously, and which I classified in art historic and art theoretic terms. In it, I also put forward the thesis that in his last work a critique of modernity as "retinal art" is included.

In my opinion, Barnett Newman is one of those artists, whose artists' theory and art theory is one of the neglected and unrecognized ones in art history. His writings are highly-po(i)etic, drenched in metaphors, in which it is barely about the materiality of his modernist works. He is aware of the materiality of his works, but it is not his main concern, as he says in an interview with Lane Slater:

"[...] that I have removed the emphasis on a painting as an object. [...]. [I]t doesn't mean that I'm ignorant of the fact that the painting inevitably is an object [...]. I'm trying to make a distinction between aesthetic object and a work of art"<sup>22</sup>,

and furthermore in an interview with Thomas B. Hess:

„What I'm saying is that my painting is physical and what I'm saying also is that my painting is metaphysical. What I'm also saying is that my life is physical and that my life is metaphysical [...]. [...] [T]he attempt to describe something which is alive is impossible."<sup>23</sup>

It is remarkable that, on the one hand, Newman understands his artworks not only as located in the physicality of the world, but also reaches out to something metaphysical. Even more remarkable, on the other hand, is the way he conceives his artworks are parallel to his view of a life or rather a living being, respectively. He wants the recipients to have a sublime experience in front of his artworks.

Differentiations and terms like these come up in his complete writings again and again: plastic vs. plasmic, aesthetic object vs. artwork, communication vs. poetry, beautiful vs. sublime. All for pairs of notions have in common that the former is to be understood in a formal way that he opposes to with the latter notion. The latter notions are reserved for something that won't and can't be absorbed by the artwork as an object. The latter notion has always a tendency towards something metaphysical<sup>24</sup>. At least, I will argue for such a tendency towards the metaphysical in Newman's writings and renew this claim for my artworks.

Newman's works were never occasions for the recipient to observe their physicality, but their quality as artistic expressions always were occasions to trace them back to the artist and/or lead from them to the recipient. The artwork seems to be beautiful, but is rather an occasion for the recipients' sublime experience that the artist expresses in the artwork and wants to evoke in the recipient. This is what is alive and exalted in his works. The artwork as an object is rather an occasion for Newman to express a private sensation, which then for the recipient in turn is an occasion for evoking this sensation by looking at the artwork.

There are two essays, which he wrote in the year 1948 and which both indicate the disregarding of the object and the referring back to a basic emotive component. At the same time, these essays show the new self-conscience that Newman and his artist colleagues have and how they break away

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<sup>22</sup> Newman, B.: "Interview with Lane Slater (1963)". In: O'Neill, John P. (1990) (Hg.): Barnett Newman. Selected Writings and Interviews. New York 1990, p. 253.

<sup>23</sup> Newman, B.: "A Conversation: Barnett Newman and Thomas B. Hess (1966)". In: O'Neill, John P. (1990) (Hg.): Barnett Newman. Selected Writings and Interviews. New York 1990, p. 280 – 281.

<sup>24</sup> It shall not be concealed that the thinking of Newman was even more radical in his beginnings, in which the beauty was dismissed and rejected as a formal pattern. The question is legitimate whether this radical rejection of beauty is a provoking strategy. Also see footnote 17.

In this regard, the statements of the interviews, which were up to 20 years older than the more radical writings (for instance "The Plasmic Image (1945)" or "The First Man was an artist (1947)"), can be seen as mitigating continuations.

in a defiant way from the European tradition of painting by occupying their autonomy that comes with this self-conscience:

„The artist in America, by comparison [ in comparison to the European artist; author’s note], is like a barbarian. He does not have the superfine sensibility toward the object that dominates European feeling. He does not even have the objects.”<sup>25</sup>

And what remains that the American artists can refer to in order to face off the whole European tradition of art? Honestly it is what all human beings have in common regardless of what they may or may not know:

„We are reasserting man’s natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions”<sup>26</sup>

But it also has to be taken into account that Newman himself seems to contradict the modernist assumption of Greenberg that every form of art has to stay within its own art form’s limitations, when Newman, dismissing any kind of limitations, seems to assert:

„Man’s first expression, like his first dream, was an aesthetic one. Speech was a poetic outcry rather than a demand for communication. Original man, shouting his consonants, did so in yells of awe and anger at his tragic state, at his own self-awareness and at his own helplessness before the void. [...]. The human in language is literature, not communication. Man’s first cry was a song”<sup>27</sup>

To find an expression for the tragic fate of the self-conscious human being and to manifest this expression in his works is his goal. That this expression, even if it is a basic outcry, had to be described as a language, doesn’t seem to bother Newman at all<sup>28</sup>. And at the same time, it has to be noticed that Newman himself stays technically in the chosen art form, if his writings are seen as literature, in which he tries to overcome something or at least wants to show wherein the metaphysical in his language consists of.

This exaltation, which does not materialize in the physicality of modernist painting, was also seen by Greenberg, about which he wrote in his later writings. He tried to defend modernism by introducing the notion of “quality” of the works in order to save modernism from a false understanding, which

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<sup>25</sup> Newman, B.: „The Object and the Image (1948)“. In: O’Neill, John P. (1990) (Hg.): Barnett Newman. Selected Writings and Interviews. New York 1990, S. 170.

<sup>26</sup> Newman, B.: „The Sublime is Now (1948)“. In: O’Neill, John P. (1990) (Hg.): Barnett Newman. Selected Writings and Interviews. New York 1990, S. 173.

<sup>27</sup> Newman, B.: „The First Man was an artist (1947)“. In: O’Neill, John P. (1990) (Hg.): Barnett Newman. Selected Writings and Interviews. New York 1990, S. 158.

In this respect, it is interesting that the narration of the first man comes very close to Heidegger’s notion of “Geworfenheit”. But this is no surprise, for Newman’s search for an artistic expression is in a way also about the “being of existence”.

<sup>28</sup> The lack of conceptual clarity with which Newman describes modernism with unmodernistic means is due to the presuppositions of modernism itself.

At the end, I want to show that the modernist approach of wanting to stay within one artform’s can be taken serious, without to get a modernist result which itself stays within the same artform’s limitations. Modernism and its guiding principle of reducing the chosen art form to its nature of this chosen art form being taken seriously leads to a result that is beyond the scope of modernism itself and thereby to a postmodern resolution of art forms in general, which is characterized of a simultaneity of forms of art prevails. My artworks want to show this transition from modernism to the postmodern, which I also see as a transition from – how I would call it – a utopian-universal condition to an existential-individual condition.

then rather led to an opposite effect. Because the modernism à la Greenberg was not reductionist in its presuppositions, the emerging minimalism was a result in contrast to the modernism of Greenberg.

This exaltation and the recipient, who looks at the works is exactly what I am aiming at in my artworks without to make the mistakes of a modernism that maneuvered into a dead end or to be reduced to the work's materiality.

We can state that, for Newman, – as we have already shown for the philosophy of Wittgenstein – the metaphysical subject became the subject of art because of the reductionist tendencies which Newman tried to express in his works. Both Wittgenstein and Newman disregard of the world and its objects in a specific way and focus on the subject that constitutes the world and its objects in the first place. The component that disregards the object is the abstract one.

What almost impeded to perish in the last quote above is that, for Newman, the work as an artistic expression is the creation of an expression and to put an expression of a sensation into the work. This is the expressive component. This is what he means, when he describes this expression as a “poetic outcry”, which is expressed in the artworks<sup>29</sup>.

In my opinion, Newman – with his writing – indicates a closeness of meaning between the notions of “poesis” and “poiesis”: while “poesis” is the artistic creation of an expression by putting that expression into the artwork, “poiesis” is the general version: the creation of an expression in general<sup>30</sup>. That this po(i)etic outcry creates a space<sup>31</sup> – even a whole world – that can be filled in with objects, will be – amongst others – the subject of the next chapters.

The tragic irony of Newman's works is that they can nowadays be described as beautiful, just as Mondrian's works were described as such by Newman (as I already pointed out earlier). There are also very good reasons for this, which can sooner or later happen to any avant-garde work of art and which we will discuss later.

## **5. Art as art forms connected by family resemblances?**

For I am using the strict rules of modernism in order to go beyond the scope of what this reductionist approach is about, I am able to show modernism's relation to the postmodern. I am breaking down modernist conditions of staying within one art form with modernist means. By being freed from these modernist conditions, I am opening up for a transition towards a more universal thinking: by doing so, I am able to talk about art in general again, instead of only talking about single art forms.

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<sup>29</sup> The thought of an emotive expression can also be found in a similar way in Frost, when he writes: „A poem...begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where an emotion finds the thought and the thought finds the words” (from a letter to Louis Untermeyer, dated January 1<sup>st</sup> 1916).

<sup>30</sup> I'm referring to the passage in Plato's Symposium, where it is written: “You know that producing [this is my interpretation, author's note] is something manifold. For what is a cause for some thing to come into existence out of nothingness, is poiesis in general”. In: Plato, Symposium 205 b-c.

To what extent an aristotelic understanding of “poiesis” – understood as an “act that has a purpose” – is in accordance with a platonic understanding of poiesis, is not the goal of this essay and can't be answered here.

<sup>31</sup> That's the reason why minimalism is important as an elaboration for the issue of “space” without being exhaustive: it just falls thematically short.

Thus, it is obvious that we have the old problem of talking about art in general without the use of a notion that could satisfy our needs. Because we once more have to show what all the art forms have in common, for instance what music and painting have in common.

The only plausible solution I can give at the moment is to conceive the art forms as connected by family resemblances<sup>32</sup>, in order to subsume them under the notion of art. At least then we have the possibility to say that some single art forms have one single property in common without having to say that all art forms possess that one property or have it in common.

By doing so, we could then build up a transition from painting to sculpture by showing the materiality of that painted colour. With the aid of light and paint, we could show the transition from painting to photography. If we use several frames and put it together like in the work "Frameworks/Black lives matter (Giacometti revisited), we could reflect on time, space, photography, film/movie and theatre. By painting poems and words (like I did in "Schwarz auf Weiss No. 2/[...]"), I reflect on language, rhythm and by doing so, also about music.

At the same time, there is the possibility to make statements within the artworks through quotes and by appropriations about single styles and –isms and amongst others, to show that all roads lead to Rome. If I quote the styles of artists like Josef Albers, Victor Vasarely, Barnett Newman, Robert Ryman, Edvard Munch, Frank Stella, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, Marcel Duchamp, Alberto Giacometti, Daniel Buren, Pablo Picasso, Joseph Kosuth, Donald Judd, Yves Klein, Gustave Courbet, William Forsythe, Steven Parrino, then I am not only showing from where I am coming from, but also to renew, update and expand their questions that were entailed in their works.

And at the end, if you stand in front of my works in an exhibition, the whole exhibition becomes a performance to reflect on. This performance is constituted and completed by the existence of a recipient. And this performance only exists to show that through the reception of the artworks, the recipient encounters oneself as a limit of the world and others as a limit in the world.

To argue with Thomas S. Kuhn: my work is based on a simple theory with which different works can be summarized. I take the theory that underlies my works as paradigmatic. I also try to exemplify this theory on the basis of the works (for example, in the work "Viktor Vasarely" reflections on monochrome, on minimalism, on the OpArt are confluencing with modernist elements). As a result of these confluences, complex interdependencies arise.

## **6. Once more the metaphysical subject: the human being in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Of course, both the explanations of Newman and my own explanation are attempts of a narrative that emphasizes the avant-gardist claims of both the American modernism at that time and the avant-gardist claims of my own. This narrative breakaway moment has to be considered as the standard case in history<sup>33</sup>, both in art and philosophy. In this regard, this breakaway moment doesn't

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<sup>32</sup> Also see footnote 13 for the notion of „family resemblances“.

<sup>33</sup> I'm coming back to the issue of metaphysics and avant-garde: even trends that once were avant-garde can become – depending on the course of your own narration and the history in general – conservative in the course of history. Metaphorically spoken: avant-garde is to be understood as pioneering or path-breaking, but

differ from the ones of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, but also Adorno in their attempt of a foundation (and the following applies to me, too). They all tried to work through or work towards a residual, they may (sometimes) find this residual to be endangered and (therefore) worth protecting.

Adorno tried to protect this residual of being appropriated by notions (which is why he criticized the reifying tendency of the world) with his design of what is known as nonconceptuality. The origins for this danger of reifying this nonconceptual residual that needs to be protected can probably already be found in Heidegger and his notions of “presentness-at-hand” and “readiness-to-hand”. The former is tied to a reifying world, while the latter is eventful<sup>34</sup>. And at the same time, it is important to understand that the notion of nonconceptuality only comes into view by having a notion of conceptuality in the first place<sup>35</sup>.

Newmans narration of the first outcry that is an aesthetic expression of the artist and which creates the world as we know it in the first place evokes Heidegger’s thrown-ness of humankind. It is not yet an always and already being-in-the-world, but almost.

It was and is the search for an (artistic) expression for our sensations/qualia for Newman that made him go away from beautiful art objects and towards a sublime experience. This sublime that elevates the human being, lets him come to itself and thereby to an ultimate experience is what Newman is aiming at and what he implemented in his artworks. Here, at the limits of the world, is where people touch and move each other.

The breakaway moment, in which he postulates the modernist work of art as a metaphysical and sublime one – in combination with their reception within the art scene – guaranteed him that his works were perceived as avant-garde works. But the history of metaphysics shows that the perception of his works as avant-garde (especially, if there is a metaphysical component that comes with it) becomes the center for a new breakaway moment of a new art movement as his works are generally accepted by the people. Even the American modernism degenerated into a beauty due to the historicity. It became a beautiful object. The sublime works of the past are the beautiful works of a future present. They become the canon and occasions of future hermeneutics. That’s the course of (art) history.

I want to reclaim the avant-garde claim of Newman in my works of art: I want to show with modernist means in my artworks to what extent the transition to the postmodern is based in modernism and feed postmodern back to modernism. And though I am European, and I have beautiful objects as an artist, at the end I am still searching for an expression for my sensations in order to find a connection to the recipient. Perhaps more subtle sensations than the American modernist, but nevertheless they are sensations. Every artist wants to emancipate her-/himself by

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if everyone takes this course, it becomes a universal path. Frost describes the avant-garde quite well when he writes:

„[...]

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference”.

From Frost, Robert: “The road not taken”.

<sup>34</sup> I won’t be able to go into further details that both are not mutually exclusive as it was argued for by Heidegger in his critique of “presentness-at-hand” and thereby a critique of science.

<sup>35</sup> This is an interpretation that Wellmer offered in “Adorno, Anwalt des Nicht-Identischen”. In: Wellmer, Albrecht: Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne: Vernunftkritik nach Adorno, Frankfurt 1993.

what she or he is moved by in her/his contemporary era. She or he searches for a critical liberation from the chains of the conditions of this contemporary era, which are her/his impediments. To be liberated by the chains of the past in the present. To achieve this, it is important to know and to recognize your history. Only then, you are free for a future yet to be determined. A future which is different and which can be better.

Once again, I return to Wittgenstein: in a heterodoxical interpretation of his philosophy of language, I indicated that for Wittgenstein's understanding of language acquisition, there is a time to follow the rules and in which you are drilled. At the end of this process is the transition from immaturity ("Unmündigkeit") to maturity ("Mündigkeit"). At the end of this transition, maturity also leads to autonomy/("Selbstbestimmung"). And the responsibility ("Verantwortung") that comes with it. And if you look closer, you will recognize the metaphors and the roots of these words like "Mündigkeit", "Selbstbestimmung" and "Verantwortung": "Mund" (mouth), "Stimme" (voice), "Antwort" (response). And how easy it gets to understand these words in retrospect (and how complicated it was to get there).

And even if it may feel unsatisfactory: it is not the indeterminacy of language that lets us make art to find an expression for our sensations, but the indeterminableness through language, with which everything begins and never will find an end. In the end, this indeterminableness is exactly what guarantees the sanctity of our dignity. The attempt to determine what cannot be determined completely is the paradox of any existence. A being who once felt tragic, but now is fortunate because it found its freedom. It is this moment, in which fate changes to freedom without to fall back in determinism. We may not be able to change the past. But we can learn out of it to autonomously determine our future. It is about us to decide how we want to proceed.

In the end, I leave it with the contradiction that it is exactly what distinguishes us from each other is what generally draws our commonalities. We can only exalt ourselves because we have a common ground. And we have a common ground because we can exalt ourselves.

Now, we have all the freedom and the responsibility to determine in a mature and autonomous way how we can be everything. How we all can be. How we want to be a certain way.

The life<sup>36</sup> of every single one of us is just an autonomous step away...

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<sup>36</sup> In an earlier version I wrote "fortune" instead of "life". "Life" seems to be a more appropriate word, because it is more descriptive and more general.