

The aesthetics of appearing

Martin Seel

If for a moment we were to imagine aesthetics as an expansive building that has been worked upon continuously for centuries, that has undergone many redecorations and acquired numerous extensions – let's say, as a museum that has become somewhat labyrinthine in the course of time – then we could consider which of its many entrances is the best for us to commence a tour of the building. It would probably be easiest to meet up at the entrance most conveniently located for reaching the important exhibition halls, the café, the cloakroom, the screening room, and the bookstore. If we were lucky, this would be the main entrance, to which someone giving us directions would in any case send us. But we are not that lucky. As a result of the many renovations and additions to the building, the idea of a main entrance has been forgotten. Instead, there are countless portals from which the various exhibits can be reached more or less easily. Therefore we must first set about finding an appropriate entrance that will lead us without diversion to the heart of the complex.

In what follows I would like to give an account of what I found during my search. I shall distinguish an entrance to aesthetics that can lead us without any detours *in medias res*. My concern here is exclusively with such an opening, not with the many further steps that follow upon this access.¹ I shall take this step into aesthetics exemplarily – two examples are to show where a suitable access point is located. As in our imaginary building, there are of course many other entry points, some of which are hardly any less suitable; but the entrance presented here is the one I would recommend – should anyone ask.

A topographical sketch

Since its Platonic beginnings, philosophical aesthetics has been impelled by an alternative that is as enlightening as it is misleading. Aesthetic perception has been attributed the capacity either to gain a genuine access to being or to disclose a genuine sphere of illusion [*Schein*]. In the first figure of thought, aesthetic perception is seen as an encounter with how things truly are, as a penetration of illusionary conditions of

everyday life. In the second figure of thought, however, aesthetic perception appears inversely as a turning away from the stability of the reliable world and thus as a penetration of the power of the real.

To my mind, this is one of the incorrect contrasts from which aesthetics ought to escape. The way of doing so becomes evident once it is clear that the alternative paths are just variations of a third path that is already well trodden, where intuition and reflection are on a pilgrimage to being or appearance.

The classical *aesthetics of being* [*Ästhetik des Seins*] understands the aesthetic process as the revelation of an otherwise concealed higher sense or being. In current discussions, though, a non-classical variation, one frequently formulated in media theory, plays a big part; in the objects of art, this variation sees at work a discovery of the *constructiveness* of all relations of the real. Both variations of an aesthetics of being do, however, assume that *general* structures of reality can be recognized in or by means of aesthetic perception; the basic constitution of the reality becomes visible in the constitution of aesthetic perception.

An *aesthetics of illusion* [*Ästhetik des Scheins*], by contrast, rejects this close liaison between reality and aesthetic reality, and, correspondingly, between the aesthetic, epistemological and ethical *theory* of the one reality. For the aesthetics of illusion the field – or, more radically, the time span – of the aesthetic is a separate zone from which nothing can be inferred about the constitution of reality. It describes the process of aesthetic experience as entering the sphere of illusion, an illusion that is otherwise ignored, one that is located outside the continuity of being.

Each of these positions has been defended in very different variations and with enormously varying willingness to form alliances. One need only recall Hegel's hugely influential discussion of the absolute's sensuous illusion [*sinnlicher Schein*], Nietzsche's ideas about artistically exposing the illusionary character [*Scheincharakter*] of the cultural world, or Bloch's aesthetics of anticipating [*Vorschein*] a better society in the future. Nonetheless, the preoccupation with being or appearance, which goes back to Plato, presents an

especially unfortunate alternative. According to this fixation, aesthetic consciousness paves the way either to a higher reality or out of the lower reaches of reality (or it goes both ways simultaneously). Either way, aesthetic perception is conceived of as flight from the phenomenal presence of human life. In effect, aesthetic consciousness is understood in both perspectives as an inattentiveness to the concrete here and now of its acts of perception.

We should not accept this disastrous consequence. For there is a lot of evidence that aesthetic consciousness ought to be comprehended as an excellent form of intuiting presence. Even if it is past or future presences that are perceived in their fathomlessness, for this we nevertheless require a situation that is perceived in its own particular momentariness. This turn to the presence of something present, I would like to say, is a basic propelling force of all aesthetic perception. Aesthetic consciousness perceives reality in the particularity of its own sensuous self-presentation, and this means in the simultaneity and momentariness in which it presents itself to sensuous discernment. In this perspective, aesthetic perception is understood as the opening of a zone of appearing [*Erscheinen*] in which reality is revealed from a different, otherwise inaccessible, side. Neither determinable being nor unreal appearance, but the momentary and simultaneous repleteness of the process of appearing, constitutes the first touchstone of aesthetic conduct.

The basic idea is simply to translate Kant's turn of phrase 'play of epistemological faculties', which in its original place is not much more than a terminological metaphor, into a specification that encompasses both the 'subjective' and the 'objective' elements of aesthetic practice equally. What is important is to comprehend aesthetic perception in terms of its object and aesthetic objects in terms of their perception. In accordance with this demand we can say that aesthetic perception is *attentiveness to a play of appearances*. This connecting and interweaving of appearances is closed to both theoretical and practical access – as Kant demonstrated convincingly. Nonetheless, it is not a chimera or a projection, and certainly not a deception. After all, this interaction of sensuously distinguishable aspects – an interaction indeterminable in its totality – is present to everyone who can hear and see (as well as feel, smell and taste). What we perceive here is not a world *different from* the one of sensuous objects; we do, however, perceive it *differently* – with an intensified feeling for the here and now of the situation in which perception is executed.

What is discerned here is a constellation of aspects that are indeed *separately* determinable. The appearances that come into play here are not 'undetermined object[s] of empirical intuition', as we read at the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*;² they are conceptually determinable objects or aspects of perception, frequently determined in intuition. When I observe the flight of a plastic bag aesthetically, I observe the flight of a plastic bag – and the intensity of my observation is in no way diminished by the fact that I know what kind of object I actually see. The appropriate starting point for an analysis of aesthetic perception is not a concept of appearance conceived prior to all processes of conceptual understanding but a concept of the conceptually graspable given. Everything, however, that can be grasped by using predicates of perception can also be perceived in a particularity that, for its part, cannot be conceptually exhausted. As long as we concentrate on this particularity, what is important is not the fixing of a *being so* [*Sosein*], but a play of *appearances* – we perceive the empirical world in the radiance of its constitutive *underdeterminacy*.

Aesthetic appearing is not primarily an appearing of something; it is an appearing of itself. Something appears as 'itself'; it is not grasped in the role of something or as a sign for something else. All anticipation [*Vorschein*] or semblance [*Anschein*] in the field of aesthetics is to be understood in terms of an appearing that does not merely serve the function of a revealing or illuminating *representation*. All aesthetic showing originates in a self-showing that does not always include an intentional act of showing. All aesthetic illusion [*Schein*] originates in an appearing [*Erscheinen*] that is itself not illusory [*scheinhaft*]. For that reason, I believe, the indisputable insights of both an 'aesthetics of being' and an 'aesthetics of appearance' can be formulated plausibly only on the basis of an *aesthetics of appearing*.

This aesthetics should not be restricted to art, especially if it wishes to do justice to the particularity of the arts. The presentation of artworks operates in the medium of a semantically charged appearing that can be analysed only in combination with elementary processes of appearing, processes that are not directed towards the act of showing or the formation of signs and are therefore not semantically charged.³ Of course, works of art do frequently make complex knowledge possible; they can impart knowledge and their perception often requires a special knowledge. And of course art operates a lot with elements of illusion; it may imagine states of the world that do not correspond to any reality outside fiction. But a primary element of

the perception of artworks, too, and therefore a favourable starting point for its theory, is attentiveness to the phenomenal individuality of their forms.

Hence, the first step into aesthetics is to be devoted to this attentiveness. It focuses on what kind of attentiveness it is and on that to which it is directed. The objects of perception can be any objects whatsoever – a ball, a tree or a car wash. Even so, I take this step here with the help of two *artistic* examples, first, because they are also individual objects of perception and, second, because they have the convenient advantage of being aesthetically something more than that.

A plastic bag in flight

In the movie *American Beauty* directed by Sam Mendes (1999) there is a short sequence that deserves all the recognition that has been abundantly conferred upon the work itself. It is a video recording of a plastic bag that flies about in a circulating air current. The video footage is approximately 80 seconds long and is seen halfway through the movie. At the end of the movie, when the epilogue of the deceased main character is narrated, another 20-second segment of this film within the film is shown.

This video is embedded in the movie's plot in a manner that is as unequivocal as it is complex. The footage is taken from the video diary, shot with a camcorder, of the eighteen-year-old Ricky; in this diary he films everything that appears noteworthy to him. When the movie shows a situation from Ricky's perspective, it shows the video pictures that he shoots of the situation and that he views in his camera's display. It is through the videos that he has shot of Jane, the neighbour's daughter, that the audience discovers his interest in her. The first time Jane accompanies Ricky to his room, he plays the videocassette of the plastic bag for her. The total recording, he tells her, is 15 minutes long. While the two young people are watching the video, they form the only, as yet, unbroken relationship in the movie. Similarly, the excerpt shown again at the end of the movie engenders a positive image. The sequence with the hovering bag verifies the dead hero's view of the beauty of a life that has liberated itself from the constraints of convention and routine, and is open to the experience of the moment – an experience that he underscores even though it has cost him his life.

Within the framework of my example, however, the movie is important only as forming the context for the video. In it the camera follows a white plastic bag hovering against the background of a red brick wall whose sections are separated by white pillars. The

bag first circles just above the surface of grey paving stone in front of this wall. The paving is partly covered with autumnal leaves, which are also moving in the wind. After a short time the bag – but not the leaves – takes to the air and begins to oscillate in circular movements and, followed by the camera, progresses to the left along the wall. In the sequence shown at the end of the movie, the camera zooms in on the bag so that only the wall and the gyrating object in front of it can be seen. It is a completely silent video. Neither the whooshing of the wind nor the rustling of the bag nor any other sound can be heard. The scene is completely isolated. The recorded episode unfolds in no-man's-land; it could be the wall of a shopping mall in the suburbs. The pictures do not provide any information about this, however. They do not provide any information at all. They document a unique event by following it with the camera. The camera stays with the movement, which it follows with its own movement generated by pan shots and zooms. This concentration is the aesthetic sense of the video. It is about nothing else but the perception of something in the process of its appearing. When, and to the extent that, something is taken up in this manner (irrespective of the sensory apparatus employed), we find ourselves in a state of aesthetic perception. The video exemplifies a particular access to the outer world, an access that is at hand in all aesthetic attentiveness. This attentiveness is tuned into the phenomenal individuality – and, thus, to the irreducible sensuous presence – of its objects or surroundings.

In – or after – the process, we can of course discern all sorts of things, just as I did in describing the scene: that there are leaves on the ground; that it has been paved; that there are white pillars; that the bag moves this way or that way; and so forth. If we were to break the sequence down into a series of stills, we could conduct detailed studies of the aerodynamics of a plastic bag or of the fortuitous choreography of leaves on a surface. We can do all this, just as we can treat any aesthetic object in a manner that is contrary to its aesthetic consideration. (In principle, every aesthetic object can be treated non-aesthetically and every non-aesthetic object aesthetically.) But this is not the crucial sense of the video – it reflects neither the sense Ricky had in mind when he shot the footage, nor the sense in which the video is employed in the movie. The video is an icon of aesthetic intuition itself.

Everything and anything that is at all perceptible can be perceived in the process of its appearing. We just have to pay attention to the simultaneity and momentariness of its own present givenness in sensuous-

ness, a givenness experienced in the particular here and now. It then encounters us with a phenomenal repleteness, the perception of which allows us to take the time to sense the moment. I believe that we can locate a basic relation of all aesthetic perception here: a relation that is operative in all states of aesthetic perception, however differently they may otherwise be developed.

The concept of appearing, as I use it here, should not therefore be equated with, or precipitately opposed to, the concepts of *being* and *illusion*, in the sense presented in my opening sketch. The concept of appearing is a counter-concept not to the concept of being, but just to the concept of the conceptually predetermined *being so* of phenomenal objects. In contradistinction to this phenomenal constitution of things and events, the complex contemporaneousness of their appearing can indeed be grasped in perception but it cannot be held fast in a knowledge form. This appearing can encompass elements of sensuous appearance to a high degree but it can also do without them quite easily. What the tradition has called aesthetic appearance is primarily a relation of simultaneous, momentary, and – in this sense – *real* appearing; it is not the relation of an unreal as-if – be it feigned, fictional or imaginary. Nor should this appearing be generally grasped as a relation of representation. It is not primarily an appearing of something else; it is an occurrence that presents itself here and now to unreduced sensuous perception – and thereby makes its presence felt in the time span of a nonfunctionalized present.

Emphasizing the reality of appearing is, of course, equivocal in the context of our video. For we are concerned here with three such realities. The video is the recording of a real occurrence; yet what we see is not

this occurrence but a video – a video, however, whose pictures have themselves been filmed, and indeed in such a way that they are at all times recognizable as video sequences in contradistinction to the movie's sequences. (In the fiction of the movie this means: as the subjective *representation* of reality in contrast to represented *reality*.) We can describe this as a play of appearance: the occurrence visible *in the video*, along with the occurrence *of the video*, as well as the occurrence of the *presentation of the video* as a video. Our minimal specification relates neutrally to these differences. Irrespective of whether we are concerned with a segment of reality or with a representation of reality or with the representation of a representation, what we perceive when we perceive something aesthetically is a play of appearances that is never just appearance but a connecting and interweaving of phenomenal aspects.

Whether we see the dance of a plastic bag or the moving images of such a dance or the moving images of the moving images of a dancing bag, all this makes a very significant difference. For something notably different appears in each of the situations in question. In the scene in which the video recording was made, other senses besides seeing would have played a part in the perception: hearing, touch and smell would have been involved too. In perceiving the video, by contrast, we see a stirring choreography of colours and forms, which we – as practised image users – recognize as the flight of a plastic bag; at the same time we follow the choreography of the video, which directs our perception to the bag, and our perception makes the bag the hero of its reconnaissance. (The video is by no means a poor copy of the real occurrence, as Ricky says it is to Jane; it transforms the occurrence into a silently animated ornament.) In the movie that presents the



video to us, we see what is on the video recording; but we also see the grainy video image and understand it moreover as an extract from a much longer video recording, just about one-fifteenth of which we get to see. We imagine a video work of art that creates a school of seeing using artistic means.

Whichever of these sensations we might be looking for, each time we have to meet at the scene of the appearing. That does not mean that attentiveness to what is appearing is the start of each aesthetic perception. That is not always the case. Aesthetic perception can begin wherever it wants to – while reviewing a critique or a theory, when awakening in a train, or while climbing a mountain. My claim is simply that it is an immanent telos of aesthetic perception to be attentive to a presence of what is appearing. Because this is the case, the theory of perception and its objects is well advised to begin its analysis with the presence of appearing. Sooner or later this theory must however make distinctions, all of which are already present in this minimalist primal scene of aesthetic perception.

First of all, to perceive aesthetically may be nothing more than a concentration on sensory appearing. Aesthetic perception's attentiveness is then directed toward mere appearing. Ricky irritates his fellow human beings by, among other things, finding odd things inherently worthy of consideration and thereby beautiful. He tells Jane that he once saw and filmed a homeless person who had frozen to death. She asks him why he did it. 'Because it was amazing', he replies. Ricky espouses an aesthetics of contemplative wonder about the things of the world and of life. It is in this sense that he also interprets his work on the flying plastic bag: he has never seen anything more beautiful in his whole life, he says. What is important to the two young people is the scene's meaninglessness, its being free of symbols, its innocence. In this sense they experience the flight of the plastic bag as something absolutely beautiful, as can be found in a profane world only in the realm of garbage.

Second, however, the video also creates a special atmosphere between the two. They sense that they are of one mind in their admiration for this detached occurrence, which becomes for them the event of detaching themselves from their depressing social surroundings. By watching the video together they become closer to each other in a manner that would have been much more difficult for them in a direct face-to-face situation. While they are looking at the screen and Ricky is talking about the experience of recording the video, Jane takes hold of his hand; a little later she kisses

him. Not only has the video transformed the scene in which it is shot into a floating dance of elements, in being perceived by the couple jointly this dance is transformed into an atmospheric appearing that corresponds vividly with the viewers' lives.

Third, moviegoers can experience the video not only as mere appearing, nor just as an atmospheric alteration of a situation (be it the protagonists' or their own situation), but over and above this as an artistic presentation of a kind of world encounter and therefore as a process of artistic appearing. They see an excerpt from a video artwork that draws part of its fascination precisely from the fact that it appears only in fragments within the movie.⁴ Like every artistic fragment, this one also has to be thought further by the beholder; it guides the imagination beyond the limits of the perceivable. The fragmentary character of the excerpt also highlights the improvisatory nature of the video recording. The camera lets itself be guided by the movements of the object in focus, closes in on it and moves away from it through the alternating settings of the zoom. On the grainy television screen that is seen in the movie – and on which the electronic image's horizontal and vertical grid points are still visible – the camera work acquires an element of scribbling; its actions are those of a pictorial *écriture automatique* that lets everything enter into the stream of its daydreams.⁵ The event of cinematic movement thus becomes the event of presenting a form of perception for which all interpretations and meanings become provisional.

Philip Roth has someone read a line from Shakespeare

However the flight of a plastic bag is experienced – as a real occurrence, as a film document, or as an artistic presentation – flying plastic bags can be grasped differently. We chase after them because they have taken flight; we regard them as trash that does not belong here; we measure their trajectory in the context of aerodynamic experiments. In perceiving them, we can relate to them aesthetically or otherwise, sometimes aesthetically *and* otherwise. This is the case with everything that is or can be an object of our sensuous perception – be it sounds, weights, textures, tastes, or morphemes and phonemes.

Ostensibly Philip Roth's novel *I Married a Communist* is about the impossible marriage of the communist agitator Ira Ringold (alias Iron Rinn) and the actress Chava Fromkin (alias Eve Frame). The core of the book, however, depicts the relationship between Nathan Zuckerman, who functions again here as Roth's

alter ego, and Murray Ringold, Rinn's elder brother. The novel begins with Zuckerman's recollections of the elder Ringold, who was his much-admired English teacher in high school. The novel ends with the aged Murray visiting Nathan, who has also grown older, and telling him how the tragic story of his brother continued and finally ended. After the dramatic breakup of his marriage, Ira is fiercely determined to kill his wife and stepdaughter. Ira had already committed a murder in his youth; at the time Murray helped him to cover it up. Once again, he believes, he has to stand back and watch while his brother makes him an accomplice to a crime. The enthusiastic ex-teacher describes in the following words what crosses his mind in this situation:

'And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.' Line of prose. Recognize it? From the last act of *Twelfth Night*. Feste the clown, to Malvolio, just before Feste sings that lovely song, before he sings, 'A great while ago the world begun,/ With hey ho, the wind and the rain', and the play is over. I couldn't get that line out of my head. 'And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.' Those cryptogrammic *g*'s, the subtlety of their deintensification – those hard *g*'s of 'revenges.' Those terminal *s*'s ... 'thus brings his revenges.' The hissing surprise of the plural noun 'revenges.' Guhh. Juhh. Zuhh. Consonants sticking into me like needles. And the pulsating vowels, the rising tide of their pitch – engulfed by that. The low-pitched vowels giving way to the high-pitched vowels. The bass and tenor vowels giving way to the alto vowels. The assertive lengthening of the vowel *i* just before the rhythm shifts from iambic to trochaic and the prose pounds round the turn for the stretch. Short *i*, short *i*, long *i*. Short *i*, short *i*, short *i*, boom! Revenges. Brings in his revenges. *His* revenges. Sibilated. Hizzzzzuh! Driving back to Newark with Ira's weapons in my car, those ten words, the phonetic webbing, the blanket omniscience ... I felt I was being asphyxiated inside Shakespeare.⁶

There is really nothing to be added to this. There are probably only a few passages in the history of aesthetics that simultaneously analyse and evoke with such clarity the literal sensuousness of literature. Like the video within the movie, there is an artistic doubling here, too. Through the mouth of the figure of the teacher, Roth dramatizes the lines, whose highly dramatic energy is crucial. It is not, however, as Murray explicitly emphasizes, a poem; it is a 'line of prose' to which he devotes his passionate attention. Of course the literal sensuousness of the Shakespearean words is not purely literal: without a sense of the sense of the words, the sense of their sensuousness is not disclosed. Sensuousness and sense reinforce each other; they

form a speech gesture that enjoys the very attributes that this gesture ascribes to its object. The words in Shakespeare's line thus become mimetic signs that show what they express about the relentless passing of time.

This is often the case in literature, though frequently in a less dramatic manner. The sound of the words, their choice and order, the rhythm of sentences and paragraphs, the kind of punctuation – all of these are means used in literary writing, and they are employed no less in prose than in poetry. They allow the moved body of words to come to appearance, in a way that does not occur in other language use. This coming-to-appearance of language is not, however, a privilege of literature alone; it occurs wherever words become striking in their audibly and visually perceptible arrangement, be it in the whispering of sweet nothings, in newspaper headlines, or in advertising catchphrases.⁷ It occurs wherever language forms are heard, seen, or read in such a way that what is important is their acoustic, rhythmic and pictographic appearing – be it identical or parallel to, or even contrary to, their conventional meaning.

Returning to the starting point

Nevertheless it has become almost a convention to hold modern art responsible for a tendency to abandon all appearing. I do not wish to argue against this implausible conception again here.⁸ Those works of fine art, of music and literature, that ostensibly adopt an indifferent stance toward appearing are either interested in a different appearing or experimenting with the conditions of artistic appearing. They do not advocate an artistic rejection of all sensuous contact in favour of ideas, conceptions or other software. For an artistic rejection is to be understood as the rejection that produces its own sensuous irritations, and through these irritations it in turn makes of itself an incommensurable phenomenal event.

That is why a contemporary aesthetics of the arts ought to set up camp at the scene of appearing. The objects of recent art also gain their emotional and atmospheric, their reflective and cognitive, their moral and political significance from processes, energies, constellations of their appearing. If, however, that is the case, then it is evident that aesthetics should make a start not with art but *generally* with incidents of appearing: wherever we leave something as it is, just as it appears to us here and now. That is by no means an encounter with pure being, whatever that might be – for it is after all socialized and cultured individuals who, in their intuition, reside with a thing or in a

situation; we transport our capabilities and knowledge, our distinctions and views into all the moments of this sensuous alertness. Appearing is that being that can become aware only as an unreduced simultaneity of the features of phenomenal being and thus as a passing presence. The paths of aesthetic experience, which diverge in all directions, intersect at this being.

At that intersection we find the answer to Hegel's question concerning the 'necessity' of aesthetic consciousness, concerning its indispensable meaning for the human form of life.⁹ Of course aesthetic consciousness of presence is neither the sole nor the only important form of focus on presence. Everyone striving to accomplish something has to be aligned with the here and now in a different way. In an ascertaining and determining manner, he or she has to adhere to what is given in and to what may be expected from that presence – in contrast to aesthetic reaction, which does not adhere to adherence. Here is where aesthetic perception differs decisively from all theoretical and practical appropriation: it allows us to develop a sense of the passing presence of life.

This sense can flourish or decay – on individual and social, informal and institutional, cultural and societal levels. It is an anthropologically central capability that, in being applied, is subject to constant historical change. Its value in the economy of culture varies. Just as there are, inside or outside art, no aesthetic objects without the capability of aesthetic perception – although these objects exist independently of the ongoing performance of this perception and although they reveal themselves in this performance as an objective play of appearances – a presence made present aesthetically is a state that, in individual and collective life, can be more or less open or closed. What would therefore be lost if the aesthetic sense decayed, would be a private and public sensitivity and receptivity to what immediately touches and moves our imagination and reflection in the midst of all historical and biographical, social and societal mediation. However important this seismographic meaning of aesthetics is for the self-evaluation of human cultures, it continues to be a side effect of aesthetic conduct. For aesthetics' primary sense is located in itself – in a self-encounter executed as world encounter, a self-encounter that is concerned with nothing other than the encounter. In this encounter, human beings have one of their best possibilities for being allowed to be in the time of their being.

Translated by John Farrell

Notes

1. On these steps, see Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*, Hanser, Munich, 2000; forthcoming as *Aesthetics of Appearing*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2003.
2. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Macmillan, London, 1933, p. A19/B33; see also p. A69/B94.
3. In recognizing the necessity of this connection, aesthetic theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were correct in the comparative and complementary treatment of 'nature' and 'art'; see Martin Seel, *Eine Ästhetik der Natur*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1991, ch. V.
4. The flight of plastic bags seems to be a topic in recent video art. The video *Incidents* by Igor and Svedlana Kopistiansky, which was shown at the Fourth Biennale in Lyon in 1997, and in a revised version at the Museum for Modern Art in Frankfurt in 1999, shows objects – including plastic and paper bags – that are blown by the wind through the streets (and sounds) of New York; the video runs for 15 minutes. Similar fortuitous choreographies can be found in the work of the Swiss video artist Eric Hattan. The video *Air* (1998) follows for 34 minutes a plastic bag that is blown by the wind in an inner courtyard. *Blowing in the Wind* (1999) follows the figurations formed by a strip of paper blowing in the wind. 'Yesterday', the artist wrote to the critic Kathrin Becker, 'I saw the movie *American Beauty*. The scene with the plastic bag could have come from me; rather, it can be found in my oeuvre, too.' See the exhibition catalogue: Eric Hatten, *Beton Liquide*, Müller, Baden, Switzerland, 2000, no pagination.
5. As an artefact of the character Ricky, the video is also a chapter in the chronicle of luring someone to passionless beholding (which, of course, abruptly turns into passion the moment Jane becomes the primary object of his lens).
6. Philip Roth, *I Married a Communist*, Vintage, London, 1999, p. 302.
7. 'Il mio mito e finito, ammette Rossi' ran the headline in Italy's sports newspaper *Gazzetta dello Sport* in the summer of 1982 when the Italian soccer team completed a dismal first round in the World Cup without its virtuoso forward scoring a goal (after which, in the second round, the team began its triumphant march to the title and Paolo Rossi began his advance to 'player of the tournament'). 'I like Ike' was a catchphrase of General Eisenhower's presidential campaigns in the 1950s, a slogan to which Roman Jakobson has devoted a convincing analysis in 'Linguistics and Poetics', in K. Pomorska and S. Rudy, eds, *Language in Literature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1960, pp. 62–94.
8. See Martin Seel, 'Art as Appearance: Two Comments on Arthur C. Danto's *After the End of Art*', in *History and Theory* 37, 1998, pp. 102–14.
9. G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. with an introduction and commentary by Michael Inwood, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1993, p. 28.