The Claim of Experience: Aesthetics and Modernity in the Work of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Rancière and Stanley Cavell

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This thesis analyses the work of three philosophers who are rarely connected but, when considered in the context of the tradition of post-Kantian aesthetics, illuminate the connection between individual and shared experience. The thesis presents the challenges posed to experience in modernity, outlining an historically specific conception of experience in the work of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Rancière and Stanley Cavell respectively. The thesis explores the ways that subjective experience makes claims on others. The starting point of this thesis is the dramatic changes to the concept and feeling of experience in modernity, characterised by the loss of traditional authority and the possibility of new forms of freedom. By locating the three philosophers in the Kantian tradition of aesthetics, their views on the possibility of shared experience can be compared and evaluated. Developing and engaging with recent scholarship on each, the thesis establishes new connections between these thinkers. The thesis defends a conception of shared, common experience from within the aesthetic framework. Each philosopher identifies possibilities within ordinary experience through which such experience can be transformed and fulfilled in shared experiences with others. These possibilities are examined in cultural, educational and political contexts where shared encounters with common objects enables the meaning of experience to be both contested and shared. The thesis provides a counterargument to hypertrophic and literalist conceptions of experience that renounce or diminish the significance of shared, communicable and enduring experience as a site of both freedom and orientation in the world. It argues that ordinary experience is in principle sharable and communicable even when it is fully subjective. The framework of Kantian aesthetic experience guides the evaluation of each philosopher's approach, and provides an account of how heightened meaning can emerge in experience that is both historically specific as well as open and imaginative in its engagement with ordinary, material objects.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Publications during enrolment

Scott Robinson, 'Review: *Debt and Guilt: A Political Philosophy*', *Thesis Eleven*, 163:1, 2021, pp.142-145

Scott Robinson, 'Review: *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against the Family* by Sophie Lewis', *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*, 13:2, 2020, pp.199-203

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– 'A challenge to criticism: Judyth Emanuel's *Yeh Hell Ow*' (2020),
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Contents

The Experience of the Ordinary: Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell

This thesis analyses the work of three philosophers who are rarely connected, but whose work illuminates how meaning-making processes emerge in ordinary experience. Jacques Rancière, Walter Benjamin and Stanley Cavell adopt and transform the post-Kantian tradition of aesthetics. In this thesis, I demonstrate how each of these thinkers conceptualises experience in relation to its specifically modern historical and social features. I argue that the framework of Kantian aesthetics serves to highlight the problems of modern experience, including the role of history in experience, the tension between individual and collective experience, and the way it is expressed and communicated.

The types of experience that emerge from my analysis of these three thinkers have some distinct characteristics. They are experiences that reflect the material, social and historical world. Yet, they are also experiences of freedom.[1] The tension between an experience that is context bound and yet reflective is intimately related to the tension between the individual and collective experience. These tensions animate debates in the philosophical tradition of aesthetics and are embodied in key concepts from that tradition, such as Kant's theory of the *sensus communis*, disinterest and the peculiar type of subjective universal validity called for in aesthetic judgment. Rancière, Benjamin and Cavell offer ways of connecting individual and collective experience, which can be illuminated by contextualising their work in terms of Kantian aesthetics.

Throughout the thesis I ask to what extent specific, individual experiences with material objects are connected to historical and social conditions. The issue of whether these conditions are constraints or possibilities is also a guiding question. Rancière, Benjamin and Cavell all argue that the condition of modernity is one of loss and separation from certain rooted forms of experience, for instance those of tradition. At the same time, modernity is acknowledged as an expansion and opening both in terms of who counts as a proper subject of experience and what kinds of objects are conduits for meaning making. In this thesis, I evoke the dilemma posed by the modern world's plethora of apparent possibilities for enjoyment, with the disorienting discovery that this phantasmagoria yields little substantive,

[1] Richard Eldridge in *Images of History: Kant, Benjamin, Freedom and the Human Subject*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016 emphasises this aspect in particular. Eldridge also connects Kant, Benjamin and Cavell on this topic, see pp.187-191.

lasting, or shared experience. Similarly, the tension between individual and collective aspects of experience bears upon the way in which experience in modernity is at once available to all in mass culture and densely social environments and yet rendered mute by anonymity; the possibilities of expanding social experience are cut off by chronic aspects of modern life, including hierarchical and restrictive social orders and cultures, capitalist social relations, and impoverished, ritualised and desiccated forms of communication, political cooperation and moral encounter.[2]

In the opening part of the thesis, I examine the work of Walter Benjamin in the context of recent scholarly re-evaluation of his work. The first two chapters elaborate Benjamin's concept of experience, located both within historical modernity and the ordinary material world, as well as through personal dimensions, such as dreams and wishes. I show how in each aspect, Benjamin attempts to connect individual experiences with collective experience and develop paths for meaning making that have collective political and epistemological significance. Benjamin's uniquely heterodox philosophical approach offers a challenge to the aesthetic framework I develop throughout the thesis. However, I contend that his position relies on an aesthetic space of meaning. Moreover, I argue that although there are weaknesses in Benjamin's concept of collective experience as modeled on individual, fulfilled experience, his work poses useful questions and suggests features of experience that are compelling.

In the second part of the thesis, I turn to Jacques Rancière's re-evaluation of Kant's aesthetics. Rancière's approach provides a reply to problems that arise in Benjamin's concept of collective experience and critique of aesthetics, and crucially locates aesthetic experience in the historical context of modernity. Like Benjamin, Rancière accounts for new ways of relating personal experience to history, and ordinary objects to the possibility of emancipation. Rancière also provides an alternative, Kantian account of the connection between individual and shared experience through the key aesthetic principles of beauty without concept and disinterest. Rancière's approach also connects political egalitarianism with a re-assessment of the significance of ordinary individual experience.

[2] See for instance Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Kurt H. Wolff (trans. and ed.), Glencoe, Illinois: The Free press, 1950, pp.409-424.

The third part of the thesis extends the analysis of political egalitarianism to the context of aesthetic education, where I outline the practical significance of aesthetic experience for communication and education. To this end, I demonstrate an affinity between Rancière's work and that of Stanley Cavell. I defend an open conception of political communities based on the account of aesthetic experience developed throughout the thesis. Based on Cavell's approach to ordinary language, in the final chapter, I articulate the expressive dimension of experience as a key part of the connection between individual and collective significance. I argue throughout the thesis that the significance of ordinary experience can be illuminated by the Kantian aesthetic framework against the background of the historical context of modernity. Moreover, I propose a definition of ordinary, meaningful experience that involves a substantial connection to the world of material objects, inflected by history and, crucially, shared in acts and practices of expression that give voice to this experience.

Post-Kantian Background

I frame this thesis in terms of the post-Kantian tradition of aesthetics in order to develop both historical and conceptual arguments. I show how philosophical aesthetics is characterised by its response to the specific conditions of modernity. Rancière articulates the way in which Kant's aesthetics are linked to democratic revolutions and to a new way of making sense of the world he terms the 'aesthetic regime.'[3] Each thinker responds to different ways in which the post-Kantian tradition has defined modern concepts of experience. Benjamin's concept of experience is defined in opposition to the thin psychological notion of experience in neo-Kantian and phenomenological circles.[4] Cavell modifies Kant via his reading of Wittgenstein and Austin, in order to insist on a common dimension to aesthetic experience that counters a narrow, sceptical version of its subjective character.[5] Kant's *Critique of the Power of*

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[3] See Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy', *New Left Review*, 14, March-April 2002, pp.133-151.

[4] See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodore W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute*, New York: The Free Press, 1977, pp.6-11. Benjamin's inheritance of Kant's concept of experience is perhaps most disputed. See Eldridge, *Images of History*; Espen Hammer, 'Reason, Agency and History: Remarks on Kant and Benjamin', *History and Theory*, 57:3, pp.426-430; Max Pensky, 'Contributions Towards a Theory of Storms: Historical Knowing and Historical Progress in Kant and Benjamin', *The Philosophical Forum*, 2010; Eli Friedlander, 'Learning from the Colours of Fantasy', *boundary 2*, 2018, pp.111-137 and Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, especially pp.107-137. See also Eli Friedlander's *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012, especially pp.27-36. I engage with this text in detail in this thesis.

[5] See Eli Friedlander, 'Meaning and Schematics in Cavell's Kantian Reading of Wittgenstein', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 65:256 (2), 2011, pp.183-199 and see also Avner Baz, 'The Sound of Bedrock:

Judgment offers conceptual resources that propose a broader conception of experience than that offered by restrictive conceptions of pleasure, interest or satisfaction.[6]

Taking up expanded conceptions of experience is a characteristic of the heterodox treatments of Kant's aesthetic experience by Rancière, Benjamin and Cavell. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* can be used to frame the discussion of modern experience in a variety of ways. Kant's concept of experience is significant for philosophical debates about the moral and political import of aesthetics, the role of art in social and individual experience, and, crucially for my thesis, the claim that our experiences may have on each other. This phrasing – the claim of 'our experience' on 'each other' – reflects the equivocal status of social factors in aesthetic experience. Central to Kant's conception of aesthetic experience is the fact that it is distinctively my own – that is, free and autonomous from the influence of others' judgment – and yet indelibly – even transcendentally, by way of common sense – connected to social and common forms of experience.

Aesthetic experience is framed in Kant as separate from the ways experience can be socially determined, which preserves its freedom and autonomy in the individual. But the act of aesthetic judgment and the conditions for aesthetic experience as described by Kant necessarily involve a community of sense.[7] This more contentious claim is elaborated differently in each of the thinkers, with Rancière focusing on the ways aesthetic experience makes an opening through which to contest fixed or determinate notions of such a community.[8] However, his conception of autonomy is historically grounded and located in the material world that is available to all. He shares with Benjamin the emphasis on the way the historical and material world provides pathways for making meaning together in the context of modernity. Cavell takes up the demand for universal validity in the context of language and the ways we articulate our experience, guiding recent interpretations of Kant

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Lines of Grammar between Kant, Wittgenstein and Cavell', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 24:3, 2016, pp.607-628.

[6] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Paul Guyer (ed.) and Eric Matthews (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 90, 5:204-206. Hereafter, *The Critique of Judgment* will be cited as *CJ*, followed by the, section, paragraph, and page numbers.

[7] Ibid. 5:236-240, 121-124.

[8] See by contrast Kirk Pillow, 'Understanding Aestheticised' in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Rebecca Kukla, (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 245-265 which insists that for individual experience to be connected to collective ones, it requires a determinate cognitive element.

such as Eli Friedlander's to highlight the intimacy between the act of judgment and its expression.[9]

Friedlander draws a strong connection between Cavell and Kant on this point, and, further, articulates how common sense involves what is most subjective with what is universal.[10] A judgment of taste, in Kant, 'does not just point to the horizon of an ideal community of taste, but is also devoted to our common, ordinary world. Beauty, like the ordinary, is open to view.'[11] Without the convention of rules or the ordering of a tradition or community, however, there is a demand on our experience to find the routes of interest and feeling that *are* exemplary and that *do* point to the horizon of common sense. Disorientation registers that we lack pre-ordained routes, and yet in modernity a special and new emphasis is placed on education as the process of finding *our own* routes, and not simply finding them in isolation but together. Our experiences are marked by these processes of meaning making that we undertake together, inflecting the most individual and highly subjective occasions with the pattern of the social world we inhabit. This thesis is devoted to articulating variations of these ways in which emphatic yet ordinary individual experiences are connected to shared experience.

My thesis engages with that path identified by Bernstein as the continental, or European post-Kantian tradition, and part of the aim is to show the affinities between heterodox inheritors of Kant's concept of experience.[12] This path rejects the differentiation of moral, aesthetic and

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[9] Eli Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment: An Essay on Kant's Aesthetic*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015. Friedlander's interpretation of Kant is marked by the influence of Cavell, especially 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, pp.73-96.
[10] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 44.
[11] Ibid. 44
[12] See J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, 7. Anthony J. Cascardi argues that the concept of art 'comes into being within the culture of enlightened modernity as the consequence of an impossibility – specifically, as a consequence of constitute the whole of experience by bridging the two worlds that Kant had set apart in the first two *Critiques*.' ('The Difficulty of Art', *boundary* 2, 2:25, 1998, 41) See also for the different ways each figure takes up romanticism, Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in Early German Romanticism', David Lachterman, Howard Eiland and Ian Balfour (trans.) in *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926*, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, pp.116-200 (hereafter works from Walter Benjamin's *Selected Writings* will be cited as *SW* followed by the volume number), Jacques Rancière, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, James Swenson, trans., New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 and Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism,* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

cognitive experience that others have identified with Kant's project in the three *Critiques*.[13] Although it is a current field of debate, I am less interested in the scholarship on Kant's texts and more interested in the uses to which they are put for conceptualising modern concepts of experience.[14] Rather than lay claim to an authentic Kant, Rancière and Cavell in particular renew Kant's concept of aesthetic experience by posing it new questions and staging new encounters with, for instance, political egalitarianism, ordinary workers during the 1848 revolution in Paris,[15] and the insistence on the ordinary that motivates Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein.[16]

Modern Concepts of Experience

The concept of experience in the background to the thesis is as Kantian one that involves mental reflection and activity on concrete forms.[17] Since the philosophers I discuss inherit Kant's concept of experience differently, and insist on the historical specificity of experience, this definition does not apply in every instance of the term. As I explain in the first chapter, Benjamin's concept of experience is characterised by the distinction between *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and *Erfahrung* (emphatic experience).[18] For example, Benjamin writes that '"to

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[13] My account of Kantian aesthetic experience, following these thinkers, does not accept what Peter Bürger analyses as the institutional separation of art and aesthetics from moral and political life. See Peter Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, especially pp.3-47.

[14] See Eckart Förster's *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012 for instance for a close archival reconsideration of the unity of Kant's project. By contrast, Eli Friedlander's *Expressions of Judgment: An Essay on Kant's Aesthetic*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015, from which I draw throughout the thesis, represents a different form of reconsideration. By reformulating Kant's terms, Friedlander seeks a new appreciation of the unity and systematicity of Kant's aesthetics, as well as a re-articulation of it in clear terms. Friedlander demarcates his text's difference from current Kant scholarship by emphasising the 'inner connection between the aesthetic judgment and meaning or expression… what is at stake [in aesthetic judgment] is the meaning found in the particular experience of beauty, most clearly evident in being responsive to works of art.' (*x*) Friedlander's identification of a deep affinity between our modes of expression and the experience of beauty is congruent with my approach to Cavell in later chapters, but in writing about Kant's notion of disinterest I use Friedlander's account of Kant to locate Rancière's unorthodox approach.

[15] See Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, John Drury (trans.), London: Verso, 2012.

[16] See Stanley Cavell, 'The Availability of the Later Wittgenstein' in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp.44-72.

[17] For a short account of the background to Kant's own concept of experience, see Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 185-186. It is notable that in his wide survey of the history of concepts of experience, Jay focuses almost exclusively on Kant's concept of *aesthetic* experience, see *Songs of Experience*, 139-145. For a useful summary of recent accounts of the theory of experience in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, see Maja Soboleva, 'How we read Kant: an Empiricist and a Transcendental Reading of Kant's Theory of Experience', *Philosophia*, 45, 2017, pp.1331-1344.

[18] Fredric Jameson argues that we should resist identifying *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* as opposites (*The Benjamin Files*, Verso: London, 2020, 166), yet himself consistently defines them against each other (see 6 and 173-176). For a discussion of Benjamin's inheritance of the Kantian concept of experience, see Eli Friedlander, *Walter*

experience" [*Erleben*] without spirit is comfortable, if unredeeming. Again: we know a different experience.'[19] Benjamin criticizes the Kantian account of experience as losing touch with the ordinary world, 'virtually reduced to a nadir, to a minimum of significance.'[20] Benjamin's early essay 'Experience' notes the double atrophy of the transmission and acquisition of experience, and evokes a mood of apathy.[21] Benjamin's dissatisfaction with modern experience condenses the historical changes in the concept of experience, which are perceptible as early as Montaigne's essay 'On experience'. Montaigne voices the same doubts about our inheritance of the authority of experience, but like Benjamin, suggests that there is 'a different experience':

> For if we say we lack the requisite authority to produce faith in our testimony we are off the point: in my opinion the most ordinary things, the most commonplace and best-known can constitute, if we know how to present them in the right light...[22]

Montaigne, as Agamben argues, registered the displacement of the claim of ordinary experience to the increasingly inflexible and indifferent standards of scientific and juridical authority.[23] Deleuze inadvertently illustrates that ordinary experience does not survive the

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Benjamin, 27-36. See for Benjamin's early critique of Kant, 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy', *Selected Writings*: *Volume 1, 1913-1926*, Mark Ritter (trans.), Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, pp.100-110.

[19] Walter Benjamin, 'Experience' in *SW I*, 5.

[20] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy' in *SW I*, 101. See Benjamin, 'On Perception' (*SW I*): 'the basic philosophical interest in the logical deducibility of the world, the fundamental interest of knowledge, inevitably suffered because of the abovementioned confusion between "experience" and "knowledge of experience." There was no longer any interest in the necessity of the world.' (95) Cf. Jonathan Lear, 'The Disappearing "We"', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 58, 1984: 'Kant's notion of 'experience' (*Erfahrung*) is much richer than ours. In contemporary discussions of transcendental arguments, 'experience' is used, as I began to use it, in a minimal sense, to refer to the type of mental life which even a sceptic cannot interestingly deny we have. Kant, by contrast, defines 'experience' as empirical knowledge. Experience, for Kant, is a type of knowing.' (220)

[21] Benjamin, 'Experience', *SW I*: 'The adult has always already experienced [*erlebt*] everything… Yes, that is their experience, this one thing, never anything different: the meaningless of life.' (3) See also Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Experience' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Brooks Atkinson (ed.), New York: The Modern Library, 2000, pp.307-326.

[22] Michel de Montaigne, 'On experience' in *The Essays: A Selection*, M.A. Screech (trans.), London: Penguin, 2004, 384-385. See also Richard Flatham, 'Perfectionism Without Perfection: Cavell, Montaigne and the Conditions of Morals and Politics' in *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy*, Andrew Norris (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, pp.98-127, and Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2005, 315-316 for a connection between Benjamin and Montaigne.

[23] See Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, Liz Heron (trans.), London: Verso, 2007: 'For – as demonstrated by the last work of European culture still integrally based on experience: Montaigne's *Essays* – experience is incompatible with certainty, and once an experience has become measurable and certain, it immediately loses its authority.' (20) See also Benjamin, 'On Perception': 'The "material of sensation" was artificially distanced from the animating center of the categories by the forms of intuition by

reduction to epistemological standards: 'The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us.'[24]

According to Robert Pippin, the 'relation between philosophy and experience… is arguably the central theme of all modern European philosophy', and various attempts to formulate this relation often consist in the 'attempt… to recover some everyday perspective that is said to have been, oddly, not only lost but missing (hard to find).'[25] The recovery of the ordinary, Pippin suggest, proceeds by either dispelling the 'artificial constructs and fantasies' behind which it is hidden, or recognizing the 'historically multiple (if sometimes continuous) everydays'.[26] While Pippin presents these as mutually exclusive, in the first and second parts of the thesis in which I examine Benjamin and Rancière's contribution to the modern conceptualization of experience, I suggest that the historical multiplicity of ordinary experience involves precisely the dreams and fantasies that are sometimes treated as occlusions or obstacles to recovering experience.[27]

Yet it is with Montaigne (along with Descartes) that we can begin to perceive the increasing privacy of experience.[28] He recommends '"We should reserve a storehouse for ourselves…

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which it was only imperfectly absorbed. In this way Kant achieved the separation of metaphysics and experience, or, to use his own terms, between pure knowledge and experience.' (*SW I,* 93-94)

[24] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 171.

[25] Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 122.

[26] Ibid. 123.

[27] Noting the early Frankfurt School's conception of experience, revived by Alexander Kluge and Oscar Negt, Miriam Hansen argues that 'What seems significant about this concern with *Erfahrung*, especially in the writings of Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, is that the concept oscillates between an emphatic and an empirical pole: on the one hand, of seeing connections and relation, of juggling reality and fantasy, of remembering the past and imagining a future; on the other, it entails the historical disintegration and transformation of these very capacities with the onslaught of industrialization, urbanization, and a modern culture of consumption. With a dialectical twist, then, experience in the emphatic sense comes to includes the ability to register and negotiate the effects of historical fragmentation and loss, rupture and change… Accordingly, *Erfahrung* is seen as the matrix that mediates individual perception and social horizons of meaning, including the collective experience of alienation, isolation, and privatization.' (Miriam Hansen, 'Foreword' in Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel and Assenka Oksiloff (trans.), London: Verso, 2016*, xvii-xviii*) The significance of a post-Kantian conception of experience in Rancière's work is relatively unusual in the context of the post-structuralist consignment of experience to the metaphysics of the subject. See Joan Wallach Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17:4, 1991, pp.773-797 and Jonas Grethlein, 'Aesthetic Experiences, Ancient and Modern', *New Literary History*, 46, 2015, pp.309-333. For a summary of some post-structuralist conceptualisations of experience, see Jay, *Songs of Experience*, pp.361-400.

[28] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, John Cottingham (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 470.

altogether ours, and wholly free, wherein we may hoard up and establish our true liberty and principal retreat and solitariness"', which Greenblatt calls 'a world of private property.'[29] Max Weber argues that the cultivation of inwardness in Protestantism had its material counterpart in the moralised 'release of acquisitive activity… accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save.'[30] Similarly, Adorno recognized the material environment of Kierkegaard's aesthetic as the bourgeois interior, and the 'man of private means' where the authenticity of the meaning of experience was marked by its inwardness.[31] The conception of modern alienation derived from Kierkegaard, Rahel Jaeggi notes, is defined by the loss of 'what it means both to be oneself and to lose oneself', characterized by 'experiences of indifference and radical foreignness'.[32] The connection between experience and its material situation means that alienation is never separate from the way in which we relate to others, and specifically to the claim our experience could have on others. Cavell, for instance, shows how the question of the loss of intimacy with our own experience is irrevocably connected to the necessary inexpressiveness or powerlessness to make our experience known to others.[33]

Ordinary, Shared Experience

For the thinkers considered in this thesis, the ordinary world orients shared experience.[34] For example, Rancière's approach examines historically specific scenes of subjects whose experience is defined by 'a relation between occupations and [sensible] equipment, performing specific activities, and being endowed with capacities for seeing, saying, and doing that "fit" those activities.'[35] Rancière attends especially to instances of the

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[29] Montaigne in Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, 46.
[30] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons (trans.), London and New York: Routledge, 2001, 116.
[31] See Theodore Adorno, *Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic*, Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans. and ed.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 15, 27 and 47.
[32] Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith (trans.), Frederick Neuhouser (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 6. However Jaeggi rejects the association of inwardness as a refuge and theorises it instead as 'crucial for the development of independence, or "obstinacy," over and against social demands.' (167) See also Stanley Cavell, 'Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*' in *Must We Must We Mean What We Say?*, pp.163-179.
[33] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 351-52.
[34] See J.M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006: '… what has been excised from the everyday is the *orientational significance of sensory encounter*, *sensory experience as constitutive of conviction and connection to the world of things*.' (3)
[35] Jacques Rancière, 'Afterword: The Method of Equality: Some Answers to Some Questions' in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 275.

'performance of equality' that 'implies the reframing of a common sense' that, he writes elsewhere, 'must keep something of the tension that pushes aesthetic experience towards the reconfiguration of collective life…'[36]

The conceptualization of experience in Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell aims to connect ordinary experiences to collective life in ways that are both structural and historical. Modern experience is distinctive for its break with tradition, religious ritual or totalising ways of delineating what counts. Experience is granted a new significance at the heart of subjectivity, however this intensifies the demands placed on it to bear different political and social meanings.[37] Rather than developing foundational, transhistorical frameworks that explain the logical necessity of common experience, Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell recognise that subjective meaning is only sustained when it can be connected to and communicated with others, a possibility that is often cut off by modern conditions and flawed conceptions of experience.[38]

The status of ordinary experience is equivocal in Kantian aesthetics, with some arguing that it is 'too trivial to bear the weight of transcendental argument for the *a priori* conditions of judgments of taste.'[39] But others have noted the fact that aesthetic experience seems to involve an activity of the mind that is present in all cognition, a ubiquity highlighted by the notions of commons sense and communicability.[40] it is important also that these features of aesthetic experience are not merely automatic but achieved.[41] The concept of experience that

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[36] Ibid., 277 and Jacques Rancière, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics', in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Beth Hinderliter et al. (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 41. See Peter Hallward, 'Jacques Rancière and the Subversion of Mastery', *Paragraph*, 28:1, 2005: 'Rancière persists, above all, in what must surely be remembered as the great philosophical effort both of his generation and of the generation which preceded it: the effort to orient philosophy in line with the primacy of the *subject*'s experience of thought.' (38-39)

[37] Agamben, *Infancy and* History, pp.13-72 and see Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, 2; see also 122-123. See for example the role played by 'lived experience' in political debates, as Jay notes in *Songs of Experience*, 3.

[38] For examples of this see Alison Ross, 'The Aesthetic Fable: Cinema in Jacques Rancière's "Aesthetic Politics"', *SubStance*, 38:1 (118), 2009, pp.128-150. For a critical analysis of the connection between individual and collective experience in Benjamin see also Alison Ross, *Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin: A Conceptual Analysis*, New York: Routledge, 2019. For a critical discussion of Rancière's collective politics see Peter Hallward, 'Staging Equality: On Rancière's Theatrocracy', *New Left Review*, 37, January-February, 2006, pp.109-129.

[39] Eva Schaper, 'Kant on Aesthetic Appraisals', *Kant-Studien*, 54:4, 1973, 499. Cf Jonathan Lear, 'The Disappearing "We"' for a contrary position on Kant influenced, like Cavell, by Wittgenstein.

[40] See Hannah Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant's 'Critique of Judgment'*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 46. See Eli Friedlander, 'Between Communicability and Common Sense', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 56:4, October 2016, pp.401-404 for a response to Ginsborg's conceptualisation of rule following, which Friedlander argues suffers for being taken *out* of ordinary contexts, and the connection between Kant, Wittgenstein and Cavell on these topics. I discuss this debate in chapter five.

[41] See Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 57-58.

is articulated in Cavell and Rancière emphasises the way in which aesthetic experience is ordinarily available but nevertheless signifies a singular moment in which meaning is at stake.[42] Both of their philosophical approaches serve to highlight these moments, at times by seeking to approach the fact of others' experience differently.[43] In the fifth chapter, I propose that Rancière and Cavell are committed to an egalitarian framework which illuminates ordinary experiences and the ways in which they are shared.[44] This recognition stands in contrast to the sceptical approach (including the forms of anaesthetic and reactionary responses to modernity identified by Benjamin)[45], and the various ways in which the challenge of communicating and sharing experience is avoided.

Contrasting Conceptions: ideology, subjectivism and limit experiences

A degree of scepticism is pervasive in evaluations of the freedom and autonomy of aesthetic experience, although it takes different forms. For instance, the application of ideology critique to aesthetic experience tends to associate it with narrow class interest.[46] This approach is also identifiable in the historical analysis of the background to Kantian aesthetics,

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[42] Jason Franks mentions the connection between Rancière's 'politics of the ordinary' and Cavell in his 'Jacques Rancière's Politics of the Ordinary' in *Distributions of the Sensible: Rancière, Between Aesthetics and Politics*, Scott Durham and Dilip Gaonkar (ed.), Evantston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2019, pp.27-52. See also Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016, which connects Kant, Wittgenstein and Cavell in an argument for the relevance of ordinary experience for political judgment in a way that is comparable to Rancière's approach.

[43] See Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Kristin Ross (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991and Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism, The Carus Lectures 1988*, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1990. I also draw on Benjamin's writing on education, for instance his early essays 'Life of Students' (*SW I*, pp.37-47) and 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre' (*SW II*, pp.201-206).

[44] The comparison between Cavell and Rancière highlights a different conception of egalitarianism than that defended by Chantal Mouffe in relation to Cavell in *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso, 2005, pp.74-77. See also Andrew Norris, 'Cynicism, Skepticism, and the Politics of Truth,' in *Truth and Democracy*, Andrew Norris and James Elkins (ed.), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012, pp.97-113 and Andrew Norris, *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

[45] See Richard Shusterman, 'The End of Aesthetic Experience', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55:1, Winter 1997, 38. Like Shusterman, Aaron Smuts defends a pragmatic aesthetics after Dewey, for whom the aesthetic is a 'dimension of ordinary experience.' ('Anesthetic Experience', *Philosophy and Literature*, 29, 2005, 98) However pragmatic aesthetics appears to be geared directly towards the liberal individual, albeit in the 'interactions of agents with the experienced environment.' (106) See also Jay, *Songs of Experience*, pp.161-169.

[46] See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (trans.), London: Routledge, 1984. Rancière's work consistently opposes Bourdieu's position on the social determination of taste. See for instance, Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Heterotopia', *Philosophy Today*, SPEP Supplement, 2010, pp.15-25.

and casts doubt on the claim made on behalf of experience to universal validity.[47] This view proposes that the cultivation of taste is simply a mark of class stratification and determination, and at the same time that ordinary experience is highly determined by economic and social imperatives and so cannot claim autonomy or freedom. Ideology critique represents a frustrated attempt to ground a position apart from the social order it condemns.[48] Those accounts that repudiate ordinary experience and make an exception of aesthetics tend to replicate the same problems, leaving no possibility within the debased ordinary world for aesthetic education to begin.[49] The development of aesthetic experience is historically linked to the desire to counteract such limited modes of experience as represented in utilitarian, hedonistic or narrowly scientistic theories.[50] I defend Rancière's account of disinterest in aesthetic experience as one such attempt, and argue that with disinterest Kant was not limiting but expanding the possibilities of experience to include mundane objects.[51]

Some theorists have sought to derive the autonomy of aesthetic experience precisely by contrast with ordinary experience.[52] These accounts reflect hypertrophic tendencies that exacerbate the tensions in aesthetic experience between individual and collective, historical life. One version of this approach hypostasises the subjective element of experience, often focusing on the affective dimension in order to shelter experience from instrumental calculation or consumption.[53] The exclusive focus on sensation leaves very little room for the

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[47] See Richard Shusterman, 'Of the scandal of taste: social privilege as nature in the aesthetic theories of Hume and Kant' (pp.96-119) and David Summers, 'Why did Kant call taste a "common sense"?', pp.120-151 in *Cambridge Companion to Aesthetics*, Paul Mattick, Jr. (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, and see also Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgment*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

[48] For a brief history of some of the ways in which the position of social criticism has been articulated via aesthetics in European philosophy see Alison Ross, 'The Modern Concept of Aesthetic Experience: from Ascetic Pleasure to Social Criticism', *Critical Horizons*, 11:3, 2010, pp.333-339. See also Jürgen Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique', in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 93-98.

[49] See for instance Michael W. Clune, 'Judgment and Equality', *Critical Inquiry*, Summer 2019, pp.910-934 and Benjamin Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2015, *xxxix*. Rancière addresses these issues and the circular logic that governs them in *The Emancipated Spectator*, Gregory Elliott (trans.), London: Verso, 2011.

[50] See Jan Miezskowski, *Labors of Imagination: Aesthetics and Political Economy from Kant to Althusser*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, Miguel de Beistegui, *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018, and see also Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013 for an account of the qualities of experience cultivated in *homo eoconomicus*.

[51] I present a number of contrasting views in the fourth chapter. See Jay, *Songs of Experience*, 143 for a brief example.

[52] See Krzysztof Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde and the Event*, Evantston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001, pp.86-115.

[53] See for instance Davide Panagia, *Rancière's Sentiments*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018 and Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.

communication, sharing or collective dimension of experience.[54] The turn to affect reflects the desire to insulate subjectivity from over-rationalisation and disenchantment.[55] It resists the 'discursive articulation' of experience in order to prove that its imaginative freedom outstrips the determination by nature or social order.[56] At the same time, it tends to cut off experience from critical reflection or collective aspiration. Benjamin identified aestheticism with just such a retreat, noting the way the loss of traditional meaning could be recuperated by asserting a naturalised order, engaging in desiccated rituals, or mystified bourgeois contemplation.[57] Each of these reactions attempts to recuperate the certainty lost in the transition to modernity, and to induce a direct correspondence between matter and sense, or between the world and our experience.[58]

Certain forms of artistic response to modernity lend themselves to this kind of hypertrophy of affect and subjective interiority (even as they ironically offer bland or gaudy objective correlates or adornments). Successive avant-garde art movements have identified themselves as fulfilling (or surpassed) the promise of aesthetic modernity.[59] For example, the minimalist art movement sought to dispense with the mediation of the beholder's experience by asserting

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[54] For excellent analyses of this tendency see Linda M. G. Zerilli, 'The Turn to Affect and the Problem of Judgment', *New Literary History*, 2015, 46, pp.261-286 and Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017. See also Zerilli's response to Panagia in 'Judging Politically: A Symposium on Linda Zerilli's *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*', *Political Theory*, 46:4, pp.630-642.

[55] See Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.

[56] See Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 2nd Ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 3.

[57] See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' in *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn (trans), Hannah Arendt (ed.), Fontana, 1979, pp.219-253 and see also Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, London: Pluto Press, 2000 and Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', *October,* 62 1992, pp.3-41.

[58] David Raskin, for instance, seeks to bypass aesthetics altogether in his attempt to escape 'some sort of intermediary, representation or picture' and fast-track 'the process of attempting to build consensus, a mandate for affiliation…' (Raskin, 'The Dogma of Conviction' in *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice*, Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen and Tony O'Connor (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 71-74) Raskin's literalism about representation has affinities with political attacks on certain types of representation and suspicion about 'ordinary language' as irremediably oppressive, such as Andrea Dworkin's work. In contrast, feminists inspired by Wittgenstein have defended what Jane Braaten calls 'nonliteralism', for which see 'The Short Life of Meaning: Feminism and Nonliteralism' in *Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein*, Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor (ed.), University Park: The Pennsylvannia State University Press, 2002, pp.176-192. Such inspiration has been useful in redefining the link between experience and collective identity in democratic politics, see for instance Michaele L. Ferguson, 'Sharing without Knowing: Collective Identity in Feminist and Democratic Theory', *Hypatia*, 22:4, 2007, pp.30-45.

[59] Rancière's *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (Zakir Paul (trans.), London: Verso, 2013) is, in effect, a counter-history to this claim. I examine it in detail in the third chapter. See also the account of artistic modernity in Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Gabriel Rockhill (trans.), London and New York: Continuum, 2004, pp.20-29.

their control over the entire situation, as Michael Fried identified in 'Art and Objecthood'.[60] The qualities of minimalist objects most prized by the artists and critics of the movement were not those that were shared or open. The resulting experience and 'literalist' sensibility that is compelled by the total situation itself is both irreducibly singular and at the same time tacitly assumed to be standard for everyone.[61] Because the situation is total and immersive, leaving no room for the beholder's experience, nevertheless there is no commonly perceptible quality to the minimalist object. As Fried quotes, '"There's no way to frame it, you just have to experience it."'[62]

Other perspectives on the avant-garde are equally involved in the repudiation of the shared character of aesthetic experience.[63] Like minimalism, this view insists that experiences are 'irreducible' to representation and this is what renders them distinctive forms of ordinary experience.[64] As Mark Grief notes, the retreat from experience is at the same time a retreat from world of objects.[65] On the one hand, experience is controlled and denied by restricting its scope to freely encounter the world, and on the other hand, it is radicalised because the objective world is perceived as intrusive and determining. This perception is substantiated by the way images and objects are described as having immediate effects, even living.[66] Experience in these theories is caught between external objects it cannot account for and

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[60] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' in *Art and Objecthood*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998, pp.148-172. See also Clement Greenberg's 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' in *Art and Culture*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1973, pp.3-21. For the relation between Fried, Rancière and Cavell see Knox Peden, 'Grace and Equality, Fried and Rancière (and Kant)' in *Michael Fried and Philosophy: Modernism, Intention and Theatricality*, Mathew Abbott (ed.), 2018, 189-205 and Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 104, note 5 and 108, note 4.

[61] See Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995, especially pp.60-93 and see also Ann Lauterbach, 'Resisting the Literal: Cavell's Conversations with Thinking' in *Inheriting Stanley Cavell: Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, David LaRocca (ed.), London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020, pp.137-139.

[62] Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', 158.

[63] See for instance Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience*: 'The avant-garde… questions the representation of the everyday within ordinary language practices and common knowledge, on the one hand, and the techno-scientific logic of representation, on the other.' (6) See also Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, 60.

[64] Ibid., 4-5. See also Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (trans.), Cambridge: Polity, 1991, especially pp.89-107; 119-128 and 135-143. See by contrast Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, Gregory Elliott (trans.), London: Verso, 2007, pp.109-138.

[65] Mark Grief, *Against Everything: On Dishonest Times*, London: Verso, 2016, see especially 'The Concept of Experience', pp.77-98, and 'Anaesthetic Ideology', pp.225-246.

[66] See W.J.T. Mitchell, 'What Do Pictures "Really" Want?', *October*, 77, 1996, pp.71-82. Mitchell attributes this perception to the affirmation of the fetishism described by Marx and Freud. See also Jacques Rancière, 'Do Pictures Really Want To Live?', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 50:2-3, pp.123-132. See also Ruth Leys criticism of Jane Bennett's new materialist politics in *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017, 346-349. Leys notes that Bennett expects objects to 'transmit their vital affects to us, or rather to our nervous systems, directly, without the intervention of language or representation.' (349)

sensations it cannot share. It is also caught between consolidating a conception of autonomous experience as isolating,[67] and accepting the pleasure in experience as an outcome of a passive encounter with the world.[68]

In the alternative version, experience is only at its most authentic in extreme circumstances, under conditions of trauma and catastrophe.[69] This tradition has diverse iterations, including in Lyotard, Adorno and Bataille, however it is often related to the sublime or to mystical experience as a site of heightened, even incalculable significance.[70] What they share is an insistence on the unpresentable and disregard for shared or communicable experience and accountability to rational norms (understood broadly). The claim for limit experience responds to the perceived over-determination of scientific and technological manipulation and mechanization of the modern world under industrial capitalism.[71] Limit experiences trade in their opposition to 'everyday experiences' which are largely determined, and open an escape hatch to freedom and (mostly individual) transformation through transgression of the limit.[72] Limit experiences typically challenge the contours of the subject as ordinarily understood and flirt with the boundaries of (non)sense. They are also unwittingly congruent with the ejection of aesthetics and its connection to sensuous experience. Rancière identifies the double cancellation of aesthetics in the work of such thinkers as Adorno and Lyotard as

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[67] See for instance Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions Without Owners*, Lisa Rosenblatt with Charlotte Eckler and Camilla Nielsen (trans.), London: Verso, 2014, 213-219. Pfaller writes that 'Imagination produces the idea of freedom, for example, where knowledge of the real causes of freedom is missing… [It] allows an image of a subject to emerge, which evokes favour thanks to an alleged autonomy' (214). Pfaller evokes the 'Epicurean thesis': 'Pleasure is always there; the question is simply that of *whether one succeeds in experiencing it as pleasurable*.' (216)

[68] This division also illustrated in the debate between cognitivist and non-cognitivist conceptions of the political subject. See Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.239-261. Zerilli notes that 'the radical separation of cognition and affect… leaves us with no way to connect affective experience to anything in the world that could possibly be symbolised or shared by others.' (248)

[69] See for instance Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007 and Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. For critical reflections see also Wendy Brown, 'Wounded Attachments' in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp.52-76 and Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso, 2012.

[70] See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, Espen Hammer, *Adorno's Modernism: Art, Experience and Catastrophe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015 and Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, Leslie Ann Boldt (trans.), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.

[71] See Agamben, *Infancy and History*, pp.15-34. Agamben's account of experience rehearses Benjamin's.

[72] See the account of experience in Timothy O'Leary, 'Rethinking Experience with Foucault', in *Foucault and Philosophy*, Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (ed.), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp.162-184 and see also Cressida J. Heyes, *Anaesthetics of Existence: Essays on Experience at the Edge*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.

'[e]ither the Law of Moses of the law of McDonald's.'[73] This identification of extremes leaves no room for emancipation, for Rancière, and shows how the mystification of experience at and beyond its limit actually coincides with the slogan pioneered by minimalist artists that 'you just have to experience it.'[74] Extreme experiences come to monopolise the claim to meaning, and simultaneously empty out the concept of experience so that when they are cheaply substituted for commodified 'experiences', we have no way of telling (each other) the difference.[75]

The Significance of Aesthetics

Connecting such limit experiences to communicable meaning and historical and collective life proves problematic. As Hans-Georg Gadamer notes of limit experiences, they involve an 'appeal to immediacy, to the instantaneous flash of genius, to the significance of "experiences" (*Erlebnisse*) [that] cannot withstand the claim of human existence to continuity and unity of self-understanding.'[76] Although Gadamer attributes the trajectory of the concept of experience to the epochal subjectivisation of Kantian philosophy, I propose that it is instead scepticism about ordinary experience that misleads theorists in the search for meaning. For Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell, ordinary experience already includes moments of transformation and disjunction from the mundane determination of everyday life. In different ways, they seek to affirm the diverse and open possibilities of ordinary experience, especially insofar as it is structurally connected to collective life, located and oriented in its historical context and often related to a specific object that focuses and intensifies the processes of meaning making.

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[73] Jacques Rancière, 'The sublime from Lyotard to Schiller: Two readings of Kant and their political significance', *Radical Philosophy*, 126, July/August 2004, 15. See also

[74] See B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, 'Welcome to the Experience Economy', *Harvard Business Review*, 76:4, July-August 1998, pp.97-105 and see their thrice (1999, 2011, 2019) updated *The Experience Economy: Competing for Customer Time, Attention, and Money*, Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019. As Pine and Gilmore (1998) write, 'consumers unquestionably desire experiences, and more and more businesses are responding by explicitly designing and promoting them. As services, like goods before them, increasingly become commoditised… experiences have emerged as the next step in what we call the *progression of economic value*.' (97) The commodification of experience relies on a literal conception of experience

[75] See Sami Khatib, 'Barbaric Salvage: Benjamin and the Dialectics of Destruction', *Parallax*, 24:2, 140.

[76] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (trans.), London and New York: Continuum, 2004, 84.

Both Cavell and Rancière have contributed to the revival and resuscitation of post-Kantian aesthetics in response to these tendencies, and Benjamin has remained, for some, a key critic of art movements and experience.[77] Their approaches resist the confinement of aesthetic experience to a restricted field or psychological attitude, which often corresponds with a reification of a class of art objects as uniquely soliciting that attitude.[78] Along with projects of constructing a typology or classifying suitable objects of art, the resurgence of the 'ethical' turn in aesthetics aims to directly connect aesthetic experiences with particular affective, political or moral effects.[79] At the same time as they defend aesthetic experience, then, they restrict its scope to only highly conscribed settings, objects and people.[80] One significant issue in post-Kantian aesthetics is how to open aesthetic experience to both a wide range of objects and to anyone at all without losing its conceptual features and succumbing to mere subjectivism. This issue is addressed throughout this thesis in my analyses of the ways that each thinker describes the experience of meaning as being continuous with ordinary life and yet separate from determinate or standardised rules.

Kant's theory of aesthetics promises to locate subjective meaning in relation to collective life, and provide an account of experiences that are free but not separate from ordinary affairs.[81] Although in Kant, the exemplary objects of this experience are natural, for modern thinkers like Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell, they are primarily products of shared imagination and intelligence, like the arts.[82] Cavell and Rancière have been central figures in the return to aesthetics that is interested in accounting for our experience of art in a way that provides analogies and examples for social and political life.[83] The contributions of Rancière and

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[77] For the latter, see for example Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London: Verso, 2013, pp.37-69 and Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London: Verso, 1995, pp.180-185.

[78] See for instance Kendal L. Walton, *Mimesis and Make-Believe: On the Foundation of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990 and Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music and Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005. For an account of the relationship between this type of view and Kant see M.H. Abrams, 'Kant and the Theology of Art', *Notre Dame English Journal*, 13:3, Summer 1981, pp.75-106.

[79] See Jacques Rancière, 'The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics', *Critical Horizons*, 7:1, 2006, pp.1-20.

[80] See Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge', *Critical Inquiry*, 36:1, Autumn 2009, pp.1-19.

[81] The 'utopian' dream of integrating art and life is a key part of the post-Kantian tradition to which Rancière responds throughout his work. See also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, 'Aesthetics Experience in Everyday Worlds: Reclaiming an Unredeemed Utopian Motif', *New Literary History*, 2006, pp.299-318.

[82] See J.M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, 3.

[83] See for example *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Beth Hinderliter, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor and Seth McCormick (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009; *Stanley Cavell on Aesthetic Understanding*, Garry L. Hagberg (ed.), Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018 and *The Claim to*

Cavell, and the influence of Benjamin, are distinctive for both grounding aesthetic experience in ordinary life while maintaining the specific connections between aesthetics and politics in the continental tradition. Although their frameworks are frequently invoked in explaining features of contemporary art, they also remain committed to modernity as an historical period with continuous characteristics and dynamics that shape experience and the possibilities of meaning making.[84]

Key Features of Ordinary Experience: material, historical, collective

The thesis defended in these pages is that in the historical context of modernity specific material objects can become ways to connect the deracinated individual with collective experience. For example, Benjamin's writings are littered with objects and settings that provide passages for memory and dreams, and possibilities for re-imagining the texture of collective life.[85] Cavell argues that the claim of experience, or 'the demand of experience to be satisfied, however thwarted or deferred, will not be settled apart from the responsiveness to the claims of individual objects upon experience.'[86] In Rancière's work, the connection between material object and individual experience is always mediated by a liberating separation, whether historical or conceptual. The thesis intends to show how this separation opens the field of aesthetic experience to any object or material for meaning making, and any person to engage in that process. Rancière challenges Benjamin's dream of a collective subject of modernity, insisting that meaning is dispersed before it is collected.[87] For Rancière,

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Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy, Andrew Norris (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

[84] For discussions of the revival of aesthetics and their connection to these dynamics, see *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice*, Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen and Tony O'Connor (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, and Michael Kelley, *A Hunger for Aesthetics: Enacting the Demands of Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. See also for critical appraisal of the connection between recent aesthetics, art criticism and art practice and issues of temporalisation, Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays*, London: Verso, 2018.

[85] See for example Benjamin's reflections on books, in for instance 'Unpacking My Library' in *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn (trans), Hannah Arendt (ed.), New York: Fontana, 1979, pp.59-68 and see also on children's books specifically *SW I*, pp.264-266, pp.406-413 and pp.435-443. See also recently on stamps Martin Jay, 'Timbremelancholy: Wlater Benjamin and the Fate of Philately' in *Splinters in Your Eye: Frankfurt School Provocations*, London: Verso, 2020, pp.113-123 and on the link between collecting material objects and collective life, Annie Pfeifer, 'A Collector in a Collectivist State: Walter Benjamin's Russian Toy Collection', *New German Critique*, 133:45 (1), February 2018, pp.49-78.

[86] Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2005, 251. See also Sandra Laugier, 'What Matters: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Importance' in *Stanley Cavell on Aesthetic Understanding*, Garry L. Hagberg (ed.), Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, pp.167-195.

[87] See Jacques Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Michael Steinberg (ed.), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996, pp.24–41.

the emancipatory possibilities of modernity are to be found less in the work of gathering or selection, and more in the redistribution of sense that contests determined meaning and hierarchical orders.[88] The contrast between Benjamin and Rancière serves to highlight the utility of the Kantian background, since, as Eli Friedlander describes, Benjamin seeks to 'dispel the semblance of beauty without thereby dismissing the meaning revealed in critical reflection as illusory. This would require arresting the restlessness of meaning, without ending it with a conceptual determination.'[89] The tension between the freedom of aesthetic experience and the need to orient and ground meaning is related to general features of modernity.[90] The historical axiom of modernity is that it constitutes a rupture, which for Benjamin directly affects the texture of experience. Although in some of his writing, the change in experience is registered as loss, elsewhere the emphasis is on the new possibilities for collective experience.[91]

In the midst of modernity's fragmentation, collective experience endures. This thesis aims to locate and describe the continuing presence and possibility of shared experience in ordinary life. By drawing on the Kantian background of aesthetic experience, I illuminate structural connections between individual and collective experience and locate them in historical context. In the work of Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell, particular experiences are marked as emphatic and involving in ways that do not stand out from the everyday but provide exemplary instances of the experience of the ordinary. In Benjamin scattered and mundane objects are brought together in new configurations of meaning that are both continuous and transformative of ordinary experience.[92] Rancière provides a methodological framework that rests on the axiom of equality and the premise that 'everyone thinks, everyone speaks' to

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[88] See Jacques Rancière, 'Rethinking Modernity', *Diacritics*, 42:3, 2014, pp.6-21 and for accounts of Rancière's aesthetics and modernity see Andrew Gibson, '"A New Mode of the Existence of Truth": Rancière and the Beginnings of Modernity 1780-1830' in *Rancière and Literature*, Julian Murphet and Grace Hellyer (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp.99-121 and David F. Bell, 'Writing, Movement/Space, Democracy: On Jacques Rancière's Literary History', *SubStance*, 33:1 (103), pp.126-140.

[89] Eli Friedlander, 'Meaning and Aesthetic Judgment in Kant', *Philosophical Topics*, 34:1/2, 2006, 33-34, note 21. See also Alison Ross, *Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin: A Conceptual Analysis*, New York and London: Routledge, 2019, especially pp.65-70. The formulation is similar to Rancière's: 'the finality of the beautiful is to animate the life of the faculties of the subject to produce a consciousness of their free play, to strengthen their state of animation and allow it to reproduce itself.' ('Art, Life, Finality', *Critical Inquiry*, 43, 2017, 598)

[90] See for instance Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd Edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999 and *The Persistence of Subjectivity*.

[91] The contrast between 'The Storyteller' (pp.83-110) and 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' is illustrative. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn (trans), Hannah Arendt (ed.), Fontana, 1979.

[92] See Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 91.

insist on the availability of experience to anyone at all.[93] Rancière's novel reading of Kant animates these features of aesthetic experience. Although Rancière shares with Cavell ordinary experience as a starting point, Cavell's particular commitment to ordinary language philosophy allow for a shift of emphasis to the communication and activity of sharing experience. Language, I argue in my final chapter, has what we might call both intensive and extensive collective qualities; it is a ground for common sense without being rigidly defined by rules.[94] Rancière's consistent assertion of the separation between art and life prevents his framework from encompassing the way the claims and commitments of experience do return to our lives.[95] This is the movement I pursue in this thesis: from loss and dispersal to the gathering of meaning and collective life, a dynamic which is part of modernity and its promise.

[93] See Peter Hallward, 'Jacques Rancière and the Subversion of Mastery', *Paragraph*, 28:1. 2005, 26.
[94] Eli Friedlander, 'Meaning and Schematics in Cavell's Kantian Reading of Wittgenstein', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 65:256 (2), 2011, 169.
[95] Peter Hallward succinctly articulates this issue in Rancière's work in 'Staging Equality: Rancière's Theatrocracy and the Limits of Anarchic Equality', in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabrial Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 155. See Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein*, Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1989, 35

Meaning Making in Modern Life: Walter Benjamin's Concept of Experience and Critique of Aesthetics

> *... we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognise it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday.*
> Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism', *Reflections*

Introduction: Benjamin's intellectual context and commitments

My aim in this chapter is to provide an account of the characteristics of experience in modernity and the prospects for making meaning in its material and cultural world. This chapter evaluates the re-articulation of Walter Benjamin's work as a philosophical project and as a critical position on aesthetics.[1] I have selected a range of texts from Benjamin's oeuvre that reflect his philosophical and historical commitments and offer a 'clearly defined space', to quote Benjamin, within which to make a set of claims about experience in modernity.[2] My selection from Benjamin's wide ranging oeuvre is guided by the key aim of this thesis, which is to locate experience in historical context, and in doing so, identify how processes of meaning making connect material objects to collective life. I begin by assessing the poverty of experience; that is its destitution and emaciation under conditions hostile to the form of experience Benjamin calls *Erfahrung*. This assessment leads me to elaborate a specific aspect of modern experience: its over-saturation by accumulated materials, which are false routes or even ruinous to the possibility of fulfillment. In this chapter, I elaborate the tension between this over-saturation and the possibilities for meaning making afforded by material objects for figures like the collector. Finally, in contrast

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[1] See in particular Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012, Alison Ross, *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image*, New York and London: Routledge, 2015 (hereafter *Image*) and Alison Ross, *Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin: A Conceptual Analysis*, New York: Routledge, 2019 (hereafter *Revolution*).
[2] Walter Benjamin, 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre', Rodney Livingstone (trans.) in *Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930*, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005, 202. Hereafter, references to Walter Benjamin's *Selected Writings* will be cited as *SW* followed by the volume number.

to the collector, I consider the concept of allegory in Benjamin's work. In Benjamin's work, allegory works as a criticism of aesthetic ambivalence and seduction of sensuous forms. Following Ross, I evaluate Benjamin's concept of allegory by locating it within an aesthetic space. The key argument of this chapter, which extends the work of Ross and Friedlander, culminates in a new reading of Benjamin's concept of allegory in relation to the commodity, which demonstrates the availability of emphatic experience within the ordinary world.

Benjamin's 'chiseled prose' seeks to identify both the remnants of older forms of experience in tradition and storytelling, for instance, and the conditions for a new form of experience appropriate to modern conditions.[3] In the work of Eli Friedlander and Alison Ross, Benjamin's oeuvre is subjected to rigorous conceptual analysis that is missing from the reverential exegesis of some previous scholarship.[4] Friedlander's aim is to 'explicitly lay out the philosophical armature that both holds his writing together and provides a measure by which to judge the significance of particular moments within them.'[5] Central to my argument in this chapter is Friedlander's claim that in his 'philosophical task' Benjamin is 'committed to working with and out of historically concrete material'.[6] If Benjamin's work can sometimes appear 'jealously

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[3] Pierre Missac, 'Walter Benjamin: From Rupture to Shipwreck' in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 211. See 'The Storyteller' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn (trans), Hannah Arendt (ed.), Fontana, 1979, pp.83-110. For an account of the persistence of tradition in experience, with reference to Kant and Jewish thought, see also Oli Rotlevy, 'The "Enormous Freedom of the Breaking Wave": The Experience of Tradition in Benjamin between the Talmud and Kant', *New German Critique*, 140, 47:2, August 2020, pp.191-216.

[4] Sami Khatib notes the tendency in Benjamin scholarship towards 'compulsive innovation' and 'neurotic overproduction under the doxological imperatives of creativity, innovation and originality [that] affects most domains of intellectual labour…' ('Barbaric Salvage: Benjamin and the Dialectics of Destruction', *Parallax*, 24:2, 2018, 144) Despite citing scholars who defend the philosophical integrity of Benjamin's work, Stéphane Symons in *Walter Benjamin: Presence of Mind, Failure to Comprehend* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) makes the 'absence of any systematic philosophy' (2) into a reason to avoid a 'definitive' presentation of Benjamin's concepts, as well as avoid a overview of the secondary literature (7). The diversity of Benjamin's writing and occasional imprecision of his conceptual articulation can lead to unhelpful attempts to re-formulate his work, especially emerging from the tradition of deconstruction, see for instance Werner Hamacher, 'Now: Walter Benjamin on Historical Time' in *Walter Benjamin and History*, Andrew Benjamin (ed.), London: Continuum, 2005, pp.38-68.

[5] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 2

[6] Ibid. 4. See also 9: 'In what way is the philosophical character of Benjamin's work manifest in its distinctive relation to meaning?' Although Fredric Jameson agrees that 'one must be wary of reading Benjamin as a systematic thinker: in that, he was quite the opposite of de Man, who never composed a doctrinal treatise or exposition either, but who certainly had a theory.' Nevertheless, Jameson argues that Benjamin 'had interests, but they were rarely philosophical in the disciplinary sense of the word.' (*Allegory and Ideology*, London: Verso, 2019, 32)

to keep the secret of the so-called material processes of his own production' and so acquire 'a legendary aura of esotericism', as Agamben writes, then Benjamin scholarship has been held very much in thrall to this legend.[7] Scholarship on Benjamin runs the risk of treating his own writing as 'Holy Writ', or 'words of revelation', as Scholem remarked.[8] Ross renders such reverence unfeasible by pointing to 'the absence of positions that the scattered population of this field of admirers would be willing to accept as authoritative,' a situation that has enabled 'a number of erroneous and highly impressionistic readings of Benjamin [to take] hold…'[9] Friedlander and Ross's systematic reconstructive work form the basis of my interpretation, both of which highlight sites of continuity and difference within Benjamin's oeuvre, particularly on the topic of aesthetics.[10]

In this chapter, I measure Benjamin's concept of experience by its contrast with its emaciation in modernity. I describe the role that material objects play in both saturating perception and contributing to the disenchantment and disorientation of modern life. I analyse this tendency in historicism, and contrast it to the figure of the collector, whose selective apprehension of certain objects offers some degree of clarity in the midst of fetishised objects. I argue that, although this clarity is highly ambivalent in its relation to object, nevertheless the figure of the collector exemplifies an approach to material objects in rescuing experience from the weight of accumulation. The collector is paired with the figure of the allegorist, who challenges the aestheticisation of objects and inoculates against cheap satisfaction. I conclude this chapter with the challenge set by Benjamin himself to find ways to avoid aestheticisation without abandoning historical and material passages of making meaning in modern life.

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[7] Giorgio Agamben, 'On Benjamin's *Baudelaire*' in *Walter Benjamin and Theology*, Colby Dickinson and Stéphane Symons (ed.), New York: Fordham University Press, 2016, 225.
[8] Gershom Scholem, 'Walter Benjamin and His Angel' in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 52. See also Jürgen Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin: Consciousness-Raising or Rescuing Critique' in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 91-92.
[9] Ross, *Image*, 1.
[10] See for instance, Alison Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's Critique of Aesthetic Form: "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" in the Context of Benjamin's Early Writing', in *The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings of Benjamin and Adorno*, Nathan Ross (ed.), London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, pp.83-98.

The tendencies in Benjamin's work I wish to affirm are themselves ironically in tension with each other: the destructive, clearing force of revolutionary experience, and the rescuing, redemptive force of collecting. Jameson argues that 'the key to Benjamin's thought lies in the relation to experience (which is, after all, along with history, his fundamental theme).'[11] Like Habermas, I do not think this project entails

> facile demands for consistency. Benjamin brought together motifs that ordinarily run at cross purposes… and had he united them he would have done so in as many unities as there are moments in which the interested gaze of succeeding interpreters breaks through the crust and penetrates to where the stones still have life in them.[12]

One significant figure in the constellation of influences is Immanuel Kant, whose concept of experience had undergone rehabilitation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[13] Caygill makes an argument for the decisive effect of Kant on Benjamin, but he is far from alone in noting its significance.[14] Benjamin's critique of the Kantian concept of experience sought to unite the faculties of intuition, understanding and reason, as many of his Romantic and Hegelian predecessors did.[15] However, Benjamin avoided the 'developmental history of the spirit' by proposing 'an avowed metaphysics of experience in which the absolute manifests itself in spatio-temporal experience, but indirectly in complex, tortuous and even violent forms.'[16] This is especially clear in Benjamin's concept of allegory, as I demonstrate in the conclusion of the chapter. Max Pensky notes the Hegelian influence in Benjamin's intention to 'dissolve the rigid Kantian structure of possible experience

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[11] Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, London: Verso, 2020, 163.
[12] Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin', 92.
[13] For a sketch of this movement in historical terms, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Negative Dialectics*, 77. See also Frederick Beiser, *Hermann Cohen: An Intellectual Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, one of the major figures in neo-Kantianism in this period. See also Rochelle Tobias, 'Irreconcilable: Ethics and Aesthetics for Hermann Cohen and Walter Benjamin', *MLN*, 127:3, 2012, pp.665-680.
[14] Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, *xii-xiii*. See also Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 18-22. Eldridge's *Images of Freedom* is engaged in forming substantive links and shared resources in Kant and Benjamin.
[15] Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 2. Bernstein suggests that this attempt to unify what Kant separated is characteristic of continental philosophy, whereas the acceptance of their separation is characteristic of analytic philosophy. See *The Fate of Art*, 7.
[16] Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 2.

into the space of history'.[17] The Kantian perspective remains an important way of framing the concept of experience in Benjamin, since, as Ross contends, Benjamin never fully 'expelled the aesthetic perspective of Kantian philosophy.'[18] Moreover, it is central to the argument of this thesis that, even in Benjamin's work, Kant provides an (unsurpassed) 'abbreviated grammar for how complex meanings are attached to materiality.'[19] I return to Benjamin's ambivalent inheritance of Kant in the conclusion to this chapter, where I present the argument that the concept of allegory is best understood in the context of aesthetics.

Experience and Alienation

> *... self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.*
> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'

One key tension in Benjamin's account of experience in modernity is in the seductive, phantasmagoric allure of the plenitude of objects available for consumption and pleasure. The pleasures of the commodity, however, point to the dissatisfactions of the 'sheer saturation of time, "*natura non fecit saltam*," an omnipresence which does not even allow for the separation of work and "leisure", a temporality utterly given over to capitalism's rituals, of which [Benjamin] only identifies guilt.'[20] Jameson takes issue with the all-encompassing accounts of 'phantasmagoria' exemplified by Debord and Baudrillard (in which, for instance, 'capitalist daily life will be

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[17] Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, 66. See also Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 2-3 and Benjamin, *SW I*, 93-96.

[18] Ross, *Image*, 10. See also Rodolphe Gasché, 'Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"' in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp.183-204.

[19] Ross, *Image*, 11. This is a key basis for the argument of this thesis, and is a point of connection between each of the thinkers and their adoption of Kant. What is significant is also the way in which each of them make use of this grammar.

[20] Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, 154. See also Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998: 'As an endless tedious succession of moments or a linear continuum, chronological time, for example, equalled the temporal modality of antiquarian historicism…' (59) See also Gilles Deleuze, *Gilles Deleuze, Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties,* Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984: 'Guilt is like the moral threat which duplicates the thread of time.' (*xi*)

characterised as being at best somehow ideological and at worst a realm of enchantment'[21]), which he proposes 'drains all reality from everything including ourselves, our own individual or collective identities' and 'retranslate[s] Baudrillard's process of simulation more productively back into what Benjamin called aestheticization.'[22] Rather than distinguishing between 'regression and "advanced" productivity', Jameson suggests that

> Consumerism and the triumph of the commodity form over epistemology and ethics, let alone politics itself, is surely the more telling description of a social life saturated with images and reorganized around the consumption of commodities, the mesmerisation by *schöner Schein* or aesthetic appearance as such.[23]

The critique of the pleasure in sensuous form, which Benjamin associates with aesthetics, connects his early and later work, in which he is concerned to mark out moments that can act as 'the counter to the depleting feeling of anxiety that takes hold in the face of forms that are marked for our attention [like commodities], but whose claim on us is ambiguous and de-motivating.'[24] Benjamin drew on Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety and the '"negative-infinite reflection of aesthetic man"' (92) who inhabits the inauthentic time of endless self-sameness.[25] Benjamin associates the 'endless, tedious succession of moments or a linear continuum' with 'an infernal game of reflections destined to display the empty mirror image of transcendence, which it infinitely reflected and deflected'.[26] The commodity, like aesthetic form for Benjamin, is, as Stimilli writes, 'constitutively ambiguous [*Zweideutigkeit*]'.[27] I will return to the relationship between the commodity and aesthetics in the conclusion to

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[21] Ibid. 152.
[22] Ibid. 155.
[23] Ibid. 156.
[24] Alison Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's Critique of Aesthetic Form: "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" in the Context of Benjamin's Early Writing' in *The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings of Benjamin and Adorno*, Nathan Ross (ed.), London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, 94. A similar connection is made between the critique of aesthetic form in Benjamin's early essays and his later 'Work of Art' essay in Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, pp.66-102.
[25] Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 92 and 59.
[26] Ibid. 58-59. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, John Osborne (trans.), London: Verso, 2009, 81.
[27] Elettra Stimilli, *The Debt of the Living: Ascesis and Capitalism,* Adrianna Bove (trans.), Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017, 130.

this chapter, since their relationship is useful for understanding allegory. Here, I focus on the comprehensive alienation of experience in modernity.

The pleasure of consumption has its counterpart in the origin in the alienation of labour, in Marx's critique of the 'fetishistic abstraction of the commodity. As the commodity that becomes fetish is a good that cannot be fully enjoyed without accumulation and exchange, so labour reduced to commodity is alienated and not oriented toward the realization of man in society.'[28] Commodities are social products whose surplus is appropriated by individuals rather than returned to common ownership, as Marx argues in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*.[29] Marx writes in his early analysis of alienation,

> The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. [sic] Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*… This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces – labour's products – confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has become congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labour… In the condition dealt with by political economy this realization of labour appears as *loss of reality* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object* and *object-bondage*; appropriation as *estrangement* [*Entfremdung*], as *alienation* [*Entäusserung*]. So much does labour's realization appear as loss of reality that the worker loses reality to the point of starving to death.[30]

The commodification of labour and its products emaciates our capacity to experience objects as historical and social products.[31] Benjamin expands and shifts Marx's

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[28] Ibid. 128.
[29] See Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, Volume 24 (Marx and Engels: 1874-83), Rodney and Krystyna Livingstone (trans.), New York: International Publishers, 1989, pp.83-88. See for Benjamin's comments on the Gotha Program, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, 258-259.
[30] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Martin Milligan (trans.) in *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Ed.*, Robert C. Tucker (ed), New York: Norton, 1978, 71-72.
[31] See Karl Marx, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy* (*Grundrisse*) in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, Volume 28, Ernst Wangermann (trans.), London: Lawrence &

analysis when it comes to alienation under capitalism. Unlike Marx, who analyses alienation in terms of the worker's relation to property, the process of production, and to the species-essential pursuit of purposeful activity, the account of alienation in Benjamin is inflected by theology and focuses on 'the concrete experiences of alienation' such as the factory worker.[32] Benjamin montages the factory worker's subjection to working conditions and machinery and the 'absurd kind of uniformity' of the crowd in Poe's writing as well as 'amusements' like Dodgem cars at the Fun Fair, ultimately stepping the body at the level of habit by '"early drilling of the worker."[33] This drill must be differentiated from 'practice… The unskilled worker is the one most deeply degraded by the drill of the machines. His work has been sealed off from experience; practice counts for nothing there.'[34] The worker is doubly alienated, from the material product of labour, and from the space of experience, both within work and outside. Jameson writes that ordinary life in this double alienation constitutes

> a kind of second or parallel realm, in the sense in which (as Ford understood long ago) the worker is himself already a split personality: a wage earner on the one hand, a consumer on the other. Daily life is the shadow world of the worker's second personality as a consumer; and it is this dimension which is the most visible and accessible to sociologists, writers and indeed the

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Wishart, 2010, pp.384-93. See also Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, London: Polity, 2018, pp.126-134. Benjamin also reintroduces the theological framework which Marx found lingering in classical political economic accounts of the relation between labour and exchange. See *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 71. See also Stimilli, *The Debt of the Living*, 126-128.

[32] Ross, *Revolution*, 22-23. Benjamin writes that the 'vulgar-Marxist' conception of work as the '"saviour of modern times" … bypasses the question of how its products might benefit the workers while still not being at their disposal. It recognizes only the progress in the mastery of nature, not the retrogression of society; it already displays the technocratic features later encountered in Fascism… The new conception of labour amounts to the exploitation of nature, which with naïve complacency is contrasted with the exploitation of the proletariat.' (*Illuminations*, 259) Benjamin turns instead to Fourier, who 'as a result of efficient cooperative labour… illustrates a kind of labour which, far from exploiting nature, is capable of delivering her of the creations which lie dormant in her womb as potentials.' (259)

[33] Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', 175-176. See Michael Levenson, 'Habit, Labour, Need and Desire' in *Philosophy in the Condition of Modernism*, A. Falcato and A. Cardiello (ed.), London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp.31-47.

[34] Ibid. 175-176. See also Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990, 112.

> subjects themselves (labour, like sex, being unrepresentable, as Godard declared in a memorable moment).[35]

Rather than the ballast of an anthropological constant such as 'species essence' [*Gattungswesen*], alienation in Benjamin is measured by its opposition to fulfilled experience. Alienation is characterized less by the relations of production and more by the way in which, as Ross writes, the 'sensuous forms of nature impose an alienating environment in which guilt and anxiety reign', which is characteristic of 'ritual and ritualisation in bourgeois society.'[36] The expanded analysis of alienation is congruent with developments in early twentieth century Western Marxism. As Rahel Jaeggi notes, especially in Georg Lukács theorized an account of alienation informed by the sociology of Simmel and Weber.[37] Lukács' account incorporated commodity fetishism with the alienation of social environments.[38] Lukács followed what Simmel called a

> "tragedy of culture," in which the products of human freedom take on an independent existence as something objective over and against the human being' which leads to the identification of a parched version of human freedom with 'a loss of meaning'.[39]

Alienation, then, has both social and material effects, which, combined, describe the environment of modern bourgeois life. It is against this environment, but also within it, that Benjamin's concept of experience is oriented, and it is against alienation that fulfilled experience is defined.

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[35] Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, 153. See also Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Graham Burchell (trans.), Michel Senellart (ed.), New York: Picador, 2008: 'The man of consumption is not one of the terms of exchange. The man of consumption, insofar as he consumes, is a producer. What does he produce? Well, quite simply, he produces his own satisfaction.' (226)
[36] Ross, *Revolution*, 23.
[37] See Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith (trans.), Frederick Neuhouser (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 10.
[38] See Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, London: Pluto Press, 2000, 9.
[39] Ibid. 10. Wendy Brown also proposes that Marx's concept of 'power' stands over and exceeds human freedom in his analysis of commodity fetishism and alienation. See 'Power without Logic without Marx' in *Politics Out of History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, pp.62-90. Clifford Geertz describes the 'pervasive raggedness of the world' characterized by the 'shattering of larger coherences' (*Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 161).

For Cavell, Benjamin attempts to guide us away from false redemption from alienation, even 'dismantling' it by pointing to the way 'philosophical pressure on words' can force 'them from their orbits of meaningfulness'.[40] This attempt culminates with the concept of allegory. The emphasis on recovery, and, moreover, on the failure of such a recovery lends Benjamin's theory of modernity and experience a melancholy tone. But it is one that sustains, as Pensky writes, 'a tension arising from the possibility of meaning; better, it is a productive tension maintained at the moment of dialectical suspension in which the necessity and impossibility of meaning are held frozen for the contemplating subject.'[41] I return to this tension in my conclusion to this chapter, where I consider the comparison between Kant and Benjamin's approaches to aesthetic form in providing a genuine space of meaning.

The Poverty of Experience

> *das bunte Gerede des An-*
> *erlebten*
> Paul Celan, 'Weggebeizt'[42]

According to Benjamin, experience in modernity is defined by its impoverishment and destitution. Although he is far from alone in this diagnosis,[43] Benjamin's account of this poverty lucidly combines apparently contradictory features: emptiness of meaning and fullness of objects (as commodities). Although certain conditions of production 'convert' people into 'dull, inarticulate masses', Benjamin's analysis also pairs sympathetic attention to the relationship between the causes of this

[40] Cavell, 'Wittgenstein and Benjamin', 240-42.
[41] Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 15.
[42] John Felstiner translates: 'the motley gossip of pseudo-experience', while Michael Hamburger offers 'the garish talk of rubbed-off experience'. Neither is quite as aurally satisfying as the German. See http://languagehat.com/weggebeizt/ (Accessed 12/08/2021).
[43] Buck-Morss notes Cornelius' assessment of 1923 that '"Men have uncleared the ability to recognise the Godly in themselves and in things; nature and art, family and state only have interest for them as sensations. Therefore their lives flow meaninglessly by, and their shared culture is inwardly empty and will collapse because it is worthy of collapse…"' (*Negative Dialectics*, 8)

impoverishment and the defense mechanisms deployed against it, with a demand that we overcome those conditions.[44] The poverty of experience, Benjamin writes,

> should not be understood to mean that people are yearning for experience; they long for a world in which they can make such pure and decided use of their poverty – their outer poverty, and ultimately also their inner poverty – that it will lead to something respectable. Nor are they ignorant or inexperienced. Often we could say the opposite. They have "devoured" everything, both "culture and people", and they have such a surfeit that it has exhausted them.[45]

Unlike both conservative critics of mass society, and Marxist critics of ideology, both of which elicit contempt for the ordinary world, Benjamin's response to the impoverishment of experience is strangely affirmative even as he recognises its deleterious effects.[46] It is, more often than not, the false attempts to resurrect experience through myth or ritual that Benjamin condemns.[47] In *One-Way Street*, he writes that

> mass instincts have become confused and *estranged* from life more than ever… this society, each of whose members cares only for his own abject well-being, falls victim – with animal insensibility but without the insensate

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[44] Benjamin, 'Reflections on Radio', *SW II*, 543.
[45] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, 734.
[46] See Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, pp.26-33 on Jünger's conservative diagnosis of the condition of experience, and also Benjamin's discussion of Siegfreid Kracauer, in which he explains his conception of false consciousness (see *The Salaried Masses*, Appendix A). Another notable figure of this view is Werner Sombart, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 113-14. Foucault notes the 'curious closeness and parallels between what we call the Freiburg School [of proto-neoliberalism] or ordoliberals and their neighbours, as it were, the Frankfurt School' (105), summarising Weber's 'displacement' of Marx's problem by analyzing 'not so much the contradictory logic of capital as the problem of the irrational rationality of capitalist society.' (105) Other conservative critics of mass culture and society include Ortega y Gasset and Wyndham Lewis, for instance see *The Art of Being Ruled*, Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989. Adorno gives a succinct statement of the irrationality of capitalist society in *Aesthetic Theory*, 73, see also 118 for a comment that implicitly contrasts Benjamin and conservative figures like Klages and Jung.
[47] See Buck-Morss, *Negative Dialectics*, 17 on irrationalism. See also Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* for instance 26-26; 32-35. And Michael Löwy, 'The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilisation', *Theory and Society*, 16:6, November 1987, pp.891-904. Löwy argues that the 'essential characteristic of Romantic anti-capitalism is *a thorough critique of modern industrial (bourgeois) civilization in the name of certain pre-capitalist social and cultural values*.' (891)

> intuition of animals – as a blind mass, to even the most obvious danger, and the diversity of individual goals is immaterial in the face of the identity of determining forces.[48]

Benjamin parodies both right and left ideological confidence that history will play out for the better of all. Even in this comparison with animals,[49] Benjamin recognises that the desire for life can be vociferously present as 'insensate intuition.' Moreover, he signals a violent break in experience felt at an organic level that, in reckoning with the loss of the softening effects of the aura, will be developed into a new concept of mass experience.[50]

The material culture of modernity has its psychic equivalent: 'Neurosis creates the mass-produced article in the psychic economy', in the form of 'the obsessional idea, which, manufactured in countless copies, appears in the household of the neurotic mind as the ever selfsame.'[51] Friedlander follows Benjamin in recognizing the appeal this form of psychic over-production has in filling time, emptily, noting 'the attraction of the isolated impression, the sensational, and repetition are related by the understanding that it is precisely the new that never repeats itself.'[52] Ensembles of commodities never assemble into anything intelligible, and we are subject to the 'demonic semblance' of 'immediate experience' that is 'the expression of the incapacity to judge or discriminate.'[53] The new public's industrial mentality has 'neither yardsticks for its judgment nor a language for its feelings.'[54] Judgment and experience are replaced by 'planning or calculation' that constitute the activity of an individual consciousness dutifully performing '"unceasing selection"', so as to

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[48] Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, 34.
[49] Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*: 'War molds people into a seething mass of worms, in contrast to the communist self-formation of the masses in organization.' (36).
[50] See Gasché, 'Objective Diversions', 183-204.
[51] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 166.
[52] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 156.
[53] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 152.
[54] Benjamin, 'Reflections on Radio', *SW II*, 543. See Arendt, 'The Concept of History' in Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, London: Penguin, 1977, 52-53. Susan Buck-Morss writes, 'The relation of the industrial worker to the thing-world of production… is not different from the relation of consumers to the thing-world of consumption: neither is social experience (*Erfahrung*) of a type that could lead to knowledge of the reality behind appearances.' ('The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering' in *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Beatrice Hanssen (ed.), London and New York: Continuum, 2006, 40)

harvest coveted private meaning from the chaff of ordinary life.[55] For Benjamin, this is a quality of experience characteristic of the urban, modern subject that is appropriate to its environment, but which blocks the connection between individual experience and collective life.

Khatib argues that *Erlebnis* – incontinent immediate experience – is characteristic of the 'idler', and the passive, even lazy recipient of sensation, and Schwenppenhäuser calls it 'the enscapsulated self' who 'loses the selfdom it set out to preserve' by its lame defensiveness.[56] Ross describes how efforts to resurrect experience in ritualised or aestheticised forms are 'meant to control anxiety but in fact [end] up proliferating its occasions, thus also increasing the chances of transgression and the attendant sense of guilt.'[57] Guilt and anxiety are preponderant moods inherited from the inhabitation of religious tradition by capitalism.[58] Benjamin writes,

> Worries: a mental illness characteristic of the age of capitalism. Spiritual (not material) hopelessness in poverty and in vagrant, mendicant monkhood; a condition that is so bereft of hope causes guilt feelings. "Worries" are the index of the sense of guilt induced by a despair that is communal, not individual, in origin.[59]

Despite the collective origins of anxiety in the social world (like the commodity), the moralised scramble for respectability stratifies experience to the level of the individual. As I have suggested, Benjamin's picture of experience in modernity is one

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[55] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 150 and Ross, *Revolution*, 84. Ross presents Niklas Luhmann's account of meaningful experience far more charitably than I am here.
[56] Khatib, 'Barbaric Salvation', 141-44 and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 'Propaedeutics of Profane Illumination' in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 47. See also Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Flâneur, The Sandwichman and the Whore', 38.
[57] Ross, *Revolution*, 34.
[58] The fragment 'Capitalism as Religion' (*SW I*, pp.288-291) responds to Weber's thesis that capitalism was 'a formation condition by religion', but, he argues, 'an essentially religious phenomenon' (*SW I*, 288). This is particularly evident in the discussion of ritual as a characteristic of the modern attempt to 'allay the same anxieties, torments, and disturbances to which the so-called religions offer answers.' (288) For an extensive discussion of the fragment, see Stimilli, *The Debt of the Living*, pp.113-134. See also Mauro Ponzi, *Nietzsche's Nihilism in Walter Benjamin*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp.1-20.
[59] Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', *SWI I*, 290.

torn between excess and emptiness, and suffering under the weight of accumulated sensations and impressions that are empty of content.

For Ross, Benjamin maintains that the orthodox Marxist view that revolutionary motivation emerges from an analysis of workers' material condition is flawed, and that revolutionary orientation towards the future in Marxism, for Benjamin, 'cannot anchor revolution in concrete experience.'[60] But Benjamin proposes that the poverty of experience can be recuperated as a positive condition, just as the surrealists 'perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism.'[61] Benjamin conceives different 'options for the organization of space and time', modifying Kantian categories.[62] Tradition previously ordered experience, and its 'destruction raises the possibility of not a single but of a number of possible successors.'[63] Benjamin takes up Weber's notion of '*disenchantment*' in the context of art whose basis was 'undermined by the ideology of fair exchange, thus freeing the arts from the context of ritual.'[64] This liberation is elsewhere described by Benjamin as 'a matter of honesty to declare our bankruptcy', rather than accepting a form of experience 'stimulated and obtained by underhand means.'[65] Honesty reappears as clarity in acute consciousness, and as exposure in allegorical perception. The loss of tradition opens new possibilities for the re-organisation of experience, and its re-orientation from individual bourgeois guilt to collective situations like the film audience.[66] However, instead of affirming these possibilities, which have both an

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[60] Ross, *Revolution*, 54. Enzo Traverso suggests that, according to Benjamin, Marx's concept of revolution was not only informed by 'literary reminiscence' of revolutionaries, but also 'the memories of his own experience.' (Traverso, 'Bohemia, Exile and Revolution: Notes on Marx, Benjamin and Trotsky', *Historical Materialism*, 10:1, 2002, 134) This is important for Traverso, since elsewhere he argues that whereas 'the fascist imagination is a mythical construction, the revolutionary perception of time – its antipodal one – is shaped by memory, even if it is "a memory of the future."' (*Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, 74)
[61] Benjamin, 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, 181-82. See Benjamin, *Arcades*: 'The incorporation of a nihilism into its hegemonic apparatus was reserved for the bourgeoisie of the twentieth century.' (J91,5, 385)
[62] Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 30.
[63] Ibid. 30.
[64] Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 102.
[65] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, 732.
[66] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility (Third Version)', *SW IV*, 268-69. See Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's Critique of the Category of Aesthetic Form': 'Benjamin maintains that like the modes of existence of human collectives the mode of human perception "changes over long historical periods."… Cinema is a mass art that provides the possibility of "simultaneous collective reception." What is crucial is that film enriches "our field of perception"; it

epistemological and aesthetic aspect, Benjamin observes that people are unable to throw off the weight of ritual immersion. The accumulated weight of the past, reified in objects and cosseted environments like the dank interior apartment, has a baleful, determining effect on experience.

Accumulation and the Weight of Private Objects

> *... the years of cheap acquisition*
> *and irresponsible postponement, or cheap*
> *postponement and irresponsible acquisition…*
> Michael Hofmann, 'LV'

Benjamin gives an exemplary presentation of the connection between material conditions and the quality of experience. The defining features of modern life – its distinctive patterns of work, economy, and urban environments – coalesce in the psyche as forms of neurotic overproduction and compulsive accumulation. Agamben compares the image of modern life in Kafka's *The Castle* with Benjamin's concept of modern experience. He likens tradition and culture to the castle itself, which 'burdens the village with the obscurity of its decrees and the multiplicity of its offices, the accumulated culture has lost its living meaning and hangs over man like a threat in which he can in no way recognise himself.'[67] Benjamin adduces this in the realm of objects, quoting Marx: '"Private property has made us so stupid and inert that an object is *ours* only when we have it, when it exists as capital for us… *All* the physical and intellectual sense have been replaced by the simple alienation of *all* these senses, the sense of *having*…"'[68] It is not only the alienated or fetishised status of commodities that obstructs experience, determined as it is by the 'fungibility of commodities insofar as they have equivalent market prices and to the domination of

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does so in the case of the "progressive reaction" to film "by an *immediate* fusion of pleasure – pleasure in seeing and experiencing – with an attitude of expert appraisal."' (91)

[67] Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, Georgia Albert (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 108.

[68] Benjamin, *Arcades*, H3a, 1-2, 209. See also for Marx on alienation and objectification, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 78: 'if the product of his labour, his labour *objectified*, is for him an alien, hostile, powerful object independent of him, then his position towards it is such that someone else is master of the object, someone who is alien, hostile, powerful and independent of him.' It is notable that Marx cites religious ritual in this context.

daily activities by commodity production and exchange.'[69] It is also the very mode of attention that corresponds to them, associated with possessiveness, and transplanted from the realm of the private property into, for instance, the realm of language, or the realm of knowledge.[70] Opinions and scholarship pile up alongside each other in newspapers and journals, a barren stockpile of information (*Erkenntnis*) bereft of the qualities worthy of experience, or stories, never mind truth (*Wahrheit*).[71] Benjamin identified stylistic trends of 'literalness and exaggeration', as Pensky points out, that 'effect a profusion of objects, filling up the void produced by the withdrawal of doctrinal answers to the question of the meaning of life and the value of creation.'[72] And yet, just as scholarship might aim to dispel confusion, much of the production of critique directed at material accumulation is identified by Pensky as the 'result of a contradictory will to expose the realm of objects as debased and fallen nature'.[73] Orthodox critique condemns the ordinary world and so leaves itself no basis for emancipation from within the world or by reference to past struggles.[74]

Benjamin identifies a relationship with cultural objects that is paralysed by the 'attempt to acquire culture without changing oneself', which 'would be true of the individual as well as the collective'.[75] Friedlander relates this directly to alienated labour, however he also notes 'a further sense in which the perpetuation and survival of culture are a testimony of barbarism. Culture is ideology when it is not conducive to transformation.'[76] Accumulation transfixes its objects in static configurations that are not amenable to experience and ossifies our relation to history. The instinct to

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[69] Eldridge, *Images of History*, 171.
[70] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 11 and Bainard Cowan, 'Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory', *New German Critique*, 22, 1981, 113.
[71] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, 89 and 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', *Illuminations*, 160-61. See also Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, 'Explanation [in contrast to storytelling] may be grasped as a lower, fallen realm of language shortly to be redefined in terms of information…' (168)
[72] Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 85.
[73] Ibid. 85.
[74] For example, Arendt argues that in Marx's critique of the tradition, speech is 'now conceived to be mere "ideological" talk whose chief function is to conceal the truth… The basic mistrust of speech, as represented in Marx's theory of ideologies – preceded by Descartes' terrible suspicion than an evil spirit may conceal the truth from man – has proved itself to be a fundamental and efficient onslaught on religion precisely because it is an onslaught on philosophy as well.' ('Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought', *Thinking Without a Bannister*, 19) Arendt associates Marx's view of language in connection with his revaluation of violence as (mute) action par excellence. This stands in contrast with Benjamin's concept of a naming language.
[75] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 159-160.
[76] Ibid. 160.

accumulate seeks 'to retain cultural possessions and enjoy them by enlivening the world of the past for its own sake'.[77] Benjamin writes,

> Each thing stamps its owner, leaving him only the choice of appearing a starveling or a racketeer. For although true luxury can be permeated by intellect and conviviality and so forgotten, the luxury goods swaggering before us now parade such brazen solidity that all the mind's shafts break harmlessly on their surface.[78]

Despite being caught in the parade of empty value that was the currency of hyperinflation in Germany, Benjamin describes the 'amalgam of stupidity and cowardice constituting the mode of life of the German bourgeois… The helpless fixation on notions of security and property… keeps the average citizen from perceiving the quite remarkable stabilities of an entirely new kind that underlie the situation.'[79] Collective possibilities are debased by the privatised version of a political and social condition that leads to a moralised, defensive response, which regards 'any state that dispossesses… as unstable.'[80]

The reaction entrenches the bourgeois condition as 'the regime of private affairs', seeking 'hideouts' in buttressed interiors and in forms of corrupted sociality like the family, which Benjamin calls 'the rotten, dismal edifice in whose closets and crannies the most ignominious instincts are deposited. Mundane life proclaims the total subjugation of eroticism to privacy.'[81] Caygill defines the new concept of experience precisely by the opposition between the occluded bourgeois interior and the affirmation of glass architecture, which maintains a

> single, continuous concept of transparency. This form of architecture not only expresses a change in the structure of experience, but also confirms and contributes to it… [T]his affirmative modernism is stated in disturbing terms, but for Benjamin this transformation of experience is already in train, and

[77] Ibid. 161.
[78] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 39.
[79] Ibid. 32-33.
[80] Ibid. 33.
[81] Ibid. 90.

> every option, whether compensatory, affirmative or destructive and negative expresses a decision taken in respect to it.[82]

By contrast, the bourgeois interior is designed so as to preserve the traces of life, which are erased in the flood of urban life.[83] The interior 'is constituted as a counterpart to the individual's experience of the masses, as a defense in the face of the impossibility of leaving any traces of one's existence in the collective space of city life.'[84] Yet defensive preservation in Benjamin's image of the interior is consistently related to death and decay: 'the bourgeois interior… fittingly houses only the corpse. "On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered." The soulless luxury of the furnishings becomes the true comfort only in the presence of a dead body.'[85] Death appears as murder, a crime or a secret that must be kept hidden, and a sign of the pungent turpitude of bourgeois life, lingering like a stain on the furnishings.[86] In a scene in *One-Way Street*, Benjamin describes 'rooms, where on Sundays someone sits amid thought… like a bowl of overripe fruit with withered leaves.'[87] Like the objects hoarded around them, the bourgeois family's inner lives rot and pickle, just as the 'deformation of dream images is the manifestation of the internalisation of the surroundings.'[88] As objects 'parade such brazen solidity', so 'society's attachment to its familiar and long-forfeited life is so rigid as to nullify the genuinely human application of intellect, forethought, even in dire peril.'[89] Tradition has been mortified and embalmed; '"the need to accumulate is one of the signs of approaching death"', Benjamin warns in *The Arcades*.[90] But the decay is concealed, because, paradoxically,

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[82] Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 31-32.
[83] For flood imagery, see Peter Szondi, 'Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin', *Critical Inquiry*, Harvey Mendelsohn (trans.), 4:3, Spring 1978, 501.
[84] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 101.
[85] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 26.
[86] See the end of the section on the collector for commentary on the significance of crime, secrecy and exposure in Brecht's *Threepenny Novel*. See also Stanley Cavell, 'The World as Things' in *Contemporary Collecting: Objects, Practices and the Fate of Things*, Kevin M. Moist and David Banash (ed.), Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2013, 246 where modern experience is linked to crime. See also John Lanchester's account of Agatha Christie novels: 'there is a definite cosiness to the "imaginary" of this closed society, and yet it is also a place in which people are murdered.' ('The Case of Agatha Christie', *London Review of Books*, 40:24, 20 December 2018)
[87] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 63-64.
[88] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 101.
[89] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 34.
[90] Benjamin, *Arcades*, H2a, 3, 208. Benjamin asks us to compare the avariciousness of old age with the 'collecting done by children!'

the interiors have 'no space for dying'.[91] Aestheticised consciousness that is 'prey to an anxiety-ridden existence because the things around come to bear demonically potent meaning' constantly shields itself from this reality by, for instance, removing graves to form a picturesque garden as Ross highlights.[92] In the interior of Benjamin's childhood home, the 'stairway seemed under the power of a ghost that awaited me as I mounted… On these last stairs it held me spellbound.'[93] The weight of accumulation paralyses experience amidst the decay of bourgeois life.

Pursuing spectres haunt the accumulation of history that replaced living tradition. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Marx writes that

> Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. Then the words went beyond the content; now the content goes beyond the words.[94]

What is needed, for Marx, to counteract the vitiating effect of the past – imbibed, he pictures, as a narcotic – is for the revolution to 'draw its poetry' not from the past but 'only from the future.'[95] In contrast, Benjamin remains committed to rescuing the past precisely for its revolutionary promise. Rather than only drawing its energy from the future, Benjamin's analysis clarifies that it is the loss of 'transmissibility' that makes culture 'the incessant accumulation of… nonsense', entering the realm of alienated

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[91] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 41. Contrast the role of death in storytelling: 'Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.' 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, 94.
[92] The reference to the replacement of the cemetery with a clover covered path is to the projects undertaken by the characters in Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities*. Ross, *Image*, 7. See also Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Robert Hurley (trans.), London: Penguin, 1998: 'That death is so carefully evaded is linked less to a new anxiety which makes death unbearable for our societies than to the fact that the procedures of power have not ceased to turn away from death.' (138) And see also Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 155.
[93] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 42.
[94] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1978, 13. See Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 164.
[95] Marx, *18th Brumaire*, 13. See Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History' for the implications of this about-turn in Marx in *Between Past and Future* (pp.41-90) and also Hannah Arendt, *Thinking Without A Bannister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975*, Jermone Kohn (ed.), New York: Schocken Books, 2018, pp.3-42.

'value', appraised in economic or determinate terms, rather than experience.[96] For Benjamin, Khatib argues, a positive barbarism or active nihilism is necessary to melt the ossified forms of culture available to us as 'inheritance'.[97] Defending such positive barbarism, Benjamin reminds us that 'stable conditions need by no means be pleasant conditions.'[98] Benjamin's attention to the past has deceived even his closest readers into believing that he wanted to be the

> "legitimate continuer of the most fruitful and most genuine tradition of a Hamann and a Humboldt". What [Scholem] did not understand was that such a return to and continuation of the past was the very thing which "the morality of [Benjamin's] insight", to which Scholem appealed, was bound to rule out.[99]

The configuration of history in the present is crucial for Benjamin, and for avoiding both nostalgia and positivism. The status of the past, and of the objects of culture in Benjamin's work is far from straightforward. The aim is not for direct communion or absorbed contemplation with objects but for an affirmation of a new quality of experience. This contrast is illustrated by historicism, on the one hand, and the figure of the collector on the other.

Historicism as the False Redemption of the Ordinary

> *What they do, it seems to me, is surround themselves with the softness of the dead past that cannot answer back.*
> Thomas Bernhard, *The Woodcutters*

Historicism reflects the impoverishment of historical experience. It promises to redeem ordinary objects and lives of the past 'as they really were' [*wie es eigentlich*

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[96] Agamben, *Man Without Content*, 110.
[97] Khatib, 'Barbaric Salvage', 136-38.
[98] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 33.
[99] Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction: Walter Benjamin, 1892-1940' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn (trans), Hannah Arendt (ed.), Fontana, 1979, 37. See also 'Reflections on Humboldt', *SW 1*, 424-425.

gewesen].[100] However, historicism insulates the present from the past, treating the past with a type of distancing reverence characteristic of contemplation.[101] Historicism not only hoards the past, it also 'sanctifies the actual order as the rational outcome of history. History then presents a picture of evolution that might be called Darwinistic.'[102] As what Benjamin calls '"enshrinement"', historicism 'is meant to cover up the revolutionary moments in the course of history',[103] replacing with piecemeal 'justification'[104] the totalising function tradition had performed, namely putting 'the past in order, not just chronologically but first of all systematically in that it separates the positive from the negative, the orthodox from the heretical…'[105] We have, as Benjamin writes '"given up one portion of the human heritage after another, and have left it at the pawnbroker's for a hundredth of its true value, in exchange for the small change of 'the contemporary' ['*Aktuellen*']"'.[106] Guided neither by the systematic organisation of tradition nor the scientific acuity of historical materialism, historicism imposes on the past the role of conforming to the present. Historicism reflects the alienating effect of the loss of tradition because, having lost its transmissibility and availability as a medium of freedom,[107] objects of the past become a 'monstrous archive'.[108] The historicist method deploys 'empathy as a mode of judgment'[109] that acquiesces to the 'universal delusion' in which 'everyone is

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[100] Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*, 255. See for discussions of historicism, Ranke and Benjamin, Stephen Best, 'On Failing to Make the Past Present', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 73:3, September 2012, pp.453-474 and for extensive discussion of Ranke, Amy Kapczynski, 'Historicism, Progress, and the Redemptive Constitution', *Cardozo Law Review* 26:3, February 2005, pp.1041-1118. See also Irving Wohlfarth, 'Et Cetera? The Historian as Chiffonnier' in *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Beatrice Hanssen (ed.), London and New York: Continuum, 2006, especially pp.23-30.
[101] See Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Compensation' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Brooks Atkinson (ed.), New York: The Modern Library, 2000: 'We are idolators of the old.' (170)
[102] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 159.
[103] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 162.
[104] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 37.
[105] Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin' in *Illuminations*, 44.
[106] Benjamin in Khatib, 'Barbaric Salvage', 135. See James Joyce, *Ulysses*: 'For them too history was a tale like any other too often heard, their land a pawnshop.' (London: Penguin, 2000, 29-30)
[107] See Ori Rotlevy, 'The "Enormous Freedom of the Breaking Wave": The Experience of Tradition in Benjamin between the Talmud and Kant', *New German Critique*, 140, 47:2, August 2020, pp.191-216. Rotlevy suggests that tradition remains a medium of freedom, whereas I emphasise its loss.
[108] Agamben, *Man Without Content*, 108. The 'monstrous archive' can be directly contrasted with the 'collection' (see 105), as I demonstrate in this chapter.
[109] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 162. See Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History': '[Historicism] is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, *acedia*, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly.' (*Illuminations*, 256)

committed to the optical illusion of his isolated standpoint.'[110] In other words, historicism makes the present moment the measure of all things, and finds justification for it in the organisation of history into a paradoxically arbitrary teleological trajectory, a dogma tethered to erratic, prevailing winds.

Historicism, as Eldridge notes, enacts a 'false actualisation' of the historical possibilities and abrogates the role ordinary objects can play in the construction of meaning.[111] The contextualising tendency of historicism is 'always disappointed', like the 'sociologist's detective-like expectation'[112] that we might associate with the 'damp boredom' of the bourgeois private interior in which the aunt cannot *but* die.[113] Wohlfarth supplies a productive analogy between historicism and the decay of experience, likening historicism to 'a dysfunctional memory-system, a hopeless clutter of inert memory-traces that merely congests the mind.'[114] Benjamin references this congestion by way of the 'idea of eternal recurrence [that] transforms the historical event itself into a mass-produced article.'[115] History becomes 'the folly of an endless universal polemic', akin to finding atonement in capitalism, rather than a decisive construction.[116] This polemic, moreover, contains 'far more facts than… convictions' that might orient or organise 'the construction of life'.[117] Anticipating the famous 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'[118] – and possibly thinking of one of Kafka's parables[119] – Benjamin repudiates the endless flow of events, writing that

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[110] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 37. See also Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, which connects Arendt's view on judgment with Leo Strauss's critique of historicism (pp.83-116). Zerilli throughout seeks to correct conventional political and philosophical conceptions of 'perspective' (see 4-5), including by comparing it with Arendt's view of Kantian disinterest (33) and Strauss' critique of '"sympathetic understanding"' of the past in historicism (102-103). Strauss criticizes the historicist's implicit (but unacknowledged) commitment to the present, in similar terms to Benjamin (Strauss is a critic of liberalism from the right, as Benjamin is of social democracy from the left).
[111] Eldridge, *Images*, 105.
[112] Benjamin, 'In Almost Every Example We Have of Materialist Literary History', *SW II*, 547.
[113] Benjamin, 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, 177.
[114] Irving Wohlfarth, 'Resentment Begins at Home: Nietzsche, Benjamin, and the University' in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 242.
[115] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 166.
[116] Benjamin, 'Capital as Religion', *SW I*, 288.
[117] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 21.
[118] See Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, Chris Turner (trans.), London: Verso, 2016, 8-9.
[119] See Arendt, 'Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future' in *Between Past and Future*, 7, and see 9-13 for Arendt's commentary. Kafka's parable, as quoted in Arendt is as follows: '"He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives

'History knows nothing of the evil infinity contained in the image of two wrestlers locked in eternal combat.'[120] Agamben articulates the dilemma of historicism through this image:

> on the one hand, a past that incessantly accumulates behind him and oppresses him with the multiplicity of its now-indecipherable contents, and on the other hand a future that he does not possess and that does not throw any light on his struggle with the past.[121]

Historicism offers no decisive orientation, nor any way of having done with the past by bringing it to completion, fulfilling it or overcoming it. Historicism transmutes objects into information or entertainment, justification disguised as evidence for an explanation of the present.

The 'false actualisation' mentioned by Eldridge (like Cavell's false redemption) also signals the fact that historicism replaces genuine meaning with the patina of innovation, just as 'every six months a new method [is] introduced with all the latest psychological refinement… in the nursery schools of the bourgeoisie.'[122] Benjamin continues, 'Everywhere… the preoccupation with "methodology" is a symptom of the authentic bourgeois attitude, the ideology of laziness and muddling thought.'[123] Pedagogical innovation and the endless polemic of historicism obstruct us from seizing hold of the past. The 'reverse side of this poverty' of experience 'is the oppressive wealth of ideas'.[124] Historicism combines contradictory symptoms of modern experience: pessimism and resignation combined with justification for the present order and a continued search for the new in the selfsame. It is also dominated by an idea of history as progressive, that renders the passage of time at once meaningless and unbearably burdensome. Historicism accumulates an alienated past

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him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment – and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet – he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other."' (7)

[120] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 65-66.

[121] Agamben, *Man Without Content*, 108.

[122] Benjamin, 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre', *SW II*, 202.

[123] Ibid. 202.

[124] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, 732.

without 'theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time.'[125] Time hypertrophies to eternity, specifically the time of fulfilment of, say, a promise or the fulfilment of a wish.[126] Ross argues that Benjamin defines revolution precisely 'in opposition to' progress, and, following his effort to find redemptive shards buried in the past, cites the comment that time is '"found even in eternity"'.[127] The eternity of the fulfilled moment is contrasted with '"time in hell, which is the province of those who are not allowed to complete anything they have started…"'[128] Benjamin quotes Joubert, on the possibility that a moment of eternity is '"time that does not destroy; it merely completes."'[129] What is required of the past's crucial role in fulfilled experience is clarity and freedom, rather than suffocating proximity, 'impotence and entanglement'.

The difference between historicism and the role of history in fulfilled experience is defended in the work of Ross and Friedlander. For Friedlander, fulfilled experience is 'knowledge of experience that can itself be experienced.'[130] In contrast to the experience of knowledge, which interprets the past as a set of facts, and could be linked to the psychological present, Benjamin proposes instead a theory of the 'experience-ability of historical meaning' that is 'emphatic in the sense that it is existentially gripping and motivating.'[131] Fulfilled experience for Benjamin is emphatic in the fullest sense, which for Miriam Hansen means 'the ability to register

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[125] Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*, 262.
[126] I discuss the concept of fulfilled experience and the wish in detail in the next chapter.
[127] Ross, *Revolution*, 6. See *SW IV*, 402. See also Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History* for a categorization and discussion of three of Benjamin's concepts of 'inauthentic temporal modalities: 'chronological time, its inversion, *acme*, and, finally, the cyclical, eternal return of the same.' (59) Each are characterized by the 'loss of estchatology'.
[128] Benjamin in Ross, 32. See *SW IV*, 331. See T.J. Clark, *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2018: '"Eternity is in love with the productions of time."' (23) In the context of aesthetics, see also Michael Fried's distinction in 'Art and Objecthood' between instantaneousness of art objects and the endlessness of literalist objects. See *Art and Objecthood*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998, pp.148-172.
[129] Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, 181 (and *SW IV*, 331). See Rancière's *Proletarian Nights*, especially chapter 1, 'The Gates of Hell' but also in the chapter 'Circuit Rounds and Spirals', for instance, 'This initiation establishes a division of time that is the antithesis of the one describing the descent of the printer into hell: a positive presence of nonbeing – absence, illusion, future – in being, where it is no longer death but rebirth that is anticipated.' (Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France,* John Drury (trans.), London: Verso, 2012, 83) Cf. Theodore Adorno to Benjamin, in *Aesthetics and Politics,* Anya Bostock et al. (trans.), Rodney Livingston, Perry Anderson and Francis Mulhern (ed.), London: Verso, 2007: 'the Saint Simonian conception of the commodity world may indeed reveal itself as Utopia, but not as its reverse – namely, a dialectical image of the nineteenth century as Hell.' (111)
[130] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 52.
[131] Ross, *Revolution*, 7.

and negotiate the effects of historical fragmentation and loss, rupture and chance.'[132] Benjamin presents a version of this idea of historical experience in the convolute on collection in *The Arcades Project*, distinguishing it from historicism:

> The true method of making things present is to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space)… Thus represented, the things allow no mediating construction from out of "large contexts." The same method applies, in essence, to the consideration of great things from the past… when, that is, a favourable prospect presents itself: the method of receiving things into our space. We don't displace our being into theirs: they step into our life.[133]

Genuine historical insight jolts us from our lugubrious complacency that on one level reassures us that human history is a continuous progressive chain. Such complacency insists that we are ourselves continuous, and so subject to no transformation and more importantly, no possibility of genuine fulfillment.[134] We are cowed by '"pathological suggestibility"' into the belief that one moment is like another, and so fail to recognise the moments of possible displacement or rupture within ordinary life.[135] Friedlander argues that the 'knowledge of experience' is possible within 'ordinary experience', a position that 'can be seen as part of Kant's philosophical legacy'.[136] He writes, 'once we accept the conclusion that knowledge of experience can be presented in experience, we can also start conceiving how an ordering of such material of experience can make manifest the integral totality of knowledge of experience.'[137] Friedlander also connects Benjamin's philosophical project with the development of the intellectual legacy of Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment, asserting that fulfilled experience is continuous with ordinary experience in key ways.[138] What distinguishes the experience of knowledge from the knowledge of experience (which is itself

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[132] Miriam Hansen, 'Foreword' in Negt and Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience*, *xvii*.
[133] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 206, H2, 3
[134] I develop the second point in relation to transformation in the realization of dreams and wishes in the next chapter.
[135] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 163
[136] Ibid. 34-35.
[137] Ibid. 35.
[138] Eli Friedlander, 'Wittgenstein, Benjamin, and Pure Realism' in *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, Michael LeMahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé (ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, 129.

experienced) is a displacement, a negation and a confrontation through which the object is transplanted into our lives, sparking recognition or recollection in an intensely concentrated moment.

The Collector and the Liberation of Objects from Use

> *The collector knows that our relation to things should be better, but he does not see this materialized through their more equitable redistribution, or, say, through recollection. That the interior place of Art, and the collector as its true inhabitant, is registered as past may suggest that the place of Art is altered, or that the time of Art and its private collecting is over, or that interiority is closed, or that these properties of experience have all vanished together.*
> Stanley Cavell, 'The World as Things'

The figure of the collector in Benjamin offers an alternative to aestheticism and reaction, which avoid and debase the ordinary, historical world of objects. The figure of the collector in Benjamin's work provides an ambivalent cipher for the possibility of fulfillment that reconnects individual and collective experience.[139] The collector, Benjamin writes in convolute H of *The Arcades Project*,

> loses himself, assuredly. But he has the strength to pull himself up again by nothing more than a straw. And from out of the sea fog that envelops his senses rises the newly acquired piece, like an island. – Collecting is a form of practical memory…[140]

For example, Benjamin identifies the way Russian collections in Moscow allow the proletariat to 'take possession of bourgeois culture' because they are spaces in which

[139] This possibility is suggested in Annie Pfeifer, 'A Collector in a Collectivist State: Walter Benjamin's Russian Toy Collection', *New German Critique*, 133, 45:1, February 2018, pp.49-78. Pfeifer emphasises the tension between the Benjamin's private collecting activity and the social collectivization of the Moscow context. However, Pfeifer also emphasises the collector's activity of re-presentation (72-76), their implicit power of historical materialist analysis (63), and persistent connection to the (idealized) world of childhood and play. I analyse some of these themes in the next chapter.
[140] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 205, H1a,2

'workers and children to feel themselves at home.'[141] What Benjamin emphasises is not the objects but the quality of their appropriation for experience that defeats their alienation from history and collective labour.[142] As Cavell notes, the 'impoverishment' of our experience relates to the 'commodified, hence mystified' status of objects which are valued 'not for use but for the signs of exchange… Benjamin seems to harbour a fantasy of a future that promises a path – through collecting – to a new life, a *reformed practicality* with, or use for, objects.'[143] Although Cavell acknowledges that the collector does not aim to redistribute objects, what he and Peter Bürger recognise is that collecting is not 'a matter of mere piety towards the past [like historicism] but rather the expression of *practical humanity*'.[144] Both Cavell and Bürger identify the collector's reintegration of the ordinary world for experience. It is crucial to note that the 'practicality' liberates the objects from mere utility.[145]

Benjamin's collector demonstrates an aversion to the venal interest in objects, exemplifying instead a way of relating to objects that is

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[141] Benjamin, 'Moscow Diary' in *Reflections*, 104. See also Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 30 on the status of the public museum in modernity.

[142] Rancière, for instance, notes this aim as a goal of some contemporary art. The collection as a form involves the dissolution of the 'dissensual forms of critical art… a positive attempt at collecting traces and testimonies of a common world and a common history. The collection is a recollection as well. The equality of items… is thereby made into the equality of the archivistic traces of the life of a community.' ('Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Beth Hinderliter et al. (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 46) Rancière warns of the risk that the collection becomes a symbol of consensus, and thus erases the 'aesthetics of politics' and reconfigure the 'political in the form of the ethical' (48-49). Like Benjamin's wry comment that advertisement can surpass criticism (*One-Way Street*, 77) in its revelation of the 'allegorical structure of the modern world' (Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 153), Rancière warns against turning the collection into a symbol of consensus.

[143] Cavell, 'The World as Things', 106, my emphasis.

[144] Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, 27, my emphasis.

[145] See also Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, Dennis Porter (trans.), Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 1992. Lacan usefully illustrates the broader significance of aesthetic pleasure in collection: '[I]t was extremely satisfying from an ornamental point of view… I believe that the shock of novelty of the effect realised by this collection of empty match boxes – and this is the essential point – was to realise… that a box of matches is not simply an object, but that, in the form of an *Erscheinung* [appearance], as it appeared in its truly imposing multiplicity, it may be a Thing [*das Ding*]. In other words, this arrangement demonstrated that a match box isn't simply something that has a certain utility… The wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous, and quasi absurd character of this collection pointed to its thingness as match box… Perhaps you can even see something emerge in [the matchbox] that, goodness knows, society is able to find satisfaction in. If it is a satisfaction, it is in this case, one that doesn't ask anything of anyone.' (in Section VIII, 20 January 1960, 114) Jameson comments that Lacan makes the 'link between collecting and the constructional dimension of toys, the physical delight in removing the object from use and in incorporating it into a higher unity…' (*The Benjamin Files*, 95)

> "of the present. This present may be meagre, granted but no matter what it is like, one must firmly take it by the horns to be able to consult the past. It is the bulls whose blood must fill the pit if the shades of the departed are to appear at the edge."[146]

As this image of slaughter implies, Benjamin affirms the collector's paradoxical 'task of obliterating the commodity-like character of things through his ownership of them.'[147] Benjamin is aware of the paradox entailed by making possession into a conduit to the 'transfiguration' of the commodity.[148] The collector's 'possession', however, is not that of property rights but one of deliberate, conscious construction. 'Everything remembered, everything thought, everything conscious becomes socle [plinth at the base of a column], frame, pedestal, seal of his possession.'[149] The collection is not simply a museum which frames dead objects within a particular historical narrative; it constructs a *Spielraum*, or '"unsuspecting field of play"'.[150] By comprehensively intervening in creating surroundings for objects, the collector harboured 'an implicit assumption that the past spoke directly only through things that had not been handed down… Obligative truths were replaced by what was in some sense significant or interesting…'[151] The collector's task is one of wresting objects from the pious past of historicism, and so emerges as a possibility only after the loss of the tradition, seizing the new freedom of experience in its playful but decisive appropriation of objects.

What the collector preserves is, as Friedlander notes, the 'capacity to tell stories in relation to objects of the past'.[152] Friedlander demonstrates the continuity between Benjamin's earlier reflections on language and the methodology of the *Arcades Project*.[153] For Friedlander, the fact that Benjamin directs his attention to the 'not-so-flattering products of metropolitan existence' through the framework of theology

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[146] Benjamin in Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin' in *Illuminations*, 44.
[147] Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in *Reflections*, 155
[148] Ibid. 155. We should be reminded of Friedlander's warning that the attempt to transform culture without transforming oneself would be pointless.
[149] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 205, H1a,2.
[150] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 178. See Walter Benjamin, *SW IV*, 337.
[151] Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin' *Illuminations*, 40.
[152] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 184.
[153] Ibid. pp.9-27.

means that 'the reality he aims to wrest out of that material is attesting to higher life in the refuse of history.'[154] Benjamin sought to isolate the objects of the collection from their conventional ordering in the world, attracting accusations of fetishism or positivism in his concentration on the collector's magical absorption.[155] But that absorption was intended not to subordinate the collector to the object but to isolate it from sinking back into the world of mere things. Agamben writes that 'the collector also "quotes" the object outside its context and in this way destroys the order inside which it finds its value and meaning.'[156] The collector's transfiguration, for Agamben, takes place by way of 'depriving [the objects] both of their use value and of the ethical-social significance with which the tradition has endowed them.'[157] The collection involves decisive selection rather than sentimental accumulation.[158] Construction, Friedlander argues, 'demands in its first stage the condensation of the quotation material into several "luminous" contents.'[159] Like Benjamin's own library, the collector's objects are 'gathered with extreme care' whose value 'was proved by the fact that [Benjamin] had not read them – a library, then, which was guaranteed not to be useful or at the service of any profession.'[160] Arendt compares this positive dis-utility to Kant's 'disinterested delight' less by its affiliation with bourgeois contemplation and more for its labile capacity to 'fasten on any category of objects'.[161] The objects are assembled by the collector not to serve a purpose or determinate end, to use Kantian terms, which places a priority on the faculties of the collector.[162] The meaning of the collection is decided solely by the collector, and its

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[154] Ibid. 14.
[155] Ibid. 3-4. See Adorno to Benjamin, 10 November 1938 in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 129.
[156] Agamben, *Man Without Content* 105
[157] Ibid. 105. This position is congruent but not identical with Rancière's insistence on a disjunction between aesthetic experience and social and ethical determination, which I discuss in the third and fourth chapters.
[158] The role of discarding objects for the collector is evinced by Arendt's anecdote of Benjamin, who 'seriously considered exchanging his edition of the *Collected Works* of Kafka, which had recently appeared in five volumes, for a few first editions of Kafka's early writings – an undertaking which naturally was bound to remain incomprehensible to any nonbibliophile.' (Hannah Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin' in *Illuminations*, 39)
[159] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 42. See also Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*: The constellation is 'not a product of mere accumulation of lights, not is it identical with the concept… that we impose upon them in order to reveal their meaning…' (70)
[160] Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin' in *Illuminations*, 23
[161] Ibid. 42. See also Benjamin, *Arcades*, 207, H2,7 and H2a,1. I examine Kant's disinterest in the fourth chapter of this thesis.
[162] See for a discussion of Kant in relation to Benjamin in this context, Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 18 and 21-22.

strength (say, to persuade others to appreciate it, or construct a compelling image of history on its basis) rests on his activity.

In a collection, Benjamin writes, objects are

> ordered… according to a surprising and, for profane understanding, incomprehensible connection. This connection stands to the customary ordering and schematisation of things something as their arrangement in the dictionary stands to the natural arrangement.[163]

An illuminating comparison is afforded not only with Kant's disinterested delight (mistakenly identified with Schopenhauer by Benjamin)[164] but also the technique of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* which, as Cavell describes, 'tracks the philosophical pressure on words that forces them from their orbits of meaningfulness' that dissolves, inverts, or as Cavell says unearths 'our untiring requirement of the ideal: "Thought is surrounded by a halo."'[165] Both Benjamin and Wittgenstein work against philosophical mystification and against pre-determined criteria for the significance of objects.[166] Instead, as Friedlander notes, both Benjamin and Wittgenstein develop a concept of the ordinary in which everyday life can be perceived at a remove by reconfiguring the environment or context in which the ordinary is encountered.[167] The collector uses 'every single one of his possessions, to form a whole magic encyclopaedia, a world order, whose outline is the *fate* of his object'.[168] Under the pressure of this quite radical re-contextualisation,

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[163] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 207, H2,7.
[164] See my discussion of disinterest in the fourth chapter, particularly Heidegger's correction of Nietzsche on this topic.
[165] Stanley Cavell, 'Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities', *Critical Inquiry*, 25:2, 1999, 240. This phrase could be compared with Benjamin's rejection of Adorno's charge of esotericism, in which he describes the way speculation 'instead of putting on the waxen wings of the esoteric, it seeks its source of strength in construction alone.' (Benjamin to Adorno, 9 December 1938, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 136)
[166] See Alexander Stern, *The Fall of Language*, pp.291-338 for an account of the shared 'aesthetic' dimension in the two thinkers. Stern's contextualization of Benjamin and Wittgenstein within an 'expressivist' tradition is not relevant to my argument here. It is worth noting Stern's comment that 'Methodologically, both insist, somewhat paradoxically, that while philosophy needs in some sense to return to the concrete things themselves, it need not deal with them on a strictly factual basis… Philosophy is tasked with remediating the damage done to our understanding by thralldom to concepts and conceptual modes of thought.' (339)
[167] See Eli Friedlander, 'Wittgenstein, Benjamin, and Pure Realism'.
[168] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 207, H2,7.

> everything would strike us. But this is the way things are for the great collector. They strike him. How he himself pursues and encounters them, what changes in the ensemble of items are effected by a new supervening item – all this shows him his affairs in constant flux.[169]

The collector is not absorbed in his possessions but rather 'seems to look through them into their distance, like an augur.'[170] The arrangement of the collection is attributable to the collector alone. Suggesting the connection with the 'fetish character', Arendt indicates the 'value of genuineness which is decisive for the collector as well as for the market determined by him' as having replaced '"cult value"'.[171] It is the 'collector's passion' that determines the collection, which 'is not primarily kindled by the quality of the object – something that is classifiable – but is inflamed by its "genuineness", its uniqueness, something that defies any systematic classification.'[172] In principle, this exclusion of external measures of value makes collecting available to anyone at all;[173] the significance of the collection is measured not monetarily but in creating a new space for experience through ordinary objects.

Yet the hermetic character of the collection makes it hard see how Benjamin connects the redemption of the ordinary to a broader political or collective project. This is in part Adorno's criticism of Benjamin's 'ascetic discipline… to omit everywhere the conclusive theoretical answers to questions, and even make the questions themselves apparent only to initiates.'[174] Benjamin argues that far from 'an esoteric intellectual development', he is drawing from

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[169] Ibid. 205, H1a,5.
[170] Ibid. 207, H2,7.
[171] Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin' in *Illuminations*, 43.
[172] Ibid. 44. In contrast, Adorno argues that without 'mediation through total social process… you superstitiously attribute to material enumeration a power of illumination…' Adorno to Benjamin, 10 November 1938, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 130.
[173] Habermas (loosely) attributes to Benjamin and Brecht's 'interests in how art works… having lost their aura, could yet be received in illuminating ways' the possibility of 'the reappropriation of the expert's culture from the standpoint of the life-world'. See Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster (ed.), Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983, 13. This position is comparable to Rancière's position on the availability of aesthetic judgment to anyone at all, which I defend in chapter four.
[174] Adorno to Benjamin, 10 November 1938, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 127.

> solidarity with the experience which all of us have shared in the past 15 years. Here too, then, it is a matter of *very personal productive interests* of mine… The overcoming of this antagonism [of personal and shared interest] constitutes the problem of my study, and the problem is one of construction. I believe that speculation [which Adorno has recommended] can start its necessarily bold flight with some prospect of success only if, instead of putting on the waxen wings of the esoteric, it seeks its source of strength in construction alone.[175]

The sources of Benjamin's procedure enable us to conceptualise 'the construction of history' on the model of judgment.[176] In contrast to Adorno's view that Benjamin 'deprives phenomena, which are *experienced only subjectively*, of their real historico-philosophical weight', Benjamin draws attention to the connection between subjective and shared experience.[177] This may explain why Adorno is dissatisfied with the presentation of ideas 'as a mere as-if' rather than 'mediated through the *total social process*.'[178] Adorno accuses Benjamin of being 'bewitched'.[179] Benjamin responds that the

> closed facticity which attaches to a philological investigation and places the investigator under its spell, fades to the extent that the object is construed in an historical perspective. The base lines of this construction converge in our historical experience.[180]

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[175] Benjamin to Adorno, 9 December 1938, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 136. Compare Benjamin, *Arcades*, 211, H4a, 1: 'the allegorist – for whom objects represent only keywords in a secret dictionary, which will make known their meanings to the initiated – precisely the allegorist can never have enough of things.'
[176] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 461, N2, 6.
[177] Adorno to Benjamin, 10 November 1938, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 129.
[178] Ibid. 129.
[179] Ibid. 129.
[180] Benjamin to Adorno, 9 December 1938, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 137. Benjamin is concerned in the *Arcades* with the need for such a convergence in historical materialism, *if* an 'understanding of history [is not] to be acquired at the expense of the perceptibility of history' (461, N2, 6) He proposes that 'one of the methodological objectives of this work [is] to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress… Its founding concept is not progress but actualisation.' (460, N2, 2) See also 205, H1a, 2: 'for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopaedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes.'

The 'juncture' of the object and historical perspective require the treatment of, for instance, Baudelaire as 'a classical writer… Only when this poem has thus come into its own[181] can the work be touched, or perhaps even shaken, by interpretation.'[182] Benjamin clarifies that taking for granted of the 'classical status of the work' allows commentary (rather than criticism) to occur, which 'concerns itself only with the beauty and positive content of the text.'[183] Benjamin conceives *The Arcades Project* in terms of a commentary,[184] which, Friedlander describes as 'the construction out of quotations taken out of their world [that] makes recognisable the standard that underlies any judgment on historical experience.'[185] Benjamin writes that 'A commentary… is different from an assessment. An assessment evaluates its subject, sorting out light from obscurity.'[186]

In contrast, commentary entails 'attention to detail' and '*begins* with a presupposition concerning the value of the work and with the assumption that its meaning is complete, set.'[187] Friedlander suggests that commentary does not dispense with criticism; instead 'by way of the construction the standard is recognized at the same time as the phenomena are criticized'.[188] The model of commentary seeks to unite Benjamin's epistemological and political projects. What the collector's treatment of objects and commentary's treatment of texts does is make clear a standard that underlies judgment on historical experience. Friedlander argues that in the later concept of 'commentary' Benjamin intends to overcome the '"antimonies in criticism"' between the truth content and material content that he had developed in his earlier writing.[189] In the *Arcades*, commentary isolates what is 'striking' so that it can

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[181] See Benjamin, *Arcades*, 460, N1a, 8: 'But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to *come into their own* by making use of them.'
[182] Ibid. 137. Benjamin also quotes Marx's *Capital* (Vol. 1) in the *Arcades*: '"Research has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse the various forms of development, to trace out their inner connection… If this is done successfully, if the life of the material is reflected back as an ideal, then it may appear as if we had before us an a priori construction.' (465, N4a, 5)
[183] Benjamin, 'Commentary on Poems by Brecht', *SW IV*, 215.
[184] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 461, N2, 6. See Friedlander, Walter Benjamin, 46. Benjamin suggests that 'commentary on a reality' (as in the *Arcades*, 'of interpretation in detail') 'calls for a method completely different from that required by commentary on a text. In the one case, the scientific mainstay is theology; in the other case, philology.' (460, N2, 1)
[185] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 48.
[186] Benjamin, 'Commentary on Poems by Brecht', *SW IV*, 215.
[187] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 46-47.
[188] Ibid. 47. See Benjamin, *Arcades*, 463, N3, 1.
[189] Ibid. 47. See Benjamin, *SW II*, 410 and *SW I*: 'Critique seeks the truth content of a work of art; commentary, its material content' (297).

be rescued from 'the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their "enshrinement as heritage." – They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them.'[190] In this method, Benjamin seeks a form of rescue that unites the material content with the truth content without the risk of aestheticisation associated with an object's 'enshrinement', which is characteristic of historicism. Similarly, Benjamin exemplifies commentary by applying an 'archaic and authoritarian' form to '[Brecht's poetry] that not only has nothing archaic about it but defies what is recognised as authority today'.[191] Traditional forms like (Baudelaire or) Brecht's lyric can be deployed against mystification and confront reality 'without shame, either false or genuine',[192] especially when the reality is, like in Brecht's *Threepenny Novel* 'the element of crime hidden in all business.'[193] Benjamin finds in Brecht the 'conditions in which we live' brought to acute consciousness, so that 'their human content emerges.'[194] Benjamin's commentary aims 'to demonstrate the political content of the very passages that are purely lyrical in tone', which he does by noting the way in which Brecht's poems are located in bourgeois society and yet draw 'lessons' that 'could not differ more radically from those the society itself disseminates.'[195] This connects Benjamin's method with Kant's account of the way aesthetic experience stands out from ordinary experience.[196] Kant's connection between aesthetic experience and moral significance is repurposed for political effect by Benjamin.[197] In the next section, I elaborate the significance of 'the exhibition of

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[190] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 473, N9, 4.
[191] Benjamin, 'Commentary on Poems by Brecht', *SW IV*, 215. Adorno argues that the omission of theory lends the 'empirical evidence… a deceptively epic character…' (Adorno to Benjamin, 10 November 1938, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 129)
[192] Benjamin, 'Commentary', *SW IV*, 216. See also *Arcades*, 464, N3a,4: quoting Louis Aragon, '"It behooves a man, for the sake of his dignity, to submit his ideas to these facts, and not to bend these facts, by some conjuring trick, however ingenious."'
[193] Benjamin, 'Brecht's *Threepenny Novel*' in *Reflections*, 201. See also Novalis, in *Origin*, '"Business affairs can also be treated poetically… A certain archaism of style, a correct disposition and ordering of masses, a faint hint of allegory, a certain strangeness, respect, and bewilderment which shimmer through the writing – these are some of the essential features of this art."' (187)
[194] Ibid. 201.
[195] Ibid. 216
[196] Thijs Lijster suggests that Adorno views 'the dialectic of reification that the collector stands for [as] the model for the aesthetic experience per se.' (62) However, Lijster also argues that Adorno's own concept of reification 'deploys the Benjaminian dialectic of reification to rescue the idea of autonomous art and aesthetic experience.' (62) See 'All Reification is a Forgetting': Benjamin, Adorno and Reification', in *The Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle*, Samir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle (ed.), Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017, pp.55-66. Lijster proposes that 'While the Benjaminian kind of collecting is today a marginal phenomenon at best, one might argue that the last remnants of it have moved to the world of art—that is, not to art collections, but rather to artistic practices that involve collections or collectables.' (61)
[197] See Ross, *Image*, 142-143.

the fissure' as a protective device against aestheticisation. Like commentary and criticism, the concept of allegory connects Benjamin's earlier critique of aesthetic form with his later attention to ordinary objects. Both the collector and the concept of allegory transform the status of ordinary objects as commodities, the former by removing them from use, and the latter by exhibiting their fissures.

Allegory and Commodity in the Space of Aesthetics

> *Things are assembled according to their significance; indifference to their existence allowed them to be dispersed again… In the dialectic of this form of expression the fanaticism of the process of collection is balanced by the slackness with which the objects are arranged: the extravagant distribution of instruments of penance or violence is particularly paradoxical.*
>
> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*[198]

The allegorist is an acidic counterpart to the collector.[199] Benjamin first calls the allegorist 'the polar opposite of the collector', then suggests that 'in every collector hides an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector.'[200] Both figures respond to the devaluation of the world of things, and the depletion of experience. As I argued at the start of this chapter, Benjamin's effort to give significance to modern experience relies on an aesthetic space of meaning. In this section, I consider how Benjamin resists aestheticisation in his concept of allegory. But, following Ross, I propose that allegory is legible within an aesthetic space of meaning, linked to the Kantian position on judgment.[201] Similarly, Friedlander suggests that Benjamin's concept of allegory is not an abandonment but a re-evaluation of the categories of aesthetics.[202] In *The Arcades Project*, allegory serves as a countervailing principle to the collector's activity, which does not foreclose the space of aesthetic but protects it from venal

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[198] Benjamin, *Origin*, 188. Benjamin's formulation 'indifference to their existence' is remarkably similar to Kant's description of aesthetic judgment as 'indifferent with regard to the existence of an object' (Kant, *CJ*, 5:209, §5, 95).
[199] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 206, H2,1.
[200] Ibid. 211 H4a, 1.
[201] Ross, *Image*, 50 and 144.
[202] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 49.

interests and the seductiveness of sensuous form.[203] Allegory operates as an '"anti-aesthetic" principle within the aesthetic space [that] re-arranges the structure of attention. Aesthetic forms stand out against those forms that are merely "ordinary."'[204] For Ross, 'symbol and allegory are material forms whose expressive capacity is determined relationally against the prosaic.'[205] Yet, as I will argue in the third chapter, objects are not categorized ahead of time by virtue of sensuous characteristics but rather through the

> subject's presentation of sensuous forms. The significance of the complicated architecture of Kant's position is that it establishes a theory of sensuous form that is neither reducible to the coercive effects of the materiality of the object, nor to the inclinations of the subject. This double dislocation is the mechanism Kant uses to attach the expectation of extra-aesthetic meanings, such as moral significance, to the aesthetic judgment of sensuous forms.[206]

As I suggested in the previous section, one problem with the collector is the absence of clear ways to share the experience of the redemption of objects, and so lend it moral or political significance. Locating Benjamin's concept of allegory in the aesthetic space of meaning helps to comprehend the claim of subjective experience on others in the absence of traditional authority.

Benjamin's concept of allegory is contrasted with the symbol, which in post-Kantian aesthetics is '[the] moment of unity of transcendent truth and material embodiment.'[207] The symbol acquired heightened significance as aesthetic experience was elevated to 'the essence of experience per se', and the work of art became 'the consummation of the symbolic representation of life, and towards this consummation

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[203] Ross, *Image*, pp.138-142, see also 10-11. See Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*: '[The Sirens of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction] stem from the spirit of the so-called commodity fetish, the tiny fragments of soul embedded within the commodity… Seductresses cannot themselves be seduced. They laugh at the dilettantes who try.' (*xliv*)
[204] Ibid. 50.
[205] Ibid. 60.
[206] Ibid. 11.
[207] Friedlander, Walter Benjamin, 49.

every experience already tends.'[208] In response to the nineteenth century preference for symbol, Benjamin responds that allegory is 'a far more significant response to the crisis of art than the doctrine of art for art's sake.'[209] After elaborating their historical development, Gadamer states the conventional sense of symbol and allegory: 'symbol is the coincidence of the sensible and non-sensible; allegory, the meaningful relation of the sensible to the non-sensible.'[210] The 'meaningful relation' of allegory requires a background of mythic consciousness and tradition upon which the symbol – as a product of genius – does not depend.[211] In the nineteenth century, then, allegory lost favour because of the rationalization of myth and rejection of the dogmatism that underwrote it as a 'form of expression.'[212] Allegory's conspicuously artificial grammar created meaning 'only by pointing to something else', whereas the symbol purports to embody an internal relationship to experience as a unified whole.[213] Gadamer and Benjamin share the view that the apparent unity of the symbol 'does not dissolve the tension between the world of ideas and the world of senses', which 'remains ambiguous and indeterminate.'[214] Benjamin calls the relation 'non-committal', signifying the anxiousness that results from the aestheticization of life.[215] Both attribute to the subjectivisation of Kantian aesthetics a disconnection between sensuous form and truth. Both Gadamer and Benjamin oppose the conventional understanding of symbol and allegory, as well as the role played by the work of art in conceiving the relation between sensuous form and meaning. Gadamer proposes to repair the difference between symbol and allegory, suggesting that the 'symbol-

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[208] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (trans.), London and New York: Continuum, 2004, 60-61. See for commentary, Ross, *Image*, 67-68, note 27.
[209] Benjamin, 'Central Park', SW IV 163.
[210] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 64. The criticism of allegory was undertaken in part in response to Winckelmann, who used the concepts of symbol and allegory 'synonymously' (62). See the third chapter for further discussion of Winckelmann and the foundation of aesthetics.
[211] Ibid. 62.
[212] Ibid. 68. See Benjamin, *Origin*, 161-162. See also Stephen Mailloux, 'Hermeneutics, deconstruction, allegory' in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 257 which mentions the link between Gadamer and Benjamin's rehabilitation of allegory.
[213] Ibid. 64. See also Gadamer, 'The relevance of the beautiful' in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Nicholas Walker (trans.), Robert Bernasconi (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986: 'In the case of allegory, the reference must be known in advance. In the case of the symbol, on the other hand, and for our experience of the symbolic in general, the particular represents itself as a fragment of being that promises to complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it. Or, indeed, the symbol is that other fragment that has always been sought in order to complete and make whole our own fragmentary life.' (32)
[214] Ibid. 69. See also Benjamin, *Origin*, 159-161.
[215] Benjamin, *Origin*, 159.

making activity' can be connected to the 'continued existence of a mythical, allegorical tradition' at the cost of the modern concept of autonomous art.[216] In contrast, Benjamin heightens the opposition and inverts the Romantic preference for the symbol. Moreover, rather than dispense with the significance afforded to the work of art, Benjamin turns it into an allegory.[217]

In his reconceptualization of both allegory and the Kantian concept of experience, Benjamin is concerned with the problem of transmission.[218] Caygill argues that the loss of traditional forms of life within which the transmission of experience took place, cannot be

> captured by tragedy. It has no room for the establishment of an authentic subject making resolute decisions… The world handed down to us by tradition is uncanny, undecipherable… History becomes an allegory, withholding its meaning just as it seems to offer it.[219]

Allegory emerges as a form of expression in the wake of the loss of tradition, signified by the absence of God and disenchantment of the world.[220] In the absence of genuine referents in the religious or mythic traditions, allegory theatrically shows its own conventionality, acquiring a 'cold, rational' character.[221] It is

> not convention of expression, but expression of convention. At the same time expression of authority, which is secret in accordance with the dignity of its

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[216] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 70.
[217] Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology*, 35. See also Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, 138 on Benjamin's opposition to the aesthetics of modernism.
[218] Friedlander, Walter Benjamin, 31-32.
[219] Howard Caygill, 'Benjamin, Heidegger and the Destruction of Tradition' in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, Andrew Benjamin and Peter Obsorne (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 20. Elsewhere, Caygill emphasises the contrast between Benjamin's earlier analysis of allegory and his later one, writing that 'In the *Arcades Project* the history of salvation [which had been signalled in the *Trauerspiel* book] is perpetually interrupted, and the state of emergency is located in the crisis of value that is constitutive of the capitalist economy.' (251) See 'Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory' in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.241-253.
[220] Michael Steinberg, 'Introduction: Benjamin and the Critique of Allegorical Reason' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Michael Steinberg (ed.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, pp.10-15 and see Gillian Rose, 'Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Judaism' in *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, London: Verso, 2017, 194-195. Rose calls melancholy 'the logical outcome of Protestantism.' See also Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in* Culture, 195, note 5.
[221] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 69.

> origin, but public in accordance with the extent of its validity. And the very same antinomies take plastic form in the conflict between the cold, facile technique and the eruptive expression of allegorical interpretation. Here too the solution is a dialectical one. It lies in the essence of writing itself.[222]

Allegory insistently looks *beyond* form. It 'mortifies the meaning communicated in sensuous forms because it looks beyond form to knowledge.'[223] However, Benjamin's dismissal of sensuous forms in his earlier work is modified in his later writing such as in the *Arcades* where truth is found 'lodged in sensuous forms.'[224] The earlier and later positions are consistent insofar as they focus on detail and ruins as a means to defeat 'the semblance of false mythic totalization' and criticize 'aesthetic institutions and practices… for their pacifying effects.'[225] Nevertheless in later writing, Benjamin develops the position that 'revolutionary experience is direct and immediate, and the context of its formation is the exposure to detritus.'[226] The experience of knowledge becomes available through the interaction with sensuous forms in ordinary life. Since, as Benjamin observes, 'in the nineteenth century, the number of "hollowed-out" things increases at a rate on a scale that was previously unknown, for technical progress is continually withdrawing newly introduced objects from circulation',[227] the possibility of allegory is a 'constantly potential vision in the alienated world of the capitalist economy.'[228] This makes the ordinary world of objects replete with the

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[222] Benjamin, *Origin*, 175. Benjamin specifies that '[w]ritten language and sound confront each other in tense polarity. The relationship between them gives rise to a dialectic, in the light of which "bombast" is justified as a consistently purposeful and constructive linguistic gesture.' (*Origin*, 201) Jameson writes, 'Experience is to be found at the juncture of orality and event, and above all, of memory.' (*The Benjamin Files*, 167) In the final chapter of this thesis I return to the theme of the voice. However, it is worth noting that Benjamin's position here has something in common with that of both Rancière in *Aisthesis* (especially his comments on Ophelia, 179-84, and Wotan, 125-31 and 184-85), and Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994 (in which he refers to Benjamin, and discusses the self-conscious, even parodic denouement of the form of opera in Debussy's *Pélleas et Mélisande*, see pp.157-169).
[223] Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's Critique of the Category of Aesthetic Form', 95. See also Habermas' ('Walter Benjamin') point that art criticism is meant to 'transpose the beautiful into the medium of the true.' (106) See also Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 71.
[224] Ibid. 95.
[225] Ibid. 95. See also Charles Rosen, 'The Ruins of Walter Benjamin' in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 151.
[226] Ibid. 95.
[227] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 466, N5, 2. See also 331, J56a, 10 and Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin,* 156.
[228] Cowan, 'Allegory', 121.

possibility of a different kind of vision.[229] Cowan continues that the conspicuous artificiality of allegory exposes 'what Lukács called reification, the turning of human processes into dead objects that occurs in capitalism. From Benjamin's perspective the exposition of capitalism performed by allegory would be the internalized vision of Baroque allegory.'[230] On the one hand, this internalized vision appears 'in the form of the historical confrontation that makes up the interior (and, as it were, the bowels) of the historical objects, and into which all the forces and interests of history enter on a reduced scale.'[231] On the other hand, allegory is also internalized in the experience of the commodity, making 'allegories stand for that which the commodity makes of the experiences people have in this century.'[232]

The former deployment of the allegorical form serves, paradoxically, the redemption of ordinary objects from 'the continuum of historical succession'.[233] It 'blasts the epoch out of the reified "continuum of history." But it also explodes the homogeneity of the epoch, interspersing it with ruins – that is, with the present.'[234] This links the allegorical vision with the 'vital meaning' that connects detritus with 'revolutionary motivation in the present.'[235] In order to do so (as illustrated by the contrast with Rancière's insistence that with their liberation from use, the meaning of historical objects is contingent when it enters the aesthetic sensorium), Benjamin uses allegory 'to show the limitations of the aesthetic, i.e., the image as a mode of communication

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[229] This is similar to the way in which Rancière treats ordinary objects as constantly available for aesthetic experience. See for instance, *Aisthesis*, pp.245-262. I discuss Rancière's arguments for this position in detail in chapters three and four.

[230] Ibid. 121. Cf. Thijs Lijster, 'All Reification is a Forgetting': Lijster argues that Adorno's critique of Lukacs' notion of reification is in fact 'largely derived from Benjamin's work, and developed in dialogue with Benjamin.' (56) For Adorno, reification is '"a forgetting: objects become purely thing-like the moment they are retained for us without the continued presence of their other aspects"' (specifically the fact that they are human products) (Adorno in Lijster, 57). For Lijster, Benjamin developed the concept of reification first in relation to baroque allegory, and then in the *Arcades* through his conception of the commodity as 'not merely as an economic form, but as something that permeates the lives and minds of people. As we come to express everything in terms of exchange value, the way we perceive our world and each other changes… Herein lies the affinity between commodity and allegory, which similarly sucks the life out of any object… However, the other pole of the allegory – sanctification [*Erhebung*, in contrast to devaluation, *Entwertung*] – is equally present in commodification, as Benjamin points out by quoting Marx: "Value… converts every project into a social hieroglyphic".' (58-59)

[231] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 475, N10, 3.

[232] Ibid. 328, J55, 13. See also 207, H2, 6.

[233] Ibid. 475, N10, 3.

[234] Ibid. 474, N9a, 6.

[235] Alison Ross, 'The Meaning in the Detail: Literature and the Detritus of the Nineteenth Century in Jacques Rancière and Walter Benjamin' in *Rancière and Literature*, Julian Murphet and Grace Hellyer (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, 193-194.

of meaning.'[236] Allegory asserts the ruin amid the constant aestheticization that attends the 'fetish character of the commodity.'[237] Benjamin's truncated notes suggest a direct connection between the commodity and the allegory: 'Broken-down matter: the elevation of the commodity to the status of allegory.'[238] Friedlander proposes that the 'devaluation of the worth of objects' in the commodity is 'matched' by allegory.[239] Benjamin goes further, asserting that 'the devaluation of the world of things in allegory is *surpassed* within the world of things itself by the commodity.'[240] While the collector 'takes up the struggle against dispersion',[241] reflecting Benjamin's concern with the redemption of the world of things, allegory is associated with the perception of objects in 'desolate, sorrowful dispersion'.[242] However, Rose points out that the

> melancholy immersion in the contemplation of bones' reverses direction to "'faithlessly leap forward to the idea of resurrection," which "clears away the final phantasmagoria of the objective." And rediscovers itself – without mourning, violence or play – "seriously under the eyes of heaven."[243]

This seriousness exposes 'the theatricality of the Baroque,' drawing attention not to 'the soaring miracle above [but] to the difficulty of supporting it from below.'[244] This is illustrated in the image of an advertisement, which 'seeks to disguise the commodity character of things',[245] by focusing not on 'what the moving red neon sign *says* – but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt.'[246] This image demonstrates that the 'allegorical structure of the modern world is evident primarily in the place of the commodity in it.'[247] The collector aids Benjamin's position insofar as the collection

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[236] Ross, *Image*, 59. For Ross, Benjamin's 'claim regarding the exemplary status of the refuse of the nineteenth century for human history [is like] Kant['s argument] that the independence of aesthetic judgments from venal interests makes its insights exemplary.' (Ibid. 143)
[237] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 207, H2, 6.
[238] Ibid. 207, H2, 6.
[239] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 153.
[240] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 164, my emphasis.
[241] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 205, H1a, 2.
[242] Benjamin, *Origin*, 186-187.
[243] Rose, 'Walter Benjamin', 196. See Benjamin, *Origin*, 232.
[244] Ibid. 196. See Benjamin, *Origin*, 235.
[245] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 173.
[246] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 77.
[247] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 153.

detaches objects and commodities from their function and aestheticized appearance within the world of things.[248]

The second 'internalised vision' of allegory involves, counter-intuitively, empathy with the commodity. The context for modern allegory is the

> increasing self-estrangement of human beings, whose past is inventoried in dead effects. In the nineteenth century, allegory withdrew from the world around us to settle in the inner world. The relic comes from the cadaver; the souvenir [which Benjamin calls the 'secularised relic'] comes from the defunct experience [*Erfahrung*] which thinks of itself, euphemistically, as living [*Erlebnis*].[249]

The allegorical vision in modernity, unlike 'Baroque allegory [which] sees the corpse only from the outside', 'sees it from within.'[250] This involves, as I have suggested, what Benjamin calls 'empathy with the commodity', which 'presents itself to self-observation or inner experience as empathy with inorganic matter… Basically, however, empathy with the commodity is probably empathy with exchange value itself. Actually, one could hardly imagine "consumption" of exchange value as anything else but empathy with it…'[251] Empathy with the commodity means being fashionable; it means shopping and consuming as an activity from which we expect satisfaction.[252]

> Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which the commodity fetish wishes to be worshiped; Grandville extends fashion's claims to both the objects of everyday use and to the cosmos. By pursuing it to its extremes he discloses its nature. This resides in its conflict with the inorganic… Against the living it asserts the rights of the corpse. Fetishism, which is the sex appeal of the inorganic, is its vital nerve.[253]

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[248] Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 181.
[249] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 183.
[250] Ibid. 186.
[251] Benjamin to Adorno, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 140.
[252] See Leslie, *Walter Benjamin,* 106-107.
[253] Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in *Reflections*, 153.

Benjamin finds empathy with the commodity in Baudelaire's 'heroic' 'humanization' of the commodity, in contrast to the 'concurrent bourgeois attempt to humanize the commodity sentimentally: to give it, like the human being, a home.'[254] The sentimentalization of the commodity accepts that 'the objective environment of human beings is coming to wear the expression of the commodity.'[255] By conspicuously and theatrically adopting the techniques of the commodity's aestheticization of the world, the humanization of the commodity in fashion and prostitution can resist 'the mendacious transformation of the commodity world [by] its distortion into allegory. The commodity wants to look itself in the face. It celebrates its incarnation in the whore.'[256] This identification of prostitution and the commodity, which Benjamin draws from Baudelaire's poetry, cannot be disconnected from the experience of impotence.[257] But Benjamin's use of the concept of allegory for the commodity does not only identify with the gaze that, as Chow suggests, makes the prostitute's 'human form… a convenient way of staging and figuring those feelings [of impotence] surreally…'[258] Benjamin's use of the 'allegory of woman-as-prostitute' is not merely a specular personification of the commodity, but more fully an inhabitation of the allegory 'from within.'[259] This answers to the condition of the factory worker with which Benjamin illustrates alienation, and more clearly establishes it in ordinary experience rather than just in work.[260] The prostitute exemplifies the condition of the wage labourer and the transformation of life activity

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[254] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 173.
[255] Ibid. 173. See also Marx in Benjamin, *Arcades*: '"I can, in practice, relate myself humanly to an object only if the object relates itself humanly to man."' (209, H3a, 3)
[256] Ibid. 173. Christine Buci-Glucksmann writes that 'the *Trauerspiel* of the prostituted body organises itself within the dual movement of allegorical violence: *disfigurement* and devaluation of everything real, then its phantasmagoric *humanisation*.' (*Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, Patrick Camiller (trans.), London: SAGE, 1994, 100)
[257] See Rey Chow, 'Walter Benjamin's Love Affair with Death', *New German Critique*, 48, Autumn 1989, pp.63-86 especially 81-86. Chow develops a reading of Benjamin 'as a gloss on Freud', using the concept of castration to suggest that 'we can say that for the male fetishist, the female body "exists" already in the form of Benjamin's allegory in the sense that, as an *image*, it allows Freud to talk about something that the little boy believes has been removed.' (81) Chow asks whether 'all forms of the "male gaze" [are] always already inscribed in a certain impotence – impotence not so much as a fear of castration (which is the Freudian model) as a fear of emasculation, exhaustion and the inability to perform?' (82) See Benjamin, 'Central Park': 'Male impotence: the key figure of solitude.' (181) See also Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, 169.
[258] Ibid. 86. See also Erin Shevaugn Schlumpf, 'Historical Melancholy, Feminine Allegory', *differences*, 27:5, 2016, pp.20-44, especially 23-24.
[259] Chow, 'Walter Benjamin's Love Affair with Death', 86, and Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 186.
[260] See Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, 175-176. And see my discussion of this figure in the section on alienation and experience above.

into a commodity.[261] As Marx writes, the worker's 'business is to dispose of himself' as a commodity and so become part of the process that transforms his '*life-activity*' into accumulated labour, or capital.[262] But as Marx put it in his analysis of alienation with which I began the chapter, alienation 'is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of production*… labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself… mortifies his body and ruins his mind.'[263] What is true for all wage labour, then, and allegorical for alienation – 'the life which signifies death' – is 'most inalienably the whore's.'[264]

Baudelaire's identification of the poet with the prostitute, both of whom 'had to obey the market' ruins the romantic image of the intellectual or artist.[265] Benjamin criticizes the failure of 'intellectuals,' 'journalists, novelists and literati' to 'be of interest to the market… Because they want to be sold, so to speak, only "in one piece," they are unsalable as a calf that the butcher will sell to the housewife only as an undivided whole.'[266] Baudelaire's aptitude in perceiving the new position of the poet in the market,[267] was related to the exposure to which he was subject, because unlike other writers he was 'relatively lacking in stratagems to face the times'.[268] As allegory exposes the artificiality of apparently natural unities and arbitrariness of

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[261] See Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 'Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern', *Representations*, 14, 1986, 224 and Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason,* 99. See also Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, 114.
[262] Marx, 'Wage Labour and Capital' in *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Ed.*, Robert C. Tucker (ed), New York: Norton, 1978, 204-205.
[263] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 74.
[264] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 170. Benjamin's work can be read in the context of misogynistic and anti-Semitic Viennese culture in the early twentieth century, best reflected in figures such as Otto Weineger in whom, Freud wrote, '"the castration complex forms the link between the Jew and women."' (in Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, 118) Weininger writes, 'Judaism is the spirit of modern life. Sexuality is accepted, and contemporary ethics sing the praises of pairing… It is the Jew and the woman who are the apostles of the pairing to bring guilt on humanity.' (from *Sex and Character* in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, 36)
[265] Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason*, 97.
[266] Benjamin, 'Venal but Unusable', *SW II*, 743.
[267] Martha Woodmansee locates this shift earlier in the eighteenth century, and describes Karl Philipp Moritz's theorisation of 'disinterest' (five years before Kant's *Critique of Judgment*) as a response to precisely the emergence of a consumer market for literature. See *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, pp.11-33, see especially 22-23. See also Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*: 'It took the novel, whose beginnings go back to antiquity, hundreds of years before it encountered in the evolving middle class those elements which were favourable to its flowering.' (88)
[268] Benjamin, 'Central Park' 166.

mythic or religious icons, so Baudelaire 'had something about him [like] the mime who apes the "poet" before an audience and a society which no longer need a real poet.'[269] In Baudelaire's poems, Benjamin finds modernity in the image of 'the pure commodity… the prostitute, who is saleswoman and wares in one.'[270] But Baudelaire still avoided the full 'empathy with other commodities' as '"the more conscious [he] becomes of… the mode imposed on him by the system of production… the more he [is] gripped by the chill of the commodity economy."'[271] Nevertheless, 'through his deep experience of the nature of the commodity, [Baudelaire] was enabled, or compelled, to recognize the market as an objective court of appeals.'[272] With this recognition, 'the poet for the first time stakes a claim to exhibition value', which as in the case of the artwork, diminishes its auratic power and link to ritual.[273] Likewise, in the form of the newspaper, so antithetical to experience, Benjamin finds the 'literalisation of the conditions of living… And it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word – the newspaper, in short – that its salvation is being

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[269] Ibid. 166.

[270] Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital', 157. Kathi Weeks notes that the politics of 'sex work', insofar as it 'de-moralises' the act of having sex for wages, risks re-moralising work itself, that is reintroducing an ethic of work and replacing a politics of emancipation with one of (self-)empowerment. See Kathi Weeks, *The Problem of Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011*,* 67-68. See also Benjamin, *Arcades*, 490, O1, 5: '*public* immorality (in contrast to private) carries in itself, in its liberating cynicism, its own corrective.' Benjamin suggests that 'Certainly the whore's love is for sale. But not her client's shame. The latter seeks some hiding place during this quarter-hour, and finds the most genial: in money.' (491, O1a, 4) For feminist scholars and activists such as Silvia Federici, the work of sex(uality) is both at the origin and vanguard of the development of capitalist economies. See Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle,* Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012, pp.23-27 and 94. See also Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, pp.189-218.

[271] Benjamin in Alys Eve Weinbaum, 'Ways of Not Seeing: (En)gendered Optics in Benjamin, Baudelaire and Freud' in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 421-422, note 33. Chow also notes that Benjamin remarks '"Baudelaire never wrote a whore-poem from the perspective of a whore."' ('Walter Benjamin's Love Affair with Death', 85) Baudelaire did not realise the full implications of the fact that, as Benjamin argues, 'prostitution was an unavoidable necessity for the poet.' ('Central Park', *SW IV*, 188) Rather, the background to Baudelaire's experience of the 'whore' that 'was sexually crucial… is indicated not least by the fact that the background of his numerous evocations of the whore is never the bordello, but often the street.' (Ibid. 188)

[272] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 168.

[273] Ibid. 169. See Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, 226-227.

prepared.'[274] The delivery of information in the newspaper [*Aktualität*],[275] is, to use Benjamin's earlier terms

> exposed to the allegorist… That is to say, it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist… through it he speaks of something different and for him it becomes a key to the realm of hidden knowledge… "From somewhere else" the allegorist takes it up, by no means avoiding the arbitrariness which is the most drastic manifestation of the power of knowledge.[276]

Modern figures that represent the most advanced forms of alienation, such the prostitute,[277] the artist[278] and the degradation of experience in information, make these

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[274] Benjamin, 'The Newspaper', *SW II*, 741. As with Rose's use of the term 'theatricality' ('Walter Benjamin', 196), here literalisation echoes Michael Fried's analysis of minimalist art, as Jameson notes in referring to 'baroque decoration… either in its state of over-ripeness or as a litter of ruins.' (*Allegory and Ideology*, 31)

[275] See Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*: 'an attitude informed by *Aktualität* grabs quotidian objects whose very insignificance and 'unconscious nature' warrant their indexical relationship to social truth and social lies.' (*ix*)

[276] Benjamin, *Origin*, 183-184. Cf Jacques Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Michael Steinberg (ed.), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996, 37.

[277] See Sigrid Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*, Georgiana Paul with Rachel McNicholl and Jeremy Gaines (trans.), London and New York: Routledge, 1996, especially 92-94 for comments on this figure in Benjamin, including the transition from 'prostitute' [*Dirne*] to 'whore' [*Hure*]. Rejecting the view that Benjamin proposed a 'theory of femaleness', Weigel argues instead that Benjamin's work anticipates 'one of the central theses of feminist literary criticism' insofar as it he 'managed, in one of his thought-images, very successful to represent the use and destruction of the female in the male myth of creation' (69-70).

[278] These figures are to some extent tested or unified in works like Andrea Fraser's *Untitled* (2003) in which the artist 'and a male client of her US gallery meet for a session of sex and video recording in a New York hotel room… The collector covered the production expenses and paid the agreed-upon selling price for the artwork prior to the encounter.' See Rhea Anastas, 'Scene of Production: Andrea Fraser's *Untitled*', *Artforum*, 52:3, November 2013, pp.135. Similarly, Angela Dimitrakaki notes Tanja Ostojić's *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport* (2001-2005) as a work on the boundary between '*biopolitical* artwork' and 'aesthetic' (or 'aestheticised') document. See 'The Aesthetic, The Anti-Aesthetic, and Then What? Why Answering This Question Involves Thinking About Art as Labor' in *Beyond the Aesthetic and Anti-Aesthetic*, James Elkins (ed.), University Park: Penn State University Press, 2013, pp.201-204.

kinds of 'productivity… an allegory for the production of the socioeconomic system itself.'[279] Benjamin writes, 'Work itself has its turn to speak.'[280]

Although information supplants storytelling as the dominant 'form of communication' (even more 'menacing' than novels, which are 'to be devoured'),[281] changes in the technologies of reproduction also opened new modes of cultural transmission, albeit distinct from the 'ritual confirmation of tradition… Technology succeeds tradition as the means by which objects are "handed over", and this, Benjamin argues, means that technology now determines our experience of space and time.'[282] Beatrice Hanssen agrees that reproducibility introduces a new kind of 'cultural transmission' that affects the 'ability to be a witness to human history.'[283] For Hanssen, this is particularly perceptible in the status of the art object. 'Allegory, fragment, and ruin exposed [*Ostentation*] the fabricated nature of the artwork – in other words, its character as an artifact.'[284] Adorno, as Hanssen notes, adopts Benjamin's suggestive association and pursues the analysis. In *Aesthetic Theory*, he writes,

> Not only are artworks allegories, they are the catastrophic fulfilment of allegories. The shocks inflicted by the most recent artworks are the explosions of their appearance. In them appearance, previously a self-evident *a priori* of art, dissolves in a catastrophe in which the essence of appearance is for the first time fully revealed… In the incineration of appearance,

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[279] Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, London: Verso, 1998, 49. Jameson cites both the Artwork essay's theorization of film production as well as 'his other great technological essay, "The Author as Producer"' (see *Reflections*, pp.220-238) for this point. See also Jameson, The Benjamin Files, 129. Jameson also cites Barthes in this connection, whose discussion of Brecht's 'social gest' and the 'pregnant moment' are relevant here (see 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in Music – Image – Text, 73-74). The social gest 'is a gesture or set of gestures (but never a gesticulation) in which a whole social situation can be read. Not every gest is social: there is nothing social in the movements a man makes in order to brush off a fly; but if this same man, poorly dressed, is struggling against guard dogs, the gest becomes social… This kind of social gest can be traced even in language itself [see below for comments on allegory as form of expression]. A language can be gestural, says Brecht, when it indicates certain attitudes that the speaker adopts toward others.' (73-74)
[280] Benjamin, 'The Newspaper', *SW II*, 741.
[281] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', *Illuminations*, 88-89, and 'Little Tricks of the Trade', *SW II*, 728-729.
[282] Caygill, 'Benjamin, Heidegger and Tradition', 24-25. See also Hanssen: 'these displacements in time and space substantially altered, and virtually liquidated, the handing down of tradition through cultural heritage and patrimony [*Kulturerbe*].' (*Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 73)
[283] Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 73.
[284] Ibid. 70. I consider the role of the fragment in modern aesthetics further in chapter three. As I show, Rancière argues that the appraisal of fragmented objects reflects the disjunction in history necessary for objects to enter the aesthetic space. Benjamin writes similarly that the allegorist 'dislodges [things] from their context.' (*Arcades*, 211 H4a, 1)

> artworks break away in a glare from the empirical world and become the counterfigure of what lives there; art today is scarcely conceivable except as a form of reaction that anticipates apocalypse.[285]

As Benjamin sought to identify the redemptive 'leap towards the idea of resurrection' in Baroque allegory, Adorno attempts to identify in art a redemptive experience.[286] As I noted above, this is consistent with the argument that Benjamin's concept of allegory can be located in an aesthetic space, and, moreover as Ross explains, it is 'determined relationally against the prosaic'.[287]

Despite Adorno's criticisms of Benjamin's project as caught between 'positivism and magic', and under a '"spell,"' Benjamin shows himself to be sensitive to this problem and seeks to balance the 'seemingly affirmative stance towards the material' and so preserve 'the aspiration to social criticism.'[288] In Benjamin's development of the concept of allegory, the 'obliteration of personal interests' functions like Kant's aesthetic judgment.[289] Benjamin's explanation for 'how [the collector's] eye comes to rest on the object' is compared with Kant's '"disinterested" contemplation'.[290] This disinterest obstructs the possessive desire and mere functionality with which we normally approach objects, two kinds of meaning marked by quotation from Marx in the *Arcades*: '"Private property has made us so stupid and inert that an object is *ours* only when we have it…" "All the physical and intellectual senses… have been replaced by the simple alienation of all these senses, the sense of having."'[291] Rather than simply revert by withdrawing from the world of the senses, however, Benjamin seeks to pass through the sensible world and look 'beyond form to knowledge.'[292] Benjamin reaches to the 'archaic' past to illustrate how the collector's style of ownership is linked to '"the primitive form of property… To appropriate to oneself an

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[285] Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.), Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann and Robert Hullot-Kentor (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2012, 117.
[286] See Benjamin, *Origin,* 232.
[287] Ross, *Image*, 50.
[288] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 3-4 and 47.
[289] Ross, *Image*, 143. See Benjamin, 'The Theory of Criticism', *SW I*, 299.
[290] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 207, H2, 7; H2a, 1.
[291] Marx in Benjamin, *Arcades*, 209-210, H3a, 1 and H3a, 7. Likewise, Winckelmann's selection of the fragmented *Torso*, for Rancière, marks out aesthetic pleasure as a non-consumptive pleasure. See the third chapter for detailed discussion. And see also Verity Platt, 'Re-membering the Belvedere Torso: Ekphrastic Restoration and the Teeth of Time', *Critical Inquiry*, 47, Autumn 2020, pp.49-75.
[292] Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's Critique of the Category of Aesthetic Form', 95.

object is to render it sacred and redoubtable to others; it is to make it 'participate' in oneself."'[293] The collector develops a relationship with objects 'that now seems archaic', Benjamin writes, 'enriched through his knowledge of their origin and their duration in history'.[294] Benjamin describes how for the collector,

> his collection is never complete, for let him discover just a single piece missing, and everything he's collected remains a patchwork, which is what things are for allegory from the beginning. On the other hand, the allegorist – for whom objects represent only keywords in a secret dictionary, which will make known their meanings only to the initiated – precisely the allegorist can never have enough of things. With him, one thing is so little capable of taking the place of another that no possible reflection suffices to foresee what meaning his profundity might lay claim to for each one of them.[295]

This differentiation is elsewhere less sharp insofar as

> for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopaedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where, as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone.[296]

Allegory becomes the true aim of collecting, and yields an image of society. The 'magic encyclopaedia' of the collector and the 'secret dictionary' of the allegorist

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[293] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 209-210, H3a, 6. Benjamin is quoting Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman's *La Conscience mystyfiée* (1932). For a brief account of the book, see Stuart Elden, 'Some Are Born Posthumously: The French Afterlife of Henri Lefebvre', *Historical Materialism*, 14:4, 2006, pp.185-202, especially, 188-189. It is notable that Lefebvre's project was 'central to the introduction of a new type of Marxism into France, a Marxism that had as its central text the *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*' and that with this book Lefebvre initiated a project of 'a critique of everyday life.' (189)
[294] Ibid. 211, H4,4. On the connection between modern and pre-modern, Hanssen suggests that allegory stages a confrontation between, for instance, Christian and Hellenistic tradition, and moreover the persistence of the latter in the form: 'Benjamin read Christian allegory as a Janus-faced figure in which an Olympian world cohabited with a mythical, demonic one.' (*Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 76) See also for the connection between the modern and the antique, Benjamin, *Arcades*, 459, N1a, 2; 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 165, and Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 137-138.
[295] Ibid. 211, H4a, 1.
[296] Ibid. 205, H1a, 2. See also 207, H2, 7; H2a, 1: 'for the true collector, in every single one of his possessions, to form a whole magic encyclopaedia, a whole world order, whose outline is the *fate* of his object.'

seem to refer to one another. While the collector fights dispersion, and 'brings together what belongs together',[297] the allegorist 'holds fast to the ruins. [Allegory] offers the image of petrified unrest.'[298] The image of society constructed by the allegorist is not, then, one of unity or harmony but defined by fissures, ruins and exposed in its arbitrariness. This image emerges from out of the 'sea of fog that envelops [the collector's] senses' that affects them like '"intoxication."'[299] Friedlander argues that the 'striking recognition' of the image of society cannot be won other than by '"distraught concern with this spectacle"' of 'discontinuous multiplicity.'[300] The 'voluptuousness' and 'overbearing ostentation' that Benjamin finds in the Baroque, defined by 'acts of cruelty both lived and imagined', compels 'shock.'[301] By connecting allegory to the commodity, not only in its appearance but its very mode of being – that is, by inhabiting the commodity form through what Benjamin calls 'empathy with exchange value' – Benjamin achieves an image of society defined not by unity but by catastrophe in permanence, or the ruin of the progressive or organic image society may have of itself.[302]

Benjamin acquires this image of society by turning the commodity into an allegory, and holding fast to the ruin. Rancière calls this the point 'where the commodities exchange a wink with nothingness', and suggests that for Benjamin

> the commodities were supposed to come by themselves to this point. They have been endowed by Benjamin with the power of allegory. But the fact is they never do it. And the task reverts to the interpreter… Benjamin locked all the treasures in the magic grotto and burned them, remaining empty handed,

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[297] Ibid. 211, H4a, 1.
[298] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 169.
[299] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 205, H1a, 2 and Baudelaire in Benjamin, *Arcades*, 206, H2, 1.
[300] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 43. See Benjamin, *Arcades*, 211, H4a, 1.
[301] Benjamin, *Origin*, 183-185.
[302] In this sense, Benjamin sought with ordinary objects to do what for Adorno becomes the task of art, namely 'make people more consciously unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives, and especially to make them keenly aware… of the discrepancy between their world as potential paradise [we might say phantasmagoria] and their world as actual catastrophe.' (Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 165) Geuss continues that the work of art 'criticises our society by juxtaposing its own image of successfully realised unification of subjective spontaneity and objective necessity with the false claim our society makes that a similar unification of spontaneity and necessity takes place in our basic social institutions.' (170)

> to endow the thinking of modernity with the unique task of being faithful to an irretrievable loss.[303]

However, this position elides the epistemological significance of the allegory for Benjamin, as well as conflates the figure of the allegorist with the collector's hoarded 'grotto' of objects. Moreover, Rancière examines Benjamin's work through its appropriation by post-war catastrophist, hypertrophic aesthetics and the 'too easy project of a Benjaminian cultural history', an appropriation of which Rancière is rightly critical.[304] In this final section, I have sought to identify points of contrast between the collector and allegorist, despite similarities in their shared immersion in the world of ordinary objects. The collector's intoxication is far closer to the problematic kind of sensuous pleasure criticized by Benjamin. In contrast, the allegorist's interpretative achievement of an image of society aspires to 'command the assent of others.'[305] Both positions are intelligible within the framework of Kantian aesthetics. On the one hand, aesthetic pleasure yields a potentially endless free play of the imagination. On the other, Kant speculates that the faculty of taste 'makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest' by 'teaching us to find a free satisfaction in the objects of senses *even without any sensible charm*.'[306] Ross argues that 'Just as Kant uses nature's sensuous forms to stage claims regarding moral significance and encourage moral motives, so too the approach to history that frames the *Arcades Project* brings with it aspects of the grammar of modern aesthetics and it uses this grammar to understand history.'[307] In contrast to the symbol, which 'fails to do justice to content in formal analysis and to form in the aesthetics of content', allegory is connected to the 'dialectic of the revelation of truth.'[308] But 'the presentation of truth contents,' according to Friedlander, does not 'constitute an end in itself.'[309] He argues that it is necessary to 'think through the self-

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[303] Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn', 37-38.
[304] Ibid. 38-40. I discuss Rancière' criticisms of the aesthetics of the sublime in the fourth chapter. For Rancière, the post-war reading of Kant's sublime collapses the aesthetic into the ethical in service of an infinite, unredeemable obligation. See for example, Rancière, 'The sublime from Lyotard to Schiller: Two readings of Kant and their political significance', *Radical Philosophy*, 126, July/August 2004, pp.8-15.
[305] Ross, *Image*, 143.
[306] Kant, *CJ*, §288, 5:354, 288.
[307] Ross, *Image*, 143.
[308] Benjamin, *Origin*, 160 and Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 50.
[309] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 51.

overcoming of the allegorical vision… The dialectical movement of this form of expression opens up the possibility of a redeeming moment at the heart of the allegorical vision of the destruction in history.'[310] Benjamin writes that the essence of melancholy immersion is 'that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and… these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented.'[311]

Allegory, then, is part of the way 'Benjamin protects his position on history from the appearance of arbitrariness[, which] is analogous to the protection Kant provides for the claims of aesthetic judgment from merely appetitive pleasures.'[312] This answers Rancière's charge that Benjamin's concept of revolutionary experience involves a 'buried sense of emancipation that goes back to the absolute arbitrariness of the interpreter, to the absolute indeterminacy of the redeeming moment.'[313] The analogy with aesthetic judgment in Kant shows how 'The subjective meaningfulness of images *is* the context that allows them to look beyond the seductions of "semblance" and motivate revolutionary action… As such, Benjamin's *Arcades* can be considered to mold the historical data for an aesthetic typology whose "end" is the reassurance that the revolutionary cause has the reality (the urgency of the reality) on its side.'[314] The potential of Benjamin's position, in contrast to Rancière's,[315] is its attempt to connect subjective experience to collective, practical emancipation. Benjamin's concept of allegory contrasts the 'aesthetic disposition that looks for and expects meaning in sensuous forms [and] leads directly to the ritualization of experience… Allegory points to the meaning freed from its ties with sensuous forms.'[316] In order to connect the subjective meaning won by what Hanssen calls 'the antics of allegory' to revolutionary motivation and compel the assent of others, Benjamin's project must be viewed in the context of the aesthetic tradition. His 'conceptualisation of the

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[310] Ibid. 51.
[311] Benjamin, *Origin*, 232-233.
[312] Ross, *Image*, 142.
[313] Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn', 38.
[314] Ross, *Image*, 143. See also Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 'For under the subjective gaze of melancholia, lifeless matter was reinvested with meaning.' (101)
[315] See Ross, 'The Meaning in the Detail': 'What is striking in the comparison with Benjamin is that … [Rancière's] study of the aesthetic regime forecloses the question of how these things attract vital meaning in virtue of its default assumption that the meaning they bear, or the way they can wander into the foreground as an object of literary attention, is contingent.' (193)
[316] Ross, *Image*, 62.

collective truth of history is entirely dependent on the contingent way individuals arrive at meaningful comprehension of complex, counterfactual ideas.'[317] Benjamin tries to make 'motivation' and 'the meaning of history "graphically perceptible", that is, experienceable for individuals.'[318] This requires an aesthetic dimension that surpasses the communication of information in news which cannot 'compellingly address the experience of the recipient.'[319] However, when dislodged from its context[320] by allegorical vision, the new technologies of transmission reveal something about experience in modernity.[321] Benjamin, as Rancière argues, turns history into allegory so that it 'simultaneously reflects on its own conditions of construction, on its own ways of making sense… a suspensive or disruptive history that undoes the knots and plots through which the patrimony is transmitted to the victors.'[322] Rancière's criticisms identify what Benjamin to some extent disavows, namely that allegory 'attempts to erase the boundaries between the sacred and the ordinary from within the aesthetic space, on whose rules it depends for its effects.'[323] Similarly, it helps identify how Benjamin's work exemplifies the way in which attention to the experience of modernity must reckon with its own means of transmitting this experience in such a way as to become available to others. Where Benjamin perceives limitations, such as in the novel form, or in newspapers, Rancière perceives the 'potentially infinite surge of material with no given principle of organization.'[324] The figures of the collector, on the one hand, and the allegorist, on the other, are ways of conceiving responses to this problem. The vital, striking perception of ordinary objects amid their ruinous dispersion of tradition provides one way of making individual experience count for others. In the next chapter, I develop Benjamin's concept of collective experience, and throughout the thesis, consider the efficacy of Kantian aesthetics in articulating the claim of subjective experience on others.

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[317] Ross, 'The Meaning in the Detail', 196.
[318] Ibid. 197.
[319] Ibid. 197.
[320] See Benjamin, *Arcades*, 211 H4a, 1.
[321] Caygill proposes that in the nineteenth century, 'The commodity fetish is itself allegorical, modern culture is intrinsically allegorical, with the exchange value of the commodity devaluing all other traditional or use values, but being itself prone to crises of the inflation and deflation of values. Allegory is no longer a stylistic choice, but a predicament.' ('Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory', 251)
[322] Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn', 40. See also Ross, 'The Meaning in the Detail', 194.
[323] Ross, *Image*, 62.
[324] Ross, 'The Meaning in the Detail', 199.

The Dream, the Wish and Its Fulfilment: Walter Benjamin on Collective Experience

> *In seeking to transform the experience bound up in fantasy into collective practical emancipation, it does not suffice to simply utilize the products of fantasy*.
>
> Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*

In this chapter, I use the concepts of the dream and the wish in Benjamin's work to analyse and evaluate his account of collective experience. Collective experience is the outcome of a transformation of the ordinary like that of awaking from a dream, a metaphor used by Benjamin to capture the contours of an historical epoch. The passage from individual to collective experience is fraught in Benjamin's work, however my aim in this chapter is to defend Benjamin's suggestive connections. Benjamin's autobiographical and philosophical writing signals moments in ordinary life where dreams, wishes and remembrance offer a narrow path towards fulfilled experience. Although they can be located in relation to the ordinary, each contains elements that interrupts conventional, ritualistic ways of experiencing the world which dampen and narrow our capacity to perceive possibilities for freedom and collective experience in modern life. I begin by presenting Benjamin's accounts of the dream and wishes before examining the experience of fulfillment and evaluating the claim of collective experience. I argue that Benjamin's concept of fulfilment involves the transformation of an initial, past experience, which is subjected to a displacement similar to the alienation I introduced in the previous chapter. I show how Benjamin conceives this displacement as an enabling condition of fulfilled individual experience, and evaluate his attempt to model collective experience on that basis.

For this chapter, I draw connections between Benjamin's autobiographical sketches, such as 'A Berlin Chronicle' and *One-Way Street* and his philosophy of history in *The Arcades Project*. The topics of this chapter – dreams, wishes and fulfillment – all appear in these writings as significant features, legible in historical materials and autobiographical reflections. They each indicate ways in which individual experience

can be transformed into collective experience. I also develop the comparison with post-Kantian aesthetics as a framework to analyse Benjamin's concept of experience, drawing on Benjamin's writing on topics like surrealism and technological reproducibility. This chapter continues my engagement with recent conceptual reconstructions of Benjamin's oeuvre, most prominently the work of Eli Friedlander and Alison Ross. It is a synthesis of their positions that I propose offers the fullest account of fulfilled and collective experience respectively in relation to aesthetics and the ordinary. I follow Friedlander in locating the wish and dream in relation to ordinary experience. However, I outline Ross' objection that Friedlander makes the wish redundant in fulfilment by conceptualising it in Benjamin as the dissolution of the wish. Instead, I argue that fulfillment does not involve the dissolution of the wish but its transformation via a disjunction. I argue that the connection between the alienated experience of modern life and revolutionary collective experience is achieved in Benjamin's work by overcoming dreams, wishes and the nostalgia of childhood memories.[1] This overcoming transforms the meaning of these experiences by disconnecting them from the individual and re-conceiving the experience of the ordinary in a way that gives it broader significance to claim validity for others.

Benjamin's effort to imagine new forms of collective life should be differentiated from more systematic, totalising connections between individual and collective experience.[2] Benjamin's work consistently resists totalisation, as Ross points out,[3] and his concept of collective experience is deeply connected to the historical and technological possibilities of modernity.[4] One of Benjamin's clearest statements of the possibility of collective experience is in reference to mass audiences for the new

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[1] See Alison Ross, *Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin*: 'We must keep in mind that for Benjamin the question of collective experience is at issue not only in the context of the revolutionary exit from history, but also in that of the realisation of "community," i.e., overcoming social alienation in the general frame of modernity.' (66)

[2] See for example *'I that is We, We that is I.' Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel: Social Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism and the Critique of Kantian Constructivism*, Italo Testa and Luigi Ruggiu (ed.) Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016. In this vein, Benjamin's concept of collective experience can be differentiated from Rancière's notion of a 'collective subject', a framework that guides his criticism of Benjamin. See Ross, *Revolution*, 65.

[3] Alison Ross, *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image*, 5. See also Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, Quintin Hoare (trans.), London: Verso, 1998: 'Where a total view is demanded, no one really looks at each other any more.' (37)

[4] See in particular Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*.

medium of cinema in the context of the technological reproducibility of art works.[5] The philosophical background to this is clearly aesthetic, albeit in response to rather than agreement with Kant.[6] Benjamin is also attentive to the way in which new technological media such as film and photography,

> by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand extends our comprehension of the necessities that rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.[7]

Benjamin identifies the combination of determination and freedom in a transformative perception of the ordinary world. I discussed in the previous chapter some of the ways in which ordinary objects could be transformed and rescued for experience by striking combinations and new exposures. Similarly, dream configurations and wish fulfillment reveal a layer of collective experience beneath the fragmentation and rationalization of urban industrial modernity. Benjamin's interest is not with the persistence of traditional experience, but, like his contemporary Siegfried Kracauer, is committed to affirming and describing new forms of mass experience.[8] In his writing on the dream and the wish, Benjamin is not a credulous fantasist. Rather, it is precisely through these terms that Benjamin takes his distance from both the

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[5] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, 236-237 and see also 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, pp.177-192.
[6] See Gasché, 'Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"', pp.183-204.
[7] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, 238. See also Benjamin, *Arcades*, 394-397, K3, 2 to K4, 2.
[8] See Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*. In Inka Mülder-Bach's introduction (also published as 'Cinematic Ethnology: Siegfrid Kracauer's "The White Collar Masses"', *New Left Review*, 226, November/December 1997, pp.41-56), she identifies the combination of 'the contemporary conservative critique of culture with theoretical paradigms of the philosophical and sociological avant-garde' (7). Another parallel with Benjamin includes Kracauer's insistence that 'Knowledge of this situation… is not just the necessary precondition for change, but actually itself encompasses a change… it must be acted upon on the basis of this new awareness.' (25) Kracauer brilliantly identifies the 'exoticism of a commonplace existence' through an ethnographic technique (see Mülder-Bach, 14) strikingly reminiscent of Wittgenstein's attention to ordinary life (see for instance, Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, and also Cavell's foreword). Elsewhere, Kracauer describes a moment of revelation similar to the exposure of criminality in the economic conditions of capitalism in Brecht I noted in the previous chapter: 'A morally pink complexion – this combination of concepts at a stroke renders transparent the everyday life that is fleshed out by window displays, salary-earners and illustrated papers.' (38)

standardization and phantasmagoria of capitalism, and the organicism and naturalization of hierarchy in fascist culture.[9] Their incongruity with what is often taken for ordinary life is what makes them appealing for Benjamin, disrupting the 'categories of the "human sciences", from so-called habitus, from style, and the like.'[10] They expose what Rancière calls an 'inner discrepancy' in modern life, and so contribute to the 'narrow passage' of emancipation.[11]

The Problem of Collective Experience: Modernity and the 'Recovery of the Past'

Like the previous chapter, this chapter engages the recent philosophical scholarship on Benjamin, extending and evaluating the analysis of Benjamin's concept of collective experience. Ross places Benjamin's concept of experience in the 'historical context of modern bourgeois life in which the waning hold of tradition raises the question of where and how to find meaning.'[12] Collective experience is a problematic concept 'under conditions of modern individualism', and its link to dreams and wishes. In awakening and fulfillment, something essentially new emerges. What is 'new' emerges against the background of the loss of remembrance, tradition and their link to 'the experience of dreams.'[13] Friedlander argues that it is 'only insofar as the memory of the past coalesces as a dream configuration can it afford the possibility of realization by the present.'[14] In this context, Ross raises the problem of the translation

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[9] Kracauer writes, 'Hundreds of thousands of salaried employees throng the streets of Berlin daily, yet their life is more unknown than that of the primitive tribes at whose habits those same employees marvel in films.' (*The Salaried Masses*, 29) Linda Zerilli links this kind of recognition of the extraordinariness of the ordinary with the critique of the primitivist and moralistic anthropology of Frazer in Wittgenstein. Zerilli identifies the key element of 'critical reflective judgment' as missing from Frazer's anthropology, which is derived from Cavell, Wittgenstein and Arendt's uptake of Kant. See Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.208-238 and see also Brian R. Clark, 'Wittgenstein and Anthropology' in *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman (ed.), Malden, MA: Wiley, 2017, pp.627-638.

[10] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 462, N3,1. See also Rancière, 'The Ethics of Sociology' in *The Intellectual and His People: Staging the People, Vol. 2*, David Fernbach (trans.), London: Verso, 2012, pp.144-170. See also Michael Levenson, 'Habit, Labour, Need and Desire' in *Philosophy in the Condition of Modernism*, A. Falcato and A. Cardiello (ed.), London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp.31-47.

[11] Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn', 28; 40. See also Rancière, 'Rethinking Modernity': the present 'is not contemporaneous with itself. The issue of "non-contemporaneity" is crucial to the definition of modernism… We are "not yet" modern, says Emerson, we have not yet found the spirit that is immanent in our form of life… But this "not yet" is itself divided…' (10)

[12] Ross, *Image*, 7

[13] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 388, K1, 1.

[14] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 92

of individual experience into collective experience, which is a specific problem in modernity where 'the recovery of the past has become the condition of integrating experience and hence the possibility of community.'[15] Benjamin seeks to recover the connection between individual and collective experience through dreams and wishes, except in the entirely new context of 'a generation that had lost all bodily and natural aids to remembrance and that, poorer than before, was left to take possession of the world of childhood in a merely isolated, scattered and pathological way.'[16] Benjamin's 'experiment in the technique of awakening' intends to instigate

> the flash of awakened consciousness… The facts become something that just now first happened to us, first struck us… Indeed, awakening is the great exemplar of memory: the occasion on which it is given us to remember what is closest, tritest, most obvious.[17]

Although the dream and the wish emerge in ordinary spaces, nevertheless it is on condition of its transformation that the past is fulfilled. This transformation, considered in one respect, also inoculates us against melancholic fixation on the past.[18] Benjamin writes that with the 'process of inoculation… the feeling of longing would no more gain mastery over my spirit than a vaccine does over a healthy body.'[19] By the transformation from experience into memory, we are given insight into the '*irretrievability* of the past that would limit the melancholic potential of memory.'[20] In the same way that Benjamin protects his position on images from aesthetic form by invoking the allegory (as I argued in the last chapter), the wish and dream are also subjected to a transformative procedure that connects them to collective significance.

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[15] Ross, *Revolution*, 49 and 1.
[16] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 388, K, 1.
[17] Ibid. 388-389, K1, 2. Salzani notes that 'In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud had written that the threatening and shocking stimuli of modern life leaves traces in the unconscious: "if need be", the consciousness can be "trained" to cope with stimuli, and dreams and recollection (*Erinnerung*) are part of this training.' (Carlo Salzani, 'Experience and Play: Walter Benjamin and the Pre-Lapsarian Child', *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*, Andrew Benjamin and Charles Rice (ed.s), Melbourne: Re-Press, 2009, 192)
[18] Ross, *Revolution*, 36.
[19] Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, *SW III*, 344.
[20] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 104

Benjamin's concept of the dream follows Freud's assertion that dream contents ('*the fulfillment of a wish*') must be read for the 'concealed thoughts lying behind' the dream.[21] For Benjamin, the task is to 'elaborate detours through the complexities of the dream space to dissolve it (to accept or be able to recognise its fulfillment in its dissolution and awaken in truth).'[22] However, Friedlander's description of fulfilment through dissolution risks cutting the connection between the dream metaphor and collective experience.[23] In contrast, Ross argues that Benjamin understands '"revolution" as "wish fulfillment" via the notion of "awakening."' [24] Collective experience is not grounded in 'the recollection of truth', as Friedlander suggests, but in the dreamtime [*Zeit-traum*] of the nineteenth century, where 'the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep… We must follow in its wake so as to expound the nineteenth century – in fashion and advertising, in buildings and politics – as the outcome of its dream visions.'[25] Ross writes that while the dream is 'first and foremost a metaphor for theorizing the historical consciousness of modernity', this metaphor 'is fundamentally tied to the notion of wish-fulfillment.'[26] The dream metaphor's structure of sleep and awakening is repeated in wish fulfillment. Connecting experience and history with the figure of the child, Benjamin writes,

> Awakening as a graduated process that goes on in the life of the individuals as in the life of generations. Sleep is its initial stage… Its historical configuration is a dream configuration. Every epoch has such a side turned towards dreams, towards the child's side.[27]

Benjamin ambiguously refers to the 'convalescence' of the proletariat in the aftermath of the war, in which the 'frame of mankind was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic.'[28] It is as though the capacity to absorb and recover from the shocks of the war in a state of respite measured the potential of the working class.

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[21] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* in *The Freud Reader*, James Strachey (trans.), Peter Gay (ed.), London: Vintage, 1995, 140.
[22] Friedlander, *WB*, 96-97.
[23] Ross, *Revolution*, 69.
[24] Ibid. 65.
[25] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389, K1, 4.
[26] Ross, *Revolution*, 46 and 65.
[27] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 388, K1,1.
[28] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 95-96.

Shock and the technological impact of modernity plays a significant role towards the 'destruction of the individual in the enthused mass and the mutual innervation of collective and individual bodies in a simultaneously sacred and profane world.'[29] Benjamin links the sleeping collective consciousness to the

> macrocosmic journey [of a sleeper] through his own body, and the noises and feelings of his insides, such as blood pressure, intestinal churn, heartbeat, and muscle sensation (which for the salubrious individual converge in a steady surge of health[30]) generate, in extravagantly heightened inner awareness of the sleeper, illusion or dream imagery which translates and accounts for them, so likewise for the dreaming collective, which, through the arcades, communes with its own insides.[31]

According to Leslie, Surrealism 'instigates a collectivized humanism that is in affirmative dialogue with the technological', drawing on Marx's analysis of technology's 'enforcement of social combination… to destroy all distinction between inwardness and externality, appearance and essence.'[32] Friedlander adds 'that the striving for happiness *itself* brings about the dissolution of the historical configuration of the body.'[33] Friedlander offers philosophical context for Benjamin's reflections on the body within Kantian aesthetics.[34] For Benjamin, Friedlander writes, pleasure plays a role in evaluation or judgment, an 'alignment' which 'belongs to the legacy of

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[29] Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, 25.

[30] Robert Pippin describes what he calls 'Nietzschean Health' in *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* as 'a distinctive sort of experience of such an event, a different sort of psychological economy' from which we must recover, rather than 'avoid' (as a pathology of passive nihilism) (152; see 151-159). Nietzsche describes an 'active forgetfulness' that 'is responsible for the fact that what we experience absorbs and enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it as does the thousandfold process, involved in physical nourishment – so-called "incorporation". To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise an struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another… there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness.' (*On the Genealogy of Morals* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufman (ed.), New York: Modern Library, 2000, 493-494)

[31] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389, K1, 4. Benjamin also compares the shift from individual to collective as a 'confrontation between the "visceral unconscious" and the "unconscious of oblivion"… "The passional elements of individuals have receded, dimmed. All that remains are the givens of the external world, more or less transformed and digested. It is of the external world that this unconscious is made… Born of social life, this humus belongs to societies… it forms the great common ground…"' (Ibid. 396, K4, 2)

[32] Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, 23; 40.

[33] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 82.

[34] See ibid. 79 and 74-85 for broader context. It is worth noting that Friedlander relies largely on Benjamin's early writing for his discussion of the body in Benjamin.

Kant's account of judgment, in which the field of the aesthetic is conceived as the paradigmatic manifestation of the capacity to judge.'[35] For Benjamin, pleasure is conceived in terms of 'the sensing of a *relationship*. Pleasure is an indication of relatedness, a sensing of substantial unity by recognising things as belonging together… pleasure signals the transition from the relational to the substantial.'[36] Although Friedlander differentiates Benjamin's position from Kant's aesthetics, nevertheless pleasure in beauty for Kant is linked to the recognition of common sense.[37] Both Kant and Benjamin presuppose an experiencing subject, one who responds to the matter of ordinary life and nature by sensing connections not only between objects, but also with other subjects. The transcendental condition of experience in Kant is raised in Benjamin to the level of the mass bodily reception of modern art media like film.[38] But Benjamin retains a link between pleasure and judgment, writing that in film, 'The progressive reaction is characterized by an immediate, intimate fusion of pleasure – pleasure in seeing and experiencing – with an attitude of expert appraisal. Such a fusion is an important social index.'[39] As we saw in the last chapter, recognizing the background of aesthetics helps contextualise Benjamin's effort to affirm the possibility of collective experience in modernity. In Surrealism, 'Image space allows for collective innervation to result in revolutionary discharge, in the manifestation of a force that transforms reality. In image space, the vitality of nature in the bodily configuration of the modern world is recognized.'[40]

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[35] Ibid. 84. I discuss the theme of 'orientation' in Kantian aesthetics in the conclusion.
[36] Ibid. 84.
[37] See Kant, *CJ*, §18-22, 5:236-240, 121-124 and also Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*: 'the universality pertaining to the unity of the idea can only be expressed by the representativeness of subjects.' (25) I return to this point in the final chapter in terms of the 'universal voice.' I also discuss Kant's account of aesthetic pleasure and disinterest in chapter four.
[38] Rancière locates Benjamin's position on film in relation to Kantian aesthetics, writing 'Benjamin showed how the cinema had made available to everyone the sensorial experiences that the other arts could only practise under the form of provocation, in which art, in a way, denied itself in order to stage the gap [*mettre en scène l'écart*] between its own artifice and common experience.' ('Remarks by Way of a Postface', in *Rancière and Film*, Paul Bowman (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, 189.
[39] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', *SW IV*, 264. See also Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's Critique of the Category of Aesthetic Form', 91. Moreover, Benjamin writes that 'Only film can detonate the explosive stuff which the nineteenth century has accumulated in that strange and perhaps formerly unknown material which is kitsch.' (*Arcades*, 396, K3a, 1)
[40] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 89. See Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Peter Winch (trans.), G.H von Wright and Heikki Nyman (ed.), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984: 'Remember the impression one gets from good architecture, that it expresses a thought. It makes on want to respond with a gesture.' (Peter Winch (trans.), G.H von Wright and Heikki Nyman (ed.), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, 22e) See also Benjamin, *Arcades*: 'Wouldn't it be better to say "the role of bodily processes" – around which "artistic" architectures gather, like dreams around the framework of physiological processes?' (391, K1a, 7)

Surrealism accesses dreams and wishes and constructs them into an intoxicating mixture that has affects at the level of the collective body.

In 'Breakfast Room', Benjamin recalls a 'popular tradition against recounting dreams the next morning on an empty stomach.'[41] Such recounting, he warns, 'brings only the surface of the body… while in the deep strata, even during the morning ablutions, the grey penumbra of dream persists and… consolidates itself.' Benjamin recommends fasting, as though the intake of food would corrupt the 'dream visages', just as narrating a dream too quickly can 'bring calamity, because a person still half in league with the dream world betrays it in his words and must incur its revenge.' What the one who 'shuns contact with the day' achieves is to avoid 'the rupture between the nocturnal and the daytime worlds – a precaution justified only by the combustion of dream in a concentrated morning's work, if not in prayer…' This combustion is produced by the temporal lapse between the dream and its recounting. Benjamin writes, 'Only from the far bank, from broad daylight, may [the] dream be addressed from the superior vantage of memory', and having worked, but not eaten (that is, consumed), the 'fasting man tells his dream as if he were talking in his sleep.' The slipperiness of the dream stands in here for fulfillment, and Friedlander argues that it takes some 'cunning' to avoid the 'calamity' of the vitiated or spoilt dream. Cunning, Friedlander writes recalling Hegel, evokes the 'indirectness required for awakening'.[42] 'Every epoch, in fact, not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it – as Hegel already noticed – by cunning.'[43] Linking the dream to the wish, Friedlander argues that

> For Benjamin, cunning would consist in finding that fulfillment that takes the form of the *disappearance* of the wish. It is necessary to find a way to be spared fulfillment (or at least the kind of fulfillment that the wish images

[41] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 22.
[42] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 96.
[43] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 13. Cf K4, 4: 'Apropos of Henry Bourdeaux's recollection of his youth: "In sum, the nineteenth century ran its course without in the least appearing to announce the twentieth."' (397)

> seem to demand)… It is necessary to release the energies of the dream from their bond with the fulfillment of the wish images of the dream.[44]

This raises the question of whether the fulfilment of the wish entails its disappearance, and what the relationship is between the dreamer and the child, for instance, and the one who wakes, or matures to fulfil childhood wishes. These questions are the concerns of this chapter. I argue that in Benjamin's concept of experience, meaning is a result of the articulation of difference between these two moments, and that between them a measure of transformative overcoming is crucial. Friedlander's claim is that Benjamin 'points to a possibility of cunningly following the elaboration of dream material so as to fulfill it in the dissolution of the fantasy' in a way that combines philosophical clarity and selective affirmation of the heightened feeling of connection to others marked out by Kant's notion of common sense.[45] It is the difference between 'frustration' and 'overcoming' that marks the distance between impoverished experience (*Erlebnis*) and emphatic experience (*Erfahrung*). Although I defend the connection of the wish and dream with ordinary experience, nevertheless I modify Friedlander's view that fulfillment involves dissolution. Benjamin defines a concept of experience that aspires to be raised to a collective level and located in an historical era, and at the same time it seeks to preserve the freedom that the individual won in the separation of experience from tradition.[46]

Dreams and Awakening

> *Tiredness is followed by sleep, and then it is not uncommon for a dream to make up for the sadness and discouragement of the day – a dream that shows us in its realized form the simple but magnificent existence for which the energy is lacking in reality.*
> Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty'[47]

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[44] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 96-97.
[45] Ibid. 97.
[46] Eldridge, *Images of History*, 114.
[47] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, 734.

In his development of the dream metaphor in the context of an historical critique, Benjamin connects individual wishes and the ephemera of modern life to the universal wish for happiness. Recent scholarship on Benjamin's dream metaphor evaluates the strength of its connection to collective life. For Friedlander, through the dream, we are able to access 'dream-space-time', which emerges 'in relation to a reality common to all, namely, the arcades.'[48] This puts the dream in contact with collective life, but it is also a way of conceiving the ordinary world in which 'the memory of the past coalesces as a dream configuration [so] that it can afford the possibility of the realization by the present.'[49] Friedlander argues that the dream affords the possibility of striking recognition of 'the present in its ordinariness' as

> that to which one awakens. It can *itself* appear transformed in its significance, appear as a realization of the dream, which is the past… Meaning unfolds in the deep boredom in which the ordinary and the dream become one.[50]

Friedlander connects this possibility closely with the experience of childhood and the memory that preserves it.[51] He proposes that this experience is only realized on the basis of a decisive transformation that is mediated by the dream, writing '[t]he *dreamlike* character of the past in memory is a condition of the recognition of one's own present as the opportunity to awaken from that dream.'[52] The dream, for Friedlander, '*allows*' one to awaken as well as being 'what one awakens from'.[53] Through the dream, memory is inoculated from nostalgia and melancholy, and the ordinary is revitalized as the site of collective experience.

Ross closely analyses this claim for collective experience in Benjamin's use of the dream metaphor. For Ross, collective experience cannot be realized by the dissolution

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[48] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 90-91. See Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389, K1,4.
[49] Ibid. 92. In the 'telescoping of the times in the environment and the environment in the individual's space of experience', Friedlander argues for 'a dimension of memory in which those surroundings common to all are refracted.' (104)
[50] Ibid. 98-99.
[51] See Ibid. 93-96 and see also Ross, *Revolution*, 50-53. In particular, what marks the use of the dream metaphor is its connection between individual and collective experience, which is missing in Proust's concept of involuntary memory, according to Benjamin. See *Arcades*, 388, K1,1.
[52] Ibid. 92.
[53] Ibid. 91, my emphasis.

of the wish upon awakening.[54] It is important, then, to specify the mechanisms of transition between individual and collective experience, since the concept of awakening in Benjamin is not a 'transitional zone inscribed in a continuum' but a revolutionary break from history.[55] The dream, for Ross, does not ground collective experience by virtue of a unique connection to truth, but instead by virtue of its link to a specific historical experience of the Parisian arcades in the nineteenth century.[56] Historical critique then assumes a 'psychoanalytic type of interpretative critique' that 'deciphers' for 'signals of true historical experience' amidst the social alienation of modernity.[57] Thus, despite Friedlander's argument that Benjamin 'is not primarily concerned with illusions that first manifested themselves in the collective in the nineteenth century (say, in certain forms of alienation in bourgeois existence)',[58] it is important to specify that he *is* interested in these illusions and why.[59] As Ross argues, Friedlander risks cutting the dream from its function[60] in connecting individual experience to collective experience through the 'universal human wish for happiness, whose expression and material conditions (i.e., the real possibility of its realization) we find in the "spacetime" of the nineteenth century.'[61] What Friedlander and Ross's interpretations share is the insistence that Benjamin's use of the dream metaphor is not a 'vacation apparatus' of 'successful illusion' that constructs 'a holiday image of self', as C. Wright Mills put it.[62] In other words, the dream configuration in Benjamin

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[54] Ross, *Revolution*, 69.
[55] Ibid. 68-69.
[56] Not only historical, Ian Nairn proposes an architectural dimension to the specificity of Paris, calling it 'a collective masterpiece' that offers 'a memorable experience to have banality transform itself into ideal'. See *Nairn's Paris*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968, 17.
[57] Ross, *Revolution*, 70. See Benjamin, *Arcades*, 391, K1a,6.
[58] There are counter-arguments to the conceptualisation of dreams as illusions not only in Freud (see for instance, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 222), but also – more remarkably for this thesis – in ordinary language philosophy. J.L. Austin asserts, emphatically and in opposition to the literalism through which logical positivism homogenises all differences in experience, that the dreamer 'is not, or at least is hardly ever *deceived* at all.' (*Sense and Sensibilia*, 12) Austin continues, 'Does the dream see illusions? Does he have delusions? Neither; dreams are *dreams*.' (Ibid. 27) In other words, they are perfectly ordinary and, as well as having a language of their own (see Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 123), they are well-accommodated within ordinary language. See also O.K. Bouwsma, 'Failure I: Are Dreams Illusions?' in *Toward a New Sensibility: Essays of O.K. Bouwsma*, J.L. Craft and Ronald E. Hustwit (ed.), Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982, pp.61-88.
[59] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 91. Cf Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, 128.
[60] Friedlander writes, 'to dream is to be subjected to the wish. It is necessary to release the energies of the dream from their bond with the fulfilment of the wish images of the dream.' (*Walter Benjamin*, 97)
[61] Ross, *Revolution*, 70. By contrast, Adorno writes to Benjamin that 'if the dialectical image is nothing but the way in which the fetish character is perceived in a collective consciousness, the Saint Simonian conception of the commodity world may indeed reveal itself as Utopia, but not as its reverse – namely, a dialectical image of the 19th century as Hell.' (in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 111)
[62] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1951, 257-258. See also Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, 'the experience of the big city is

is not an escapist or utopian fantasy, nor 'a compensation… for the poverty of experience',[63] the 'refuge from loss of experience into a childish dream-state, into the *infantilization* of experience.'[64] Rather, dreams are the way in which the 'everyday can be recognised as the scene of the deepest transformation of fundamental human needs.'[65] But rather than connecting to truth, the relation of dreams to awakening is one of 'an essential discontinuity' in experience that must overcome the 'deformation and distortion' that are characteristic of dream images.[66] Dreams are the site of an encounter with the everyday in a distorted form that offers the chance for awakening and the possibility of connecting individual and collective experience.

Dreams reach into our reserve 'energies' that, as Friedlander proposes, can then be mobilised by 'their translation into (revolutionary) action.'[67] Sleep protects a portion of ourselves that is not 'touched by enlightenment… because while asleep it can speak itself rather than be spoken of by controlling awareness'.[68] Sleep offers the possibility of a revealing distortion rather than a concealing distortion.[69] Moreover, on the historical level, dreams survive a past 'that can be all the more profound because it is not his own, not private.'[70] In the dream, a different stratum of experience is available: 'For in the dream, too, the rhythm of perception and experience is altered in

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precipitated in a child of the middle class' (*SW III*, 344). See Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 104-105 and 100 on the bourgeois interior. See also for example Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

[63] Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 31.

[64] Carlo Salzani, 'Experience and Play' in *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*, 197.

[65] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 98.

[66] Ibid., 109 and 102. See also Benjamin, *Arcades*, 474, N9a,6.

[67] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 91.

[68] Schweppenhäuser, 'Propaedeutics' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 45.

[69] This is related to the psychoanalytic notion of dreams, essentially read as signs of unfulfilled wishes. See Lacan, '… the only thing that interests Freud is the elaboration through which the dream says this something – it says it in the same way as one speaks. No one had ever seen that before. People had been able to notice that dreams have meaning, that something could be read in them, but not that dreams talk.' *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III, The Psychoses, 1955-1956,* Russell Grigg (trans.), Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993, 10.

[70] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 880, e°, 1. This section of Benjamin's notes are highly suggestive for the arguments advanced in this chapter. The flâneur walks in 'vanished time' and 'The ground over which he goes, the asphalt, is hollow. His steps awaken a surprising resonance; the gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal light on this double ground.' Like Benjamin's reflections on the commodity and allegory (the reflection of the red neon light, see *One-Way Street*, 77), Benjamin redirects attention away from the literal phenomenon to the experience of walking on hollow streets, which becomes like 'a music box… palpitating <?> like some toy of long ago… An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets.' (879-880) The flâneur's intoxication opens the city as a 'landscape' and a 'room' simultaneously. It is *his*, and a site not only of 'sensory data' but also 'abstract knowledge – indeed, of dead facts – as something experienced and lived through.' (880)

such a way that everything – even the most seemingly neutral – comes to strike us; everything concerns us.'[71] Benjamin draws a link between Surrealism, the dream and intoxication; each 'loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication.'[72] In the 'disencumbering imagination of intoxication', we are more readily able to draw from both sacred and profane inspiration, we also reach towards the awakening that will connect to reality.[73] Benjamin highlights such moments of possible connection in his writing with Asja Lacis on Naples, where 'there is interpenetration of day and night'.[74] The cost, however, is that their sleep is 'not the protected Northern sleep'; while life takes on the hue of a dream, it also seems remarkably static and immune to modernity.[75] In Surrealism, however, Benjamin praises the way

> the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as by the steps of multitudinous images flooding back and forth, language only seemed itself where sound and image, image and sound interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called "meaning." Image and language take precedence.[76]

In the dream-like pressure of Surrealism, conventional meaning becomes unfeasible under the rush of images and their intense exchange with language. It ruins the ability of contemplation to integrate sense experience as similitude, which 'requires no effort' (hence the mechanical image of the 'penny-in-the-slot').[77] This enables language and image to stand for themselves as bearers of meaning, rather than

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[71] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 205-206, H1a, 5.
[72] Benjamin, 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, 179.
[73] Schweppenhäuser, 'Propaedeutics' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 38 and see Susan Buck-Morss, *Negative Dialectics*, 125.
[74] Benjamin and Asja Lacis, 'Naples' in *Reflections*, 172. See also Adorno to Benjamin, in *Aesthetics and Politics*: 'The idea that the longing which draws one to Italy is a longing for a country where one does not need to sleep is profoundly related to the later image of the roofed-over city [in Jean Paul's *Herbst-Blumine*].' (133)
[75] See Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, on the connection between dreams and tradition in education: 'tradition would provide us ways of relating ourselves to the past. It would allow us to *explain* the past's peculiar distortions, its dream quality. A crisis in tradition, as is characteristic of modernity, makes the appropriation of that dream, which is the past, highly problematic…' (93-94).
[76] Benjamin, 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, 178-179
[77] Ross, *Image*, 146, note 8.

conduits for something else as in the communicative conception of language.[78] Via digression, and disjunction procedures – 'truth Askance and strangely'[79] – meaning can return to the impenetrable everyday.

Specifically this encounter is one of the individual with the collective, which, as Ross writes 'is understood to be formed [only] on the basis of a "drastic experience."'[80] Benjamin records the way his memory 'preserve[s] in me the imprint of the collision between a larger collective and myself. Just as a certain kind of significant dream survives awakening in the form of words when all the rest of the dream content has vanished.'[81] Fragments of the experience remain from the collision, the collective leaves shards that are present as sediments in the individual. The capacity to return to these fragments establishes the identity of the person 'dynamically'.[82] In 'Berlin Childhood', Benjamin writes "many an individual may dream of how he learned to walk. But that is of no help to him. He can walk now, but never again learn to walk."[83] Szondi compares the temporal displacement that renders the intense experience of 'for the first time' inaccessible with the geographical displacement that awakens Benjamin's 'astonishment and curiosity to all the impressions streaming in upon him, like a child standing wide-eyed in a labyrinth he cannot fully encompass.'[84] Although impossible to replicate, these first experiences are preserved in the 'shelter of foreign lands.'[85] Benjamin confirms this link between the dream, childhood and displacement, as Friedlander notes: 'The child does not experience the world as though it is a dream. Rather, looking back, the experience of childhood can appear as a dream space.'[86] Childhood experience is likened to the dream, not as a site for return but precisely as an experience of the past and something as ordinary as walking that

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[78] See Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and the Language of Man' in *Reflections*, pp.314-332. This description echoes the dis-ordering of sense and meaning in Rancière's aesthetic regime, which I develop in the next two chapters.
[79] William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 110' in *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, Colin Burrow (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 601.
[80] Ross, *Revolution*, 66.
[81] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 14.
[82] Ross, *Revolution*, 66.
[83] Benjamin in Peter Szondi, 'Walter Benjamin's City Portraits' in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Gary Smith (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, 23. See for an alternative translation, Benjamin, *A Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, *SW III*: 'I now know how to walk; there is no more learning to walk.' (396)
[84] Szondi, 'City Portraits' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 23.
[85] Ibid. 23.
[86] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 93. See *Arcades*, 391, K2, 2.

becomes available as an emphatic experience through its displacement *into* a dream space. The very naturalness of walking is rendered drastic. For example, Benjamin's 'dreamy recalcitrance' in walking safely alongside his mother (or nursemaids), or his propensity for getting lost,[87] is transformed into an obstinate waywardness (and sexual exploration).[88] Benjamin links going astray to the realization of

> the insignificance of all this [either his being lost or the 'impending service' at the synagogue], of the benefits of letting things take what course they would; and these two streams of consciousness converged irresistibly in an immense pleasure that filled me with blasphemous indifference towards the service, but exalted the street in which I stood as if it had already intimated to me the services of procurement it was later to render to my awakened drive.[89]

Awakening in this image is linked to profane illumination ('blasphemous indifference') and sexual desire both of which decisively throw off the childhood dream. The everyday surroundings take on an entirely new significance that is marked by an earlier experience. As with learning to walk, Benjamin seeks to recover the intensity of the experience with which we learned something ordinary for the first time and preserve its energies for an awakening. The displacement of childhood experience into a dream space is a first 'turn', in Rancière's terms, which requires the further turn of awakening.[90] The dynamic transformation enabled by the dream is echoed in Benjamin's elaboration of both wishes and childhood memories. Benjamin uses the model of awakening for the fulfilment of wishes, not only at an individual level but on an historical, collective level.

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[87] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 4-5 and 8. See also Negt and Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience*: 'what matters is not gaining time, but losing it.' (21)
[88] See Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, 77. Leslie also links Benjamin's 'process of sexual awakening' as 'the traversing of a threshold that delimits and confines his class.'
[89] Ibid. 53. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 245.
[90] Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, pp.24-40.

The Wish for Happiness

> *Happiness for us is thinkable only in the air that we have breathed, among the people who have lived with us.*
> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N13a, 1[91]

Like the dream, the wish is an enervating phenomenon that through an almost unbearable intensity contains something vital for experience. In his 1934 essay 'Franz Kafka', Benjamin recounts a story in which a beggar announces that his wish is to be a '"powerful king"' who, after an invasion, is forced '"to flee in my shirt"' until he arrived '"safely right here at the bench in this corner. This is my wish." The others exchanged uncomprehending glances. "And what good would this wish have done you?" someone asked. "I'd have a shirt," was the answer.'[92] Friedlander asks, 'How can one wish for the everyday' as this beggar does? 'How would having an ordinary shirt acquire such extraordinary significance? How would the dissolution of the wish be more than a mere return to the disenchanted everyday?'[93] Although Friedlander posits it as 'dissolution', the beggar's wish, taken literally, is also a kind of (meagre) fulfillment. Benjamin elsewhere draws a connection between fulfillment and the ordinary, again through clothing, writing evocatively:

> The Hasidim have a saying about the world to come. Everything there will be arranged just as it is with us… The clothes we are wearing we shall also wear in the next world. Everything will be the same as here – only a little bit different… Everything remains just as it is, but the veil flutters and everything changes imperceptibly beneath it.[94]

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[91] See also Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*: 'Reflection shows us that our image of happiness is thoroughly coloured by the time to which the course of our own existence has assigned us. The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us exists only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption.' (253-254)
[92] Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', *SW II*, 812.
[93] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 97.
[94] Benjamin, 'In the Sun', *SW II*, 66.

Ross writes that 'A shift in perception changes the meaning of the past… The "little difference" is wholly a matter of perception, a matter of experience.'[95] The difference marks the experience as meaningful: 'it lifts out and manifests the significance of the environment…'[96] The wish is a re-direction that calls upon the resources of the past. The ability to wish is something that, like the earliest images in our remembrance, must 'not be allowed to disappear. It is for its sake that the ability to get lost is something to be wished for.'[97] Only through a detour is it possible to come to the wish again and recognise its fulfillment. Drawing on the structure of fairy tales, Friedlander notes that 'fulfillment can make us regret ever having uttered a wish. We so to speak did not realize how a world in which that wish came true would look like.'[98] Friedlander distinguishes the 'formation' and the 'formulation' (or utterance) of the wish.[99] The 'separation of moments' identified by Friedlander shifts 'the focus of recognition' from fulfilling the wish to the 'possibility of forming a meaningful link between past and present.'[100] According to Ross, this gives the realization of the wish a 'transition' that is lacking from 'revolutionary awakening [which] presumably takes place once and for all, and is abrupt and irreversible… Friedlander assumes that Benjamin sees the "wish" as an obstacle to "redemption."'[101] The reason the wish must be recovered from the nineteenth century's '*Zeit-traum*' is to connect fulfillment with collective experience.[102]

The ability to wish is an attempt to fend of anaesthetic numbness to everyday life, and it requires significant cognitive effort to recover.[103] Benjamin writes, 'it is only a few who recognise [the wish's] fulfillment in their own lives.'[104] Benjamin himself 'did not always recognise this fulfillment when yet another of my attempts to find a place of work, in the bourgeois sense of the word, had come to grief.'[105] Benjamin recalls a wish simply 'to finish my sleep' that was constantly interrupted by the 'repulsive

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[95] Ross, *Revolution*, 7-8.
[96] Ibid. 67.
[97] Szondi, 'Hope in the Past', 503.
[98] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 109.
[99] Ibid, 108.
[100] Ibid. 108.
[101] Ross, *Revolution*, 69.
[102] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 389, K1, 4.
[103] See Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', *October*, 62, Autumn 1992, pp.3-41, especially 18-19 and 27-28.
[104] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 34.
[105] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', 35.

clockface' for fear of being late.[106] Benjamin recognises perhaps only belatedly, in the dashed attempt to attain employment, the possibility of the fulfillment of this wish, however pyrrhic. The wish for sleep also resists the subjection of experience to mechanised labour, which wears down the capacity for fulfillment by reducing the scope for play.[107] Play in Kant requires 'imagination in its freedom [that] arouses the understanding', which makes the expression of judgment 'not as a thought, but as the inner feeling of a purposive state of mind.'[108] Kantian free play was transformed by Schiller into an 'affirmation that is the promise of a future, the promise of an art of living incorporating the sense of freedom and the equal capacity experienced in free play.'[109] Wohlfarth argues that Benjamin found in Brecht's epic theatre a

> penetration of the everyday [that] is synonymous with "profane illumination." Seemingly incommensurable energies, the mystical *nunc stans*[110] and the anarcho-syndicalist general strike, are to act in concert to bring history to a revolutionary standstill. The moment of alienating suspension – a politicised version of a classic, Schillerian definition of the

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[106] Ibid. 34. See also Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, Dennis Porter (trans.), Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 1992: 'the dream satisfies only the need to prolong sleep.' (57) Freud also notes the same impulse, without commenting on it: 'Dreams of convenience like these were very frequent in my youth… I always found it difficult to wake early. I used then to have a dream of being out of bed standing by the washing-stand; after a while I was no longer able to disguise from myself the fact that I was really still in bed, but in the meantime I had had a little more sleep.' (*The Interpretations of Dreams*, James Strachey (trans.), London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967, 125; see also 233)

[107] This observation is consistent throughout Benjamin's most significant essays. See, the essays in *Illuminations*: 'The Storyteller', 93, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', 177-78 and 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 248, note 10. Benjamin writes in this essay that the 'perceptual readiness of volitional, discursive memory, encouraged by the technique of mechanical reproduction, reduces the scope for the play of imagination… defined as an ability to gives expression to desires of a special kind, with 'something beautiful' thought of as their fulfilment.' (221)

[108] Kant, *CJ*, §40, 5:296, 175-176.

[109] Rancière, 'Art, Life, Finality: The Metamorphoses of Beauty', *Critical Inquiry*, 43, 2017, 601. I discuss Rancière and Cavell's treatment of Kantian free play in detail in the fifth chapter. See Thomas Docherty, 'Aesthetic Education and the Demise of Experience', in *The New Aestheticism*, John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas (ed.), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, pp.23-35 for an attempt to link Schiller's concept of aesthetic education and Benjamin's concept of experience. Docherty runs Benjamin's position alongside incompatible thinkers like F.R. Leavis (only at the last moment differentiating their repudiations of 'philistinism', see 24-25) and posits Schiller's 'play-drive' [*der Spieltrieb*] as 'hovering between notions of theatricality and of childhood self-entertainment' (30).

[110] Hobbes uses the phrase '*nunc stans*' for the 'meaning of *Eternity*' as 'the Standing still of the Present Time' in *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 466-467 (Chapter 46, 374).

> role of art – is its aesthetic counterpart, an iridescence which contains the spectrum of possible futures.[111]

As for personal experience, so for historical materials through which '"the past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption."'[112] Materials of the past are bearers of the universal wish for happiness, which has been accomplished only in distorted form by technology.[113] These distortions can be recovered, however, by accessing the wishes and dreams

> in which, before the eyes of each epoch, that which is to follow appears in image, the latter appears wedded to elements from prehistory, that is, of a classless society. Intimations of this, deposited in the unconscious of the collective, mingle with the new to produce the utopia that has left its traces in thousands of configurations of life, from permanent buildings to fleeting fashions.[114]

Benjamin's programmatic claim for the archaeological investigations of the nineteenth century is that they 'revealed… the universal human wish for happiness… We might say that the nineteenth century makes human happiness a meaningful concept for historical agents because it makes the constituent elements of such a "wish" describable.'[115] It does so by the 'industrial and technological innovations' that give concrete shape to particular wishes, which can be read because of the '"*transparency* of their social content"'.[116] Benjamin, once again, differs from orthodox critical approaches in his approach to the wishes and the material objects that bear them.[117] He does not, Habermas reminds us, 'want to reach behind the

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[111] Irving Wohlfarth, 'No-Man's Land: On Walter Benjamin's "Destructive Character"', *Diacritics*, 8:2, Summer 1978, 58.
[112] Benjamin in Ross, *Revolution*, 17. See *SW IV*, 389-390.
[113] Ross, *Revolution*, 17.
[114] Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in *Reflections*, 148.
[115] Ross, *Revolution*, 70.
[116] Ross, *Revolution*, 81. See Benjamin, *Arcades*, 465, N4,6.
[117] The psychoanalytic background is important to this reading of Benjamin, since as Freud emphasises throughout *The Interpretation of Dreams*, manifest content conceals and distorts latent content at the same time as revealing it. This seemingly paradoxical role is outlined in Freud's phrase that 'the wish to go to Rome had become in my dream-life a *cloak* and *symbol* for a number of other passionate wishes.' (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 197, my emphasis) Freud adds a note, which is relevant to the question of the dissolution of the wish, that 'it only needs a little courage to fulfil wishes which till then

formations of consciousness to the objectivity of an evaluation process by means of which the commodity as fetish gains power over the consciousness of individuals.'[118] Instead, his concern is to do justice 'to the collective fantasy images deposited in the expressive qualities of daily life', images that emerge 'from the secret communication between the oldest semantic potentials of human needs and the conditions of life generated by capitalism.'[119] Habermas, like Ross, cites the movement between the historical past's materials, through the present's critical gaze on them, to a more timeless stratum that unveils the universal human wish for emancipation.

The political meaning Benjamin finds disclosed in mundane objects provides a point of connection between the private wishes that can be fulfilled in experience and the wish for genuine collective life. Indeed, it may render them necessary to each other, as Benjamin highlights, dissolving the boundary between private fulfillment and collective emancipation.

> Corresponding in the collective consciousness to the forms of the new means of production, which at first were still dominated by the old (Marx), are images in which the new is intermingled with the old. These images are wishful fantasies, and in them the collective seeks both to preserve and to transfigure the inchoateness of the social product and the deficiencies of the social system of production. In addition, these wish-fulfilling images manifest an emphatic striving for dissociation with the outmoded – which means, however, with the most recent past.[120]

Wishes, in this passage, are a medium in which the resources for the realization of collective life might be found and transfigured. Rather than *merely* illusory – that is substitutes for genuine fulfillment – wishes affirmatively connect the alienated social products with genuine experience. However, it is crucial to note the discontinuity with progressive narratives signified by Benjamin's repudiation of the most 'recent'

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have been regarded as unattainable…' (Ibid. 194, note 1) Such 'little courage' may be compared with Benjamin's 'little differences', which I discuss below.

[118] Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 116.

[119] Ibid. 117.

[120] Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in *Reflections*, 148.

past.[121] The material past is affirmed as a testament to 'the existence of desire and energies for the construction of life', which, on the other hand, repudiates the 'recent' past's 'myths of progress' or 'institution building'.[122] The wish bridges individual and collective dimensions of experience, and allowing what is 'deposited' in the past to 'mingle with the new to produce the utopia that has left its traces in thousands of configurations of life'.[123] However, it does so on the condition that the element of progress is 'annihilated' from historical materialism, so that it can 'distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois habits of thought. Its founding concept is not progress but actualization.'[124]

For Benjamin, the revolutionary change necessary for collective experience cannot come from gradual steps but from a decisive rupture in history that releases humanity from its intoxication by the wish or awakens it from a dream. The dream and wish are important as signals of the transformation that must occur by awaking or fulfillment.[125] However Benjamin is not advocating the literal fulfillment of the wish. Rather, the wish – like the dream, and to some extent like the allegory – exhibits the gap between what the past had believed possible and what has been accomplished in the present. This invests the wish with pathos, since for Benjamin it is not the wish itself but what can be read in the wish and its overcoming that are important. In contrast to the experience of play, aestheticized consciousness can become 'fixated' on the wish as though it was readymade for fulfillment, as the consumer object is

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[121] Anthony Phelan discusses such an 'imaginative dislocation' in relation to Benjamin and Brecht (and Marx's Brumaire) in 'July Days in Skovsbostrand: Brecht, Benjamin and Antiquity', *German Life and Letters*, 53:3, July 2000, pp.373-386, and see also '"Im Augenblick der Gefahr": Brecht, Benjamin, and *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar*', *The Modern Language Review*, 108:3, July 2013, pp.881-897. Antiquity in Brecht and Benjamin's work, Phelan argues, forcefully punctures the present's understanding of itself without succumbing to historicism. Brecht's method in his 'Caesar' novel is to render the imperial past unusable to Nazi propaganda, while at the same time compelling a revolutionary change in perspective; it is a project of demystification. This disjunction between modernity and antiquity will be addressed from the perspective of Rancière's writing, in my discussion of Winkelmann and the Belvedere Torso in the next chapter.
[122] Eldridge, *Images of History*, 152.
[123] Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in *Reflections*, 148.
[124] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 460, N2, 2.
[125] There might be an affinity between Michelet ('Chaque époque rêve la suivante'), Wordsworth ('the child is father of the man') and Emerson ('Men walk as prophecies of the next age') on this point. Emerson's insistence that it is man's 'walk' that provides 'a suggestion of that he should be' (a workman in the world, a proletarian perhaps) seems contrary to Benjamin's anti-progressivism. Steinberg asks, 'Can modernity march while it dreams?' ('Introduction', *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, 19) Certainly not the march of a triumphal parade, though perhaps still a funeral march.

readymade for satisfaction. The pleasure associated with endlessly renewed wishing and desire is broken by a shift or rupture in the ordinary. Benjamin's effort to recover the wish for fulfillment involves accessing the nineteenth century through its objects, which have been the objects of mere consumption and degraded by their ordinary use. In Benjamin's work the experience of these objects, the possibility of a playful experience of these objects is recovered, and results in a transformation of the ordinary into a space of meaning.

From Disappearance to Fulfillment

> *One waits, and one's waiting is a* hesitant openness*, albeit of a sort that is difficult to explain. It can easily happen that someone who waits in this manner may find fulfilment in one way or another.*
> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Those Who Wait'

Dreams and wishes in Benjamin's work are oriented towards fulfillment. Benjamin's concept of fulfillment is subject to debate, which I seek to clarify in this section. For Friedlander, fulfillment involves the 'disappearance' of the wish.[126] However, this characterization risks dissolving the link between wishes, dreams and fulfillment.[127] Fulfillment could be loosely compared to the completion of a task, with the qualification that the completion radically changes the meaning of the task. Collective experience might then be modeled on the transformation entailed by the fulfilled experience. For instance, Benjamin writes that in proletarian theatre,

> Through play, their childhood has been fulfilled. They carry no superfluous baggage around with them, in the form of overemotional childhood memories that might prevent them later on from taking action in an unsentimental way. Moreover, this theatre is the only usable one for the child spectator. When grownups act for children, the result is archness.[128]

[126] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 96.
[127] Ross, *Revolution*, 69.
[128] Benjamin, 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre', *SW II*, 205.

Ross writes that the figure of the child 'experiences fulfillment in play where anything at all can be rediscovered as a toy, as a unique object of care and pleasure.'[129] Although Benjamin argues that the child is fulfilled by play, nevertheless the stakes for adulthood are entirely different. Play offers neither a 'decisive presentation of truth', nor a crystallization of meaning.[130] The task of the adult is to recollect the 'absorption in the moment and communal immediacy' in a way that 'brings to the fore the temporal (i.e., past) reference that the remembrance of the "wish" represents in the fulfilling experience.'[131]

An analogous example of the detours through which a desire must pass in order to be satisfied is sexual desire, which, Benjamin writes

> *delivers* man from his secret, which does not consist in sexuality but which in its fulfillment, and perhaps in it alone, is *severed – not solved*. The woman cuts them, and the man is free to die because his life has lost its secret. Thereby he is reborn, and as his beloved frees him from the mother's spell, the woman literally detaches him from Mother Earth – a midwife who cuts that umbilical cord which is woven of nature's mystery.[132]

The fulfillment of sexual desire is *not* sexual release but transparency and the demystification of nature.[133] This offers an analogy for the disjunction between a desire and its satisfaction (sexual desire is not exactly a 'wish' in Benjamin's terms). In trying to achieve maturity, Benjamin aims for the dissolution of guilt, the release from the demonic power of nature, and disentanglement from bourgeois morality. Just as communication does not solve the mystery of his father's business dealings,[134] so

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[129] Ross, *Revolution*, 3.
[130] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 56.
[131] Ross, *Revolution*, 35.
[132] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 87.
[133] See also Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*. Kracauer argues that 'a supposed natural law is erected against the present-day economic system without it being realized that precisely Nature, which is also embodied in capitalistic desires, is one of that system's most powerful allies; and that its perpetual glorification, moreover, conflicts with the planned organization of economic life.' Kracauer connects this mystification to the way in which collective life is fantasized to emerge from the modern '"collapse of psychic energies"' (105).
[134] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 37-38.

sex does not solve the mystery of desire.[135] There is a difference between revealing the secret and fulfilling the mystery.[136] Friedlander argues that 'cunning is required to see the devious paths that can be formed between present and past, as well as the good spirits necessary to affirm the sobering formulation the past achieves in the present.'[137] The loss of the secret could also mean the achievement of 'transparency' through which experience 'takes place without reservation and ambiguity, and is imbued with a thorough awareness of itself as fulfillment of a wish.'[138] The dissolution of the mystery finds its material equivalent in glass architecture, 'the enemy of secrets. It is also the enemy of possession.'[139] A commitment to transparency is part of Benjamin's concept of fulfilled experience, entailing an openness to others with I articulate throughout the thesis. Friedlander argues that it 'must be a possibility of common experience. It must be teachable, like a technique, and commonly available, like an experiment.'[140] This makes fulfillment sound like a science, but it is far more like a fable.

In 'Experience and Poverty', Benjamin dispenses such a fable:

> Our childhood anthologies used to contain the fable of the old man who, on his deathbed, fooled his sons into believing that there was treasure buried in the vineyard. They would only have to dig. They dug, but found no treasure. When autumn came, however, the vineyard bore fruit like no other in the whole land. They then perceived that their father had passed on a valuable piece of experience: the blessing lies in hard work and not in gold.[141]

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[135] Hanssen criticises Benjamin's attempt to purify 'male creativity, which was to be thought of as conception without gestation. [This] showed the nefarious influence of the Youth Movement, [and] Benjamin further used crass language to denounce the encroachment of the sexual on the spiritual…For as the boundaries between the sexual and the spiritual were erased, a demonic undecidability, he argued, made its appearance.' (*Walter Benjamin's Other History*, 90)
[136] Habermas quotes the *Trauerspiel* book, '"truth is not an unveiling, which annihilates the mystery, but a revelation and a manifestation that does it justice."' ('Walter Benjamin' in *On Walter Benjamin*, Smith (ed.), 106)
[137] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 109.
[138] Alison Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's idea of revolution: The fulfilled wish in historical perspective', *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 4, 2017, 1.
[139] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, 734.
[140] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 94.
[141] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, 733.

The fable is neat and revealing: the lesson is only understood by a dose of cunning. It is the father's cunning that leads to the sons' fulfillment, but it remains for the sons to acquire the experience. In other words, they could have the fruit of the vineyard without necessarily learning the 'lesson' (*lehre*), attributing it mythically instead to a generous God. Benjamin's fable is reminiscent of biblical parables, such as that in Matthew (13:44):[142] 'The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; a man has found it and hidden it again, and now, for the joy it gives him, is going home to sell all that he has and buy that field.'[143] At the end of a set of parables – the treasure in the field, the pearl and the dragnet[144] – a way of reading them is proposed: 'Every scholar, then, whose learning is of the kingdom of heaven must be like a rich man, who knows how to bring both new and old things out of his treasure-house.'[145] In his translator's note, Knox suggests that these parables are intended to show how the scholar might learn the difference between 'the old Church of the Jews and the new Church of Christ'.[146] It is a warning, then, not simply to keep sowing the fields, but to seek the further truth. This pursuit comes about in the parables of both Benjamin and Matthew by first *hiding* the 'treasure'; the 'lore of faraway places' of the 'much-travelled man' is combined with 'the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of the place.'[147] Its rediscovery then bears not only the treasure (fruit) but the lesson too; experience is passed between the generations in Benjamin's fable as its authority is passed between the old and new religion in Matthew.[148]

A variant on this parable is suggested in Wittgenstein's notes. In a similar vein to Benjamin, Wittgenstein writes of someone who found a draw full of 'his own

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[142] My attention was drawn to this parable by a variation on it in Valerie Luiselli's *The Story of My Teeth*, Christina McSweeney (trans.), London: Granta, 2015: 'Jesus said, "My Father's kingdom can be compared to a person who had a treasure hidden in his field but did not know it. And when he died he left it to his son. The son did not know about the treasure either. He took over the field and sold it. The buyer ploughed the field, discovered the treasure, and began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished." Do you understand this, Fancioulle? Yes, of course. I went to Sunday School. So what does it mean? It means you should check what's in your father's field before you sell it. Imbecile.' (73)
[143] *The Holy Bible*, Knox (trans.), London: Burns & Oates, 1955, Matthew, 13:44.
[144] Ibid. Matthew, 13:44-48.
[145] Ibid. Matthew, 13:52.
[146] Ibid. Matthew, 13:52, note 4.
[147] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, 85.
[148] Jesus claims 'Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to *abolish* them but to *fulfill* them.' (Matthew, 5:17, my emphasis) Marx writes, '*you cannot abolish philosophy without realizing it*.' ('Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction' in *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Ed.*, Robert C. Tucker (ed), New York: Norton, 1978, 59)

manuscripts [that] strike him as so splendid that he thinks it would be worth making them available to other people. (He says it's the same when he is reading through letters from his dead relations.)'[149] Wittgenstein comments that the charm of the notes, forgotten and then rediscovered is like

> seeing a man who thinks he is unobserved performing some quite simple everyday activity… like watching a chapter of biography with our own eyes, – surely this would be uncanny and wonderful at the same time… Well, when E. looks at what he has written and finds it marvelous, he is seeing his life as a work of art created by God and, as such, it is certainly worth contemplating, as is every life and everything whatever.[150]

Wittgenstein acknowledges the cunning required to present one's life to anyone in this way, never mind ourselves. He even notes that our own 'enthusiasm' for such discoveries cannot sustain its interest to others. But yet it *is* possible, and the strange disconnection between the man who wrote the manuscripts and the one who discovers them makes all the difference. It is likened to seeing one's own life in a theatre, the kind of self-alienation that makes wondrous and absurd the mundane activities of daily life.[151]

What Wittgenstein shares with Benjamin is the opening of ordinary life to a plenitude of meaning and a sense that things from the past can be buried sources of fulfillment. Wittgenstein's presentation of the experience of re-discovery recognises the strangeness and ambivalence with which we normally encounter past versions of ourselves. Fulfillment requires the alienation of our perspective from identification, just as 'when grownups act for children, the result is archness.'[152] Both Wittgenstein and Benjamin use art as a metaphor for this alienation effect. For Benjamin, surrealism and Baudelaire provide examples of ways 'to experience objects within the network of rediscovered correspondences as a counterpart that makes one happy'.[153] As Habermas argues, this is a possibility for art *only* on the basis of it being 'stripped

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[149] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 4e.
[150] Ibid. 4e.
[151] See Friedlander, 'Wittgenstein, Benjamin and Pure Realism' in *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, 125.
[152] Benjamin, 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre', *SW II*, 205.
[153] Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 107.

of the cultic element' and being 'deritualised', so that the return to experience is not a nostalgic return.[154]

In the adult's relation to childhood play, the demystification and sexuality, the fable of buried treasure and this comparison with Wittgenstein's man rediscovering his past life in notes, I argue that the concept of fulfilled experience involves recognizing a positive displacement that releases us from nostalgia, intoxication or sleep. Benjamin attempts to ensure that the penumbra of the dream survives awakening, combining captivation by the dream or wish with its overcoming. Ross describes it as 'absorbing and reflective… The fulfilling experience totally claims the ego, who is nonetheless imbued with a thorough awareness of the moment as fulfillment of a (past) wish.'[155] Benjamin writes evocatively: 'To be happy is to be able to become aware of oneself without fright.'[156] This comment combines self-presence with the recognition that the re-discovery of the past can be disturbing, especially if the wishes and dreams we find there have been abandoned or simply dragged along like accumulated baggage. It requires an active, critical attention to the past to break onto a moment of self-recognition, which in itself does not constitute fulfillment, but must be acted upon, *made* into fulfillment.

The Problem of Collective Experience

> *The situation of consciousness as patterned and checkered by sleep and waking need only be transferred from the individual to the collective… As long as they preserve this unconscious, amorphous dream configuration, they are as much natural processes as digestion, breathing, and the like. They stand in the cycle of the eternally selfsame, until the collective seizes upon them in politics and history emerges.*
> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, K1, 5

[154] Ibid. 107.
[155] Ross, *Revolution*, 1.
[156] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 55. See also Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, who quotes Thoreau on '"being beside oneself in the sane sense"' (145).

The major shortcoming of Benjamin's conception of fulfilled experience is that it relies on a structure, or 'sequence', wherein the collective past is transmuted into individual experience and only there fulfilled.[157] Ross argues that Benjamin's concept of experience fails to connect to a community or class context.[158] For instance, Ross writes, 'It is a collective past that is recalled in the beautiful work of art, but personally, as one's own.'[159] On the other hand, 'the "transfer" of a category of experience that seems to be inherently individual to collective', is in Benjamin 'elusive… The failure [of collective experience] is a structural feature of the conception, whose constituents are all drawn from individual experience.' [160] Ross grants the

> possibility of collective aspirations and the possibility of "extracting" them from certain indicative phenomena – still, insofar as the recognition of these aspirations is understood to take the form of a "compelling experience", its subject can hardly be other than the individual.[161]

The compelling individual experience understood on a collective level would tend more towards mass compulsion rather than the class consciousness towards which Benjamin aspires. Moreover, the attempt to establish institutions that would nourish collective experience tend towards bureaucratic, bourgeois, or even fascist forms that occlude the characteristics of fulfilled experience described above.[162] In this section, I consider this challenge to Benjamin's conception of experience, and suggest a more modest form of shared experience, which I develop further in the succeeding chapters.

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[157] Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's idea of revolution', 5.
[158] See also Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*, pp.102-106 on the relationship between collectivist aspirations and individual fulfillment, especially in relation to Weimar politics.
[159] Ross, *Revolution*, 38. See *SW IV*, 338.
[160] Ibid. 46 and 8. See also Bernd Witte, 'Paris-Berlin-Paris: Personal, Literary, and Social Experience in Walter Benjamin's Late Works', Susan B. Winnett (trans.), *New German Critique*, 39, Autumn, 1986, pp.49–60. I discuss the concept of 'transference' in the sixth chapter in relation to Emerson and Cavell, along with Freud.
[161] Ibid. 49.
[162] See Benjamin's comments on trade unionism in Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*, 110, Appendix. Kracauer provides an exemplary, historically relevant analysis of these tendencies in 'The Revolt of the Middle Classes: An Examination of the *Tat* Circle' in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Thomas Y. Levin (trans. and ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, pp.107-127. Kracauer writes, 'Having been emptied of all substance, these classes [the white collar workers] are now no longer subject to anything other than the binding neutrality of contentless thought. It is into such thinking that the severely shaken and social system in which we currently live has taken refuge… On can thus characterize *Die Tat's* appeal to myth as a reaction without content.' (113-116)

Benjamin synthesizes a variety of representations of the mass or crowd in the nineteenth century as a specifically modern phenomenon, connected with both urban life and the new industrial modes of production.[163] He writes of Victor Hugo that 'it is through the crowd that nature exercises its elemental rights over the city.'[164] This shows the extent of the distance between compelling experience and the compulsion that takes over in a crowd. By the early twentieth century, artists responded to this new condition for collective experience, aiming to '"create new realities the plastic manifestation of which are just as complex as those referred to by the words standing for collectives."'[165] The Surrealist's dream of the collective is speculative, and aims towards transformation rather than a realization of an existing ideal. Benjamin presents proletarian children's theatre as requiring 'the class as audience… But the child, too, is such a collective.'[166] The child's indistinction between play and reality – 'acted beatings can shade into real beatings' – and its capacity for immersive identification render its experience of spectatorship like that of involvement.[167] This may not, as Ross warns, be adequate for a fully coherent concept of collective experience, but it indicates ways in which individual experience might be connected both structurally and politically to the community in which it takes shape. Importantly, this structural connection is not simply one of sociological determination, but active construction of collectives.[168]

One point of contrast between traditional and modern life serves to illustrate how although old forms of community have been lost, new ones might nevertheless become possible. It is evident, for instance, in Benjamin's analysis of storytelling, that, while it existed, it brought together threads from collective life. The storyteller is 'granted the ability to reach back through a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but much of the experience of others)'.[169] These stories were not only sourced from the experience of others, they also unfolded

[163] See Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, 165, and 169-176.
[164] Benjamin, 'Central Park', *SW IV*, 187.
[165] Apollinaire in Benjamin, 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, 184.
[166] Benjamin, 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre', *SW II*, 203.
[167] Ibid. 202.
[168] I defend this point further in the fourth chapter.
[169] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', *SW III*, 162.

in the company of others; they would make no sense in the solitude of reading.[170] '[T]ales were recounted to distracted listeners in the midst of physical activities, like spinning and weaving, which in all likelihood provided the context for the tale'.[171] In contrast, the modern novel begins and ends in solitude, so that the fulfillment of the book is that it causes 'the anxiety of the beginning to join in an unforgettable manner with the triumph of completion', as Szondi writes of Proust's novel.[172] Put crudely, its very autonomy or self-containment prevents it from being integrated by collective experience.[173] New technologies, like radio, however, offer different configurations of individual and collective, producer and consumer. Benjamin writes that the technological effects of daily news publications and their corresponding form of reception lead to the 'indiscriminate assimilation of readers who are instantly elevated to collaborators.'[174] The transformation of storytelling in modernity sheds its connection to the tradition or its rootedness in the past; the story no longer receives orientation by reference to collective experience that has been passed down. On the other hand, the new technical and formal possibilities of storytelling, like the novel, film or radio, enable the mythical figure of the storyteller to become a producer, a role anyone could fill. Benjamin writes of the possibilities he perceives in Soviet Russia,

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[170] See Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, 162-163, and Benjamin, *SW II*, 728-729. Jameson's analysis suggests that novels are consumed rather than absorbed (say, in a state of distraction).
[171] Ross, *Revolution*, 50.
[172] Szondi, 'Hope in the Past', 494. Michael W. Clune compares Proust's ouroboros narrative form, where the novel 'ends with the narrator about to write the narrative we've just read' with Thomas Bernhard's *Woodcutters* (quoted in the previous chapter). See *A Defense of Judgment*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2021, 140. Clune argues that this presents the narrator's (Bernhard's) 'joy and urgency… Facing the prospect of composing the novel we've just read, the narrator seems enthralled by a premonition of the "real satisfaction" of the "highest art."' (140) For Clune, Bernhard achieves the defeat of the social determination of art (as defended by Bourdieu) *within* a theatrical presentation of the social role of art. What his analysis misses is that the occasion for this achievement is, as in the case of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, precisely the death of the person who has most conflated art and life. (He mentions the suicide, but does not comment on it.) See, by contrast, Rancière, 'Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed', *Critical Inquiry*, 34, 2008, pp.233-248.
[173] This position is defended affirmatively by Rancière, as I will outline in the next chapter. See for the comparison between Rancière and Benjamin, Ross, 'The Meaning in the Detail': 'Benjamin's contrast between rescuing the past through historical knowledge and Proustian, personal memory implies that literature is an insufficient vehicle for stimulating revolutionary motivation in the present. More pertinently, Benjamin complains about the limited horizons of the modern novel in the individual contexts of its production and reception; whereas Rancière endorses the communicative possibilities of literary interpretation as these exceed the peculiar intentions of the authorial voice.' (194)
[174] Benjamin, 'Author as Producer' in *Reflections*, 225. See also John Heckman's translation of essay in *New Left Review*, 1/62, July/August 1970: 'the similar indiscriminate assimilation of readers, who see themselves instantly raised to the level of co-workers.' Heckman buries the ambiguity in the sense of the 'betrayal' of class identity necessary for intellectuals to become 'co-workers', as Leslie points out (*Walter Benjamin*, 95). See also Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, 77 on crossing classes, and Rey Chow, 'Walter Benjamin's Love Affair with Death' on crossing class boundaries as a pleasure that Chow reads in part as a defence against 'castration', or the impotence of home life (79, and also 85).

> For the reader is at all times ready to become a writer, that is, a describer, but also a prescriber. As an expert – even if not on a subject but only on the post he occupies – he gains access to authorship. Work itself has its turn to speak.[175]

Not only can anyone become an author, Benjamin also recognises the visibility of ordinary experience insofar as *work* has its turn to speak. This ordinary experience is located in a collective context.[176] I argue throughout this thesis that modernity affords ordinary experience both new visibility and a voice that can always (or only ever) be located amid of other voices.[177] In modernity, according to Cavell, political community is discovered in 'the fact that men (that he [Rousseau]) can speak for society and that society can speak for him… The problem is for me to discover my position with respect to these facts – how I know with whom I am in community, and to whom and to what I am in fact obedient.'[178] There is a new, immanent possibility of a different form of collective in the co-productive capacities of the audience for modern art forms.[179] Benjamin despairs at the failure to make use of these capacities, noting the persistent

> separation between practitioners and the public, a separation that is at odds with [radio's] technological basis. A child can see that it is in the spirit of radio to put as many people as possible in front of the microphone on every possible occasion.[180]

Like the promises and dreams Benjamin found in material history, that had been vitiated yet preserved, Benjamin argues that in technology there are possibilities that

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[175] Benjamin, 'Author as Producer' in *Reflections*, 225.
[176] The constellation of work, experience and voice represents a key thematic connection between the thinkers discussed in this thesis, especially Rancière on work(ers) and experience, and Cavell on the availability of experience and the voice.
[177] See the final chapter for further discussion of this point in relation to Cavell's concept of the voice.
[178] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 25.
[179] Cavell also reflects on this relation or possibility of a relation between producer and what he calls 'consumer' in *The Claim of Reason*: 'In the modern neither the producer nor the consumer has anything to go on (history, convention, genre, form, medium, physiognomy, composition…) that secure the value or the significance of an object apart from one's [experience].' (95)
[180] Benjamin, 'Reflections on Radio', *SW II*, 543.

have not yet been realized. It is these technological possibilities that offer a measure of connection between the individual and the collective, enabling the organization of a class or the creation of an audience that is simultaneously a producer.[181]

These technological possibilities exist alongside other forms of emphatic collective experience in Benjamin's work. Jennings notes 'the theme of an eroticized, somatic reception that might provide the basis for a new form of collectivity – or might lead to cataclysm.'[182] For example, Benjamin describes a narcotic sensation in which '"All men are brothers."'[183] Intoxication dissolves the boundaries of the individual, pre-empting more comradely collectives with an emphatic solidarity. In his reflections on Naples, with Asja Lacis, the 'passion of improvisation' produces a 'porosity' in the boundaries between individual and collective lives.[184] Life, they write, is

> dispersed, porous and commingled… each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life… Just as the living room reappears on the street… so, only much more loudly, the street migrates into the living room.[185]

Evidently a romanticized, Northern attitude towards the Italian city, Szondi argues that Benjamin discovered in the incipient Soviet society similar forms of collectivity. While in the Southern cities, he 'encountered a collective life that had not yet become alienated from its origins', in Moscow he was 'able to observe a society in the process of formation. All the same, archaic and revolutionary seemed more closely related that the usual distinction between conservative and progressive would have it.'[186] The revolutionary appropriation of urban life and modern architecture has the potential to revive, albeit in modified form, collective life. Like the buildings in Naples, Caygill writes that

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[181] See Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*, 94-97 for a strong defense of the collectivising and class coordinating possibilities of technology.
[182] Michael W. Jennings, 'Introduction' in Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, 17.
[183] Benjamin, 'Hashish in Marseilles' in *Reflections*, 143.
[184] Benjamin and Lacis, 'Naples' in *Reflections*, 171.
[185] Ibid., 171.
[186] Szondi, 'Walter Benjamin's City Portraits' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 24. See also Annie Pfeifer, 'The Collector in a Collectivist State: Walter Benjamin's Russian Toy Collection', *New German Critique*, 133:45, 2018, pp.49-78.

> glass architecture dissolves the distinction between interior and exterior… This form of architecture not only expresses a change in the structure of experience, but also confirms and contributes to it. Once again, this affirmative modernism is stated in disturbing terms, but for Benjamin this transformation of experience is already in train, and every option, whether compensatory, affirmative or destructive and negative expresses a decision taken with respect to it.[187]

Recognising the condition of modern experience, and the atrophy of community, Benjamin searches for new forms of collective organization that are not simply attempts to restore older forms but respond to the changes in experience. Benjamin admits that the habit of leaving doors ajar, which he encounters in a hotel in Moscow, becomes 'disturbing', yet he also proposes that 'To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence. It is also an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need.'[188] Although discretion might once have been 'an aristocratic virtue', it is now practiced as the reticence and privacy of the bourgeoisie.[189] In contrast, 'Poverty has brought about a stretching of frontiers that mirrors the most radiant freedom of thought.'[190] Poverty is a condition of exposure, which Benjamin translates from a material context into experience. People 'long for a world in which they can make such pure and decided use of their poverty – their outer poverty, and ultimately also their inner poverty – that it will lead to something respectable.'[191] Mirroring the structure of fulfilled experience, Benjamin suggests by these contrasts that the bourgeois form of privacy takes collective products and wealth and turns to them for isolated contemplation and accumulation. The bourgeois version of experience vitiates its collective potential, and condemns itself to impoverishment.

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[187] Caygill, *Walter Benjamin*, 31-32.
[188] Benjamin, 'Surrealism', *Reflections*, 180. See also Emerson, 'Circles': 'The terror of reform is the discovery that we must cast away our virtues, or what we have always esteemed as such, into the same pit that has consumed our grosser vices… It is the highest power of divine moments that they abolish our contritions also.' (259-60) Echoing Benjamin's emphasis on shock, Emerson argues that we might need 'to be surprised out of our propriety' (262).
[189] Ibid. 180.
[190] Benjamin and Lacis, 'Naples' in *Reflections*, 171.
[191] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, 734.

Benjamin himself was accused of endorsing such bourgeois norms, which would leave him without 'a guide to conceptualizing the collective realm.'[192] Cohen notes that Adorno 'repeatedly voices concern that Benjamin's collective application of psychoanalysis simply transfers a form of experience articulated on the bourgeois subject intact from the individual to the social sphere.'[193] But Benjamin was sensitive to the difference between the impoverished aggregate and the genuine collective. In particular, he was aware of how the energies and possibilities in children could be directed towards pre-ordained forms that slotted into organizational forms antithetical to emancipation. In an early essay on student movements, he writes

> By directing students towards the professions, [bourgeois education] must necessarily fail to understand direct creativity as a form of communal activity. In reality, the uncomprehending hostility of the academy toward the life that art requires can be interpreted as a rejection of every form of direct creativity that is unconnected with the bureaucratic office.[194]

Similarly, youth movements represented a 'hopeless compromise' that sieves the enthusiasm of young people through 'idealistic self-reflection' that infuses them with 'the contents of the bourgeois class.'[195] To Benjamin, there is no inevitable decline from childhood's incipient collectives to the stagnant forms of bourgeois, private life. Nor does the path from childhood to collective experience end in the degraded aggregation of youth into a mass, like the 'mob of schoolchildren' who, by being 'the most formless and ignoble of all masses… betrays its bourgeois origin'.[196] But youth movements illustrate the 'magnitude of the task entailed in creating a community of learning, as opposed to a body of officials and academically qualified people.'[197] The mass is a reified image of the collective, preserved for its utility to political purposes exterior to it, and exempt from the possibility of fulfillment or meaningful collective experience. But it remains the condition through which genuine collectives must proceed.

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[192] Cohen, *Profane Illuminations*, 25.
[193] Ibid. 25.
[194] Benjamin, 'The Life of Students', *SW I*, 42.
[195] Benjamin, 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre', *SW II*, 205.
[196] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 13.
[197] Benjamin, 'The Life of Students', *SW I*, 38.

Benjamin takes for granted that genuine modern collectives can only be formed through existing individualism.[198] Authentic community, Ross writes, is not achieved by 'the restoration of "tradition", not just because [Benjamin] deems it historically impossible but more importantly because he remains committed to the modern value of individuality'.[199] One criterion for collective experience, then, is that 'it reinforces the ego's self-awareness as a member of the collective to which they belong.'[200] There is an 'anachronistic audacity involved in the assumption of a collective revolutionary will', seen in Benjamin's idealisation of Naples and descriptions of the storyteller as well as his depictions of the potential class consciousness of children.[201] However, one feature that emerges in some of Benjamin's more polemical writing is that revolutionary collectives are formed by making space within history, rather than restoring it. Benjamin writes, 'Someone is sure to be found who needs this space without occupying it.'[202] The destructive character incessantly clears space, not by expansion but by dissolving the heaped accumulations that have proved unnecessary or corrupt. Importantly, adopting the revolutionary virtue of transparency, the destructive character is 'surrounded by people, witness to his efficacy.'[203] This kind of clearing is a joyful, public act, making available to many what had been hoarded by only a few.[204] It is a preparatory activity towards a new collective, making space and objects newly appropriable. The porosity of life in Naples 'demands that space and opportunity be at any price preserved.'[205] Recall Benjamin's correction to the historicist method, where he writes, 'We don't displace our being into theirs; they step into our life.'[206] An analogy could be drawn between the way material objects – products of collective labour and the past – become meaningful for the individual and

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[198] Kracauer is pessimistic about this possibility, writing in a 1922 essay 'Those Who Wait', 'once the community-affirming experience of the individual – where "individual" is understood in its contemporary, flawed sense – is made the foundation of the community, then the entirely logical consequence is, on principle, to condemn supraindividual forms saturated with meaning as the petrified product of pure experience and as unnecessary interventions between the I and the Thou.' (*The Mass Ornament*, 133)
[199] Ross, *Revolution*, 35.
[200] Ibid. 55.
[201] Ross, 'Walter Benjamin's idea of revolution', *Cogent*, 10.
[202] Benjamin, 'The Destructive Character', *SW II*, 541.
[203] Ibid. 541.
[204] This activity is similar to the activity of the allegorist in relation to the collector I discussed in the previous chapter.
[205] Benjamin and Lacis, 'Naples' in *Reflections*, 166-67.
[206] Benjamin, *Arcades*, 206, H2,3.

the way collective experience might become possible for individuals. Benjamin writes of the way the collector 'actualises latent archaic representations of property', quoting Guterman and Lefebvre's *La Conscience mystifée* comparing taboo to property, '"[t]o appropriate oneself an object is to render it sacred and redoubtable to others; it is to make it 'participate' in oneself."'[207] The object rendered sacred is at once absolutely other and yet made to 'participate' in oneself; the act of appropriation exhibits this 'anachronistic audacity' that might also enable collective experience. After all 'the child lives in a world that is not only prior to distance from the object, but also prior to bourgeois "possessive individualism"…'[208] Benjamin's point is partly that since possessive individualism is learned, surely it need not be learned, and not merely its possessiveness but the individualism too.

Conclusion: Communal Luxury and Sharing Experience

Before turning to Rancière in the next chapter, it is useful to compare the approaches of Rancière and Benjamin, and re-consider the question of shared experience and Kantian aesthetics in light of my discussion of Benjamin's work. In contrast to Benjamin, Rancière identifies the 'age of social emancipation' *not* as 'the age of a collective task assigned to a collective subject. It is first of all the age of a new dispersive life of meaning…'[209] Benjamin's commitment and focus on individual experience confirms and confronts the rupture in the traditional form of common life, but he maintains the dream of a collective subject, and not necessarily one that

> reconfirms… the ruling idea of emancipation: the idea of the dreaming cogito, the epic of the collective subject asked to identify its history with the awakening of the dream, the disenchantment of the disenchanted and reenchanted world.[210]

Rancière is uncharitable about Benjamin's sensitivity to the transformations undertaken by the modern subject. I will argue in the next chapter that Rancière's

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[207] Ibid. 210, H3a,6.
[208] Salzani, 'Experience and Play' in *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*, 186.
[209] Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, 29.
[210] Ibid. 29.

concept of aesthetic experience, and in particular the role history plays in it, places far more emphasis on dispersion and displacement than collection or shared life. For Habermas, Benjamin aims at a

> condition in which the esoteric experiences of happiness have become public and universal, for only in a context of communication into which nature is integrated in a brotherly fashion, as if it were set upright once again, can human subjects open their eyes to look in return.[211]

Ross questions the extent to which the notion of the 'collective' is reducible to Habermas' conception of 'communicability', and proposes that '[n]either Benjamin nor Rancière considers mere communicability to be a sufficient threshold for collective significance to accrue its requisite value.'[212] Nevertheless, within the post-Kantian tradition of aesthetics to which both Benjamin and Rancière respond, there is a substantive connection between the common sense, which is a transcendental condition for the possibility of experience at all, and communicability. Although communicability in Kant is significantly different from Benjamin's notion of communication,[213] it is in terms of the transmissibility of experience that the connection remains appealing. For Kant, 'being able to communicate one's state of mind… carries a pleasure with it, [which] could easily be established from the natural tendency of human beings to sociability.'[214]

> The universal communicability of sensation (satisfaction or dissatisfaction) … is the empirical criterion of the derivation of taste, confirmed by examples, from the common ground, deeply buried in all human beings, of unanimity in the judging of forms under which objects are given to them.[215]

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[211] Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin' in *On Walter Benjamin*, 108.
[212] Ross, 'The Meaning of Detail' in *Rancière and Literature*, 197.
[213] See for instance Friedlander's summary of truth in Benjamin's conception of language: 'It emerges in the use of the quotations to reveal significant relationships on another plane altogether. In other words, the distinction between what we *say* by means of or *through* language and what can be revealed *in* language is at the same time a distinction between what *we* say and what communicates *itself* in language.' (13) See Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' in *Reflections*, 315-316.
[214] Kant, *CJ*, §9, 5:2128, 103.
[215] Ibid. §17, 5:231-232, 116.

Communicability in Kant is consistently connected to the grounds of shared experience in the cognitive powers required for judgment, and provides a connection between the freedom of the imagination and understanding.[216] Like Kant's emphasis on the significance of natural forms in the realization of our vocation through aesthetic experience, Benjamin – albeit in an esoteric and highly specialized theory of language – posits the '*capacity* for communication' and the 'translation of the nameless into name' as the key to an immediate relationship of knowledge with nature.[217] Benjamin testifies to this in the premodern form of storytelling, where both experience and its communicability are rich and alive.[218] I am not suggesting that communication is a sufficient condition for collective experience, but I think it might be a necessary one. I take up this point further in the final chapter. On the other hand, I want to retain a stronger sense that Benjamin is committed to a vision of the collective subject, if not in the form of communication then in what Ross calls 'a constitution of identity by way of concrete experience, [that] is necessarily a "collective experience", a co-presence of humanity as such in the ego's revolutionary experience.'[219]

Let us take the common experience of the meal, at once utterly ordinary and, in certain contexts, highly significant.[220]

> Taking food alone tends to make one hard and coarse… For it is only in company that eating is done justice; food must be divided and distributed if it is to be well received. No matter by whom: formerly, a beggar at the table enriched each banquet. The splitting up and giving are all important, and not sociable conversation. What is surprising, on the other hand, is that without food conviviality grows precarious.[221]

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[216] Ibid. §39, 5:292, 172.
[217] Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' in *Reflections*, 316 and 325.
[218] Both Friedlander and Agamben emphasise transmissibility as a key quality of tradition that requires new forms in modernity.
[219] Ross, *Revolution*, 56.
[220] See Cavell, 'Companionable Thinking' in *Wittgenstein and Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond*, Alice Crary (ed.), Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007, pp.281-298 for a reflection on the extent of the significance of the meal for the 'constitution of an identity.'
[221] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 79.

Benjamin returns us here to the themes of giving, directing it not from a past experience to present or future fulfillment, but from material plenitude to what Kristin Ross calls 'communal luxury'.[222] In Ross's account of the aftermath of the Paris Commune in 1871 – an key moment in the era from which Benjamin sources his utopian dreams and wishes – she examines the claim of communards to an 'equality of abundance', anticipating Rancière's method of equality.[223] As well as a revolutionary re-thinking of the relationship between humans and nature,[224] Ross also underscores the aesthetic 'transgression of the division' between 'manual work' and intellectual work.[225] Ross writes of the post-Ruskin English arts and crafts movement that, '[e]xtending the aesthetic dimension into everyday life… not only makes art common to all people but it also makes it an integral part of the *process* of making.'[226] However, in a concept that is shared by Benjamin and Rancière (albeit in distinct philosophical registers), Ross highlights that 'Emancipation occurs when the universe of daily experience becomes translatable into writing, and a material thing becomes the bridge of translation between two minds.'[227] The concept of emancipation used here by Ross, drawing on Rancière, is far more ordinary and modest that Benjamin's. However, they draw from the same nineteenth century milieu, and seek to re-awaken from the revolutionary energies contained therein.

The idea of 'communal luxury' captures the spirit of the meal given away convivially. Although Benjamin de-centres the act of communication, we should remember his opposition to the 'bourgeois conception of language', and its 'invalidity and emptiness' which stands in contrast to acts of naming language that connect things to human knowledge.[228] Benjamin, following Kierkegaard, seeks the 'purification and elevation' of language by submitting 'the prattling man' to 'judgment.'[229] Benjamin's

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[222] See Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, London: Verso, 2015.
[223] Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 63. See Jacques Rancière, 'Afterword: The Method of Equality: Some Answers to Some Questions' in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, pp.273-288.
[224] See in particular ibid. 137-138 on the significance of beauty in this reconceptualisation.
[225] Ibid. 54.
[226] Ibid. 64.
[227] Ibid. 48. I return to the concept of translation in Rancière and Cavell in the fifth chapter on egalitarian education.
[228] Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' in *Reflections*, 318.
[229] Ibid. 327. See Helena M. Tomko, 'Word Creatures: Theodor Haecker and Walter Benjamin between *Geschwätz* and Pure Language in the Late Weimar Republic', *New German Critique*, 133:45, 2018, pp.23-47.

remark against 'sociable conversation' aims to avert 'the abyss of prattle' beyond which 'we find a translation of the language of things into an infinite higher language' that allows us to 'recall the material community of things in their communication.'[230] The act of giving food promises far more to collective life, Benjamin suggests, than conversation. This echoes the structure of fulfilled experience insofar as the apparent wish to have one's appetite satiated is not in fact satisfied by eating but by sharing a meal. Similarly, individual experience is fulfilled by being shared (which can be distinguished from 'communicated' in the thin sense noted above), which entails a productive displacement. By virtue of this displacement, it is possible to recognise the common world as a site of genuine, emphatic experience. Our experiences emerge from the past only according to our ability to first lose them and forget them; so that in returning to them, and re-discovering them we are *both* giving them away (to ourselves) and receiving them as (possible) fulfillment.

[230] Ibid. 328-330.

Aesthetic Experience Between Life and Art: On Jacques Rancière's Reading of Johann Joachim Winckelmann and the Paradoxes of the Aesthetic Regime

> *The statue is then beautiful when it begins to be incomprehensible, when it is passing out of criticism and can no longer be defined by compass and measuring-wand, but demands an active imagination to go with it and to say what it is in the act of doing.*
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Love'

For Jacques Rancière, the founding moment of aesthetics is the break with the determinate concept of beauty, a break epitomised in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's elevation of the fragmented *Belvedere Torso* to the status of an ideal. The first scene of Rancière's *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* proposes that an aesthetic experience of art is possible via suspension and separation from the experience of ordinary life. Each of the fourteen scenes of *Aisthesis* presents 'a singular event' that shows how 'an object is felt and thought not only as art, but also as a singular artistic proposition, as novelty and revolution in art – even as a means for art to find a way out of itself.'[1] The identity of art and non-art implied by this phrase reflects Rancière's argument that modern aesthetic experience is constituted by a new capacity to include any material at all.[2] The fact that the object of aesthetic experience is in principle unspecified becomes what is specific about aesthetic experience. The aesthetic regime of art means, for Rancière, the emergence of 'Art as a notion designating a form of specific experience'.[3] This definition of aesthetic experience emerges in Rancière's reading of Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* alongside Kant's seminal *Critique of Judgment*. This chapter considers the forms of experience that emerge in modernity. In order to complicate my earlier treatment of Benjamin's concept of collective experience in the first chapter, I

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[1] Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, Zakir Paul (trans.), London and New York: Verso, 2013, *xi*.
[2] See also Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 'After aesthetic judgment taught us to distinguish art from its shadow and authenticity from inauthenticity, our experience, on the contrary, forces us to face the embarrassing truth that it is precisely to non-art that we owe, today, our most original aesthetic emotions.' (49)
[3] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, *ix*.

examine Rancière's attention to aesthetic experience (about which Benjamin was critical) as the site of the re-working of community and political identities. I argue that the possibility of a shared aesthetic experience is only possible on the condition of a double disjunction with historical patrimony and determinate judgments about material objects. I demonstrate that the claim of beauty on our experience both ruptures and reconnects ordinary ways of making meaning and how we share our experience.

In the following pages, I develop Rancière's account of the aesthetic regime by analysing in detail his discussion of Winckelmann in *Aisthesis*. I defend Rancière's account, compare it to alternative evaluations of Winckelmann, and make explicit its implications for history, politics and Rancière's conception of experience in modernity. I evaluate critical readings of Rancière, including those of Gabriel Rockhill and, later in the chapter, Walter Benn Michaels. Through close readings of both Rancière and Winckelmann, I examine the relationship between form and meaning in aesthetic experience, focusing on key terms in the tradition of post-Kantian aesthetics such as the fragment. I develop a conception of the subject of aesthetic experience, which makes visible particular kinds of satisfaction with the object that lend themselves to open-ended enjoyment of the object. While identifying limitations of Rancière's conception of aesthetic experience that I address later in the thesis, here I identify the way in which the desire for the unity of art and life compels a dynamic conception of aesthetics that propels its political potential.

This chapter pursues from a different angle the philosophical question of the impact of modernity on experience, treated in the previous chapters through the analysis of Benjamin's writing. While Benjamin responded critically to the post-Kantian aesthetic tradition, Rancière responds affirmatively although with greater scepticism about the promise of collective emancipation.[4] However, I argued in the previous chapter that fulfilled experience was structurally dependent upon a temporal disjunction in Benjamin's work. Similarly, for Rancière, modernity is not contemporaneous with itself, 'Our world is not contemporary to its thought… the

[4] Ibid. 63.

modern world is characterised by a gap between temporalities.'[5] The achievements of modern art deny the 'Hegelian verdict' that 'the long history of poetic forms and the short history of modern revolutionary turmoil were over.'[6] Rancière quotes Emerson, '"the world seems always waiting for its poet."'[7] For Emerson, Rancière suggests, the poet's task 'is to awaken this potentiality of speech, this potential of common experience of a spiritual world, slumbering in every list of words, as it is in the array of objects, and the deployment of prosaic activities.'[8] The post-Kantian idea of aesthetics seeks to unite spiritual and materialist conceptions of art, a contradictory unity of apparent opposites. Aesthetics defines what Rancière calls a 'suspended linkage' in ordinary life, suspended in order to envisage a reunification 'in the continuity of the living poem' and neutralise the consumptive pleasure of 'egotistical usage' in order to bear 'a common potential.'[9] The connection between art and life, as between individual experience and common life, is dynamically woven by the disjunction. The outlines for Rancière's use of aesthetics are perceptible in his conception of history and politics: aesthetics names the disruptive moments when the conventional hierarchical order of sensory experience, political power, and the visibility of ordinary people in history are challenged.[10]

Context and Assessments of Rancière's Aesthetic Regime

I address two key figures in the history of aesthetics, Kant and Winckelmann in light of Rancière's major work in aesthetics, *Aisthesis*. Returning to these key figures and re-evaluating them in light of Rancière's egalitarian presupposition sheds new light on the debates in aesthetics about autonomy, the role of politics and the significance of

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[5] Ibid. 62. Rancière argues in *Aisthesis*, modernism is 'first of all a counter-affirmation about modernity: it denies that the contemporary world has its own thought and that contemporary thought has its own world.' (62) See also Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays*, London: Verso, 2018, pp.3-23 and pp.42-60.
[6] Ibid. 62.
[7] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 63. See Kristin Ross, 'Historicising Untimeliness' in *Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp.15-29 and Andrew Gibson, 'The Unfinished Song: Intermittency and Melancholy in Rancière', *Paragraph*, 28:1, 2005, pp.61-76.
[8] Ibid. 60. I return to Emerson in the final chapter in the context of Cavell's engagement with Emerson as a post-Kantian thinker of modernity and the disjunctive relationship between individual and collective experience.
[9] Ibid. 72 and 65.
[10] See for example the early essays from Rancière's journal *Les Révoltes Logiques* collected in *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, David Fernbach (trans.), London: Verso, 2011.

history in experience.[11] This chapter contextualises and defines the outlines of what Rancière calls the aesthetic regime of art, which operates as an explanatory schema for modern art. It is a 'regime' since, in contrast to theoretical frameworks that seek to settle the tensions in aesthetics by drawing clear boundaries between art and life, politics or history, the notion of an aesthetic regime is inclusive of the different material that constitute the experience of art as 'aesthetic'. The aesthetic regime of art is developed in Rancière's work on aesthetics since *The Politics of Aesthetics*, through his engagements with contemporary art and politics in *The Future of the Image* and *The Emancipated Spectator*.[12] The development of the 'regimes' of art culminates in *Aisthesis*, where the aesthetic regime specifically is given its fullest presentation and defence. Like Benjamin, Rancière's key milieu is the nineteenth century and its precedents and afterlives. However, I argue that for Rancière, aesthetic experience is disjunctive with the historical context of its objects. This disjunction leads to what some identify as a lacuna in Rancière's work, however I argue that it is in fact central to his definition of aesthetic experience. This is why Winckelmann's example plays such a significant role in defining the aesthetic regime.

Each of the fourteen scenes of *Aisthesis* is introduced by a text, which comments on an artistic event, and which Rancière locates within aesthetic debates across the modern period.[13] He calls each scene a 'singular artistic proposition'.[14] The scenes are characterised by a 'voice', which 'comments on an 'artistic event' or constitutes the event of a new interpretation of what art means'.[15] In the first scene, the voice of

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[11] Rancière's 'democratic' aesthetics are differentiated from other recent attempts in part because he does not 'ground' it in Cartesian or Kantian premises but first of all in politics and history. See by contrast Christopher Menke, *Aesthetics of Equality*, Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011 and Thierry de Duve, 'Aesthetics as the Transcendental Ground of Democracy', *Critical Inquiry*, 42, Autumn 2015, pp.149-165. See also for extensive discussion of Rancière and the Cartesian egalitarian tradition, Devin Zane Shaw, *Egalitarian Moments: From Descartes to Rancière*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

[12] See Jean-Philippe Deranty, 'Regimes of the arts' in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, Jean-Philippe Deranty (ed.), Durham: Acumen, 2010, pp.116-130, and for a summary of the works on contemporary art and art history, see Toni Ross, 'Image, Montage' in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, Jean-Philippe Deranty (ed.), Durham: Acumen, 2010, pp.151-168. For a summation and contextualisation of *Aisthesis*, see Deranty, 'The Symbolic and the Material: Jacques Rancière's *Aisthesis*', *Parrhesia*, 18, 2013, pp.139-144.

[13] Deranty identifies five 'basic structural elements' that operate in each regime (see below for a discussion of the regimes): (material and historical) world, significance, language (including both speech and text), image, and community ('Regimes of the arts', in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, 118).

[14] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2013, *xi*.

[15] Jacques Rancière and Oliver Davis, 'On *Aisthesis*: An Interview' in *Rancière Now: Current Perspectives on Jacques Rancière*, Oliver Davis (ed.), Cambridge: Polity, 2013, 203. In the sixth

Winckelmann intercedes in the tradition of artistic and historical commentary to create an event that reconfigures sensible experience. That event could be parsed as the disjunction between the experience of an object, the *Torso*, and its origin in antiquity. In Rancière's elaboration, it is also the possibility of a non-determinate relation between form and meaning, a precedent of the Kantian rupture of beauty from concepts, and the fragmentation of hierarchical ordering and proportional or expressive models of the body. Kant separated judgments of taste from the 'concept of perfection', writing 'the judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment, i.e., one that rests on subjective grounds, and its determining ground cannot be a concept, and thus not a concept of a determinate end.'[16] All these possibilities are distinctive features of the aesthetic regime, and each is illuminated in Rancière's analysis of Winckelmann. He uses a method that 'shows the thing and asks what constitutes its specificity and what makes that specificity possible.'[17] The scene is Rancière's instrument for giving specificity to the general concept of art that the aesthetic regime makes possible. The *Torso* becomes intelligible as art because Winckelmann separates it from its mythological or historical function. At the same time, its separation is made possible by the material specificity of the sensible object, one whose simultaneous beauty and fragmentation confounds any generic ideal of art. The concept of art itself is constantly shifting, and the scenes of *Aisthesis* aim to 'capture the occurrences of certain displacements in the perception of what art signifies.'[18] It is by the movement between separation and joining rather than a stable conceptual relationship that Rancière registers the appearance of art in the aesthetic regime.

Rancière's approach is distinctive from either the conventional modernist or what Toni Ross calls 'great figures' view of art history.[19] Rancière's use of a framework of 'regimes' makes visible not only different artists, but the way 'artistic cases are rendered salient and intelligible within specific "regimes of art", or different systems of making, conceptualizing and assessing artistic activity.'[20] Rancière develops the

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chapter I examine the idea of the 'voice' in detail and its connection to post-Kantian aesthetics and expressions of judgment as part of the connection of aesthetic experience to life.

[16] Kant, *CJ*, §15, 5:228, 112.

[17] Rancière and Davis, 'On *Aisthesis*' in *Rancière Now*, 203.

[18] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2013, *xiii*.

[19] Ross, 'Image, Montage' in *Key Concepts*, 153-54. See also Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Gabriel Rockhill (trans.), London and New York: Continuum, 2004, 20.

[20] Ibid. 153.

'regimes' via the Foucauldian notion of an '*épistémè* and the historical *a priori*… [I]t is a matter of defining the conditions of possibility for an experience either of forms of articulation between words and things or between forms of enunciation and modes of sensible presentation of the 'objects' these enunciations concern.'[21] These regimes, somewhat unlike Foucault's *épistémès*, are not historically definitive.[22] Rancière proposes that, while inspired by

> the genealogical thought of Foucault… I am much more sensitive to crossings-over, repetitions, or anachronisms in historical experience. Second, the historicist's partition between the thinkable and the unthinkable seems to me to cover up the more basic partition concerning the very right to think.[23]

Rancière inflects the idea of a regime of intelligibility not just through historically specific instances, but by considering 'its way of producing its own politics, proposing to politics the rearrangements of its space, reconfiguring art as a political issue, or asserting itself as true politics.'[24] This connection is established from the outset in the philosophy of art when Plato linked the poetic uses of language to 'a certain regime of politics', specifically democracy.[25] Rancière inverts Plato's

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[21] Rancière, 'A Politics of Aesthetic Indetermination: An Interview with Frank Ruda and Jan Voelker', *Everything is in Everything: Jacques Rancière Between Intellectual Emancipation and Aesthetic Education*, Jason E. Smith and Annette Weisser (ed.s), Art Centre Graduate Press, 2011, 20. See also Rancière and Peter Hallward, 'Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview', *Angelaki*, Forbes Morlock (trans.), 8:2, August 2003, 209.

[22] See Gabriel Rockhill, *Interventions in Contemporary Thought: History, Politics, Aesthetics,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016: '[Unlike Foucault, Rancière] rejects the idea that structural blocs hegemonically dominate a given epoch…' (201) Béatrice Han identifies the 'regime' as a modification (a 'genealogical avatar') of the *épistémè*'. See *Foucault's Critical Project*, Edward Pile (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 9. Han suggests that Foucault pushed against the limits of the post-Kantian critical project in his archaeological analyses (36-37), and moreover, that the concept was never fully consistent, shifting between an external 'principle of order' over 'discursive formations', a '*mode* of transformation' *within* each discursive formation, and as a way of 'accounting for the fate of discursive formations' (61-62).

[23] Rancière, 'Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement (interviewed by Solange Guénoun and James H. Kavanagh)', *SubStance*, 92, 2000, 13. Rockhill writes that Rancière's 'polemics are always explanatory or synthetic polemics insofar as he insists on providing a genealogical account of the theories he attempts to refute. In this way, he not only purports to disprove the theories he is arguing against, but he simultaneously co-opts them as elements in his own system of explanation.' (In 'The Hermeneutics of Art and Political History in Rancière' in *Interventions in Contemporary Thought*, 216)

[24] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy', *New Left Review*, 14, March-April 2002, 137.

[25] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13-14. In earlier writing, Rancière developed different 'poetic systems' to define ways of thinking about literature and politics, systems which broadly speaking map onto the later vocabulary of regimes. See *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 22.

denunciation of both poetic language and egalitarianism, indeed linking the two to the kinds of emancipation made possible by aesthetic and democratic revolutions respectively.

Rancière derives from Plato the 'ethical regime of art' in which

> works of art have no autonomy. They are viewed as images to be questioned for their truth and for their effect on the ethos of individuals and the community… In the representational regime, works of art belong to the sphere of imitation, and so are no longer subject to the laws of truth or the common rules of utility. They are not so much copies of reality as ways of imposing form on matter. As such, they are subject to a set of intrinsic norms: a hierarchy of genres, adequation of expression to subject matter, correspondence between the arts, etc.[26]

The aesthetic regime by contrast is defined by the 'overthrow' of any norm or standard defining the relationship between sensible material and meaning.[27] Rancière argues in his early formulation of the regime that the aesthetic regime is the only regime that

> strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres… The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.[28]

This paradoxical relation defines the specific relationship between art and life, as well as the history and politics of art.[29] Moreover, Rancière's conception of art is defined

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[26] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution', 135, note 1. See also Deranty, 'Regimes of the arts', 120-125.
[27] Ibid. 135, note 1.
[28] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 23.
[29] Rancière contrasts the 'two regimes of historicity' of the representative and aesthetic regime. In the former 'the old stands in contrast with the new. In the aesthetic regime of art, the future of art, its separation from the present of non-art, incessantly restages the past.' (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, 24) This peculiar historicity of the aesthetic regime in part explains the appeal of Winckelmann to Rancière

by its contradictory identity with non-art, and the capacity to welcome any material at all into aesthetic experience. Moreover, alongside this explanatory framework, Rancière identifies a key motive of the attempt to define an autonomous sphere for art in modernity. He locates this aspect in Schiller, for whom 'aesthetic experience will bear the edifice of the art of the beautiful *and* the art of living… The aesthetic experience is effective inasmuch as it is the experience of that *and*. It grounds the autonomy of art, to the extent that it connects it to the hope of "changing life."'[30] The efficacy of aesthetic experience is located in the ruin of the efficacy of the other regimes of ordering the connection between sense and meaning. Toni Ross calls this ruin the 'suspension or disempowerment of symbolizing procedures.'[31] In accordance with the connection between art and life through aesthetic experience, each regime has a corresponding politics. From the outset, Rancière posits that 'the aesthetic regime of politics is strictly identical with the regime of democracy.'[32] For Rancière, aesthetics is a 'regime of perception, sensation and interpretation [that] is constituted and transformed by welcoming images, objects and performances that seemed most opposed to the idea of fine art.'[33] Paradoxically, Rancière works with a definition of aesthetics as defined by its separation from ordinary experience and yet open to ordinary objects. The contradiction between art conceived as inclusive and expansive, and art conceived as autonomous and separate is one that defines the aesthetic regime. Rancière maps the possibility of such an exchange through historical episodes, particularly the emergence of democratic ideals in the eighteenth century and their legacy in the nineteenth.[34]

Rancière stands out among contemporary European philosophers for his commitment to equality, and he has engaged with thinkers such as Adorno, Lyotard and Badiou on the persistence of the paradoxes of aesthetics in spite of their attempted resolutions,

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in that Winckelmann was engaged not only in defining the antique past but in contrasting it with the doleful present in order to renew the art of the future. See Michael Fried, 'Antiquity Now: Reading Winckelmann on Imitation', *October*, 37, Summer 1986, pp.87-97.

[30] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution', 134.

[31] Ross, 'Image, Montage', in *Key Concepts*, 157.

[32] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 14.

[33] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2013, *xx*.

[34] Jacques Rancière, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 37 and see *Mute Speech* (2011) for its development in nineteenth century French literature.

divisions or prohibitions.[35] Ironically, it is precisely the attempt to give art a special political sphere, often located in the avant-garde, that ruins its disruptive potential for Rancière. Adorno makes art, in its contrast with culture industry, into a rarefied phenomenon, while Lyotard turns to the sublime art as limit to representation in the wake of the Holocaust.[36] Rancière, as I argue in this chapter, portrays art as fundamentally open to ordinary materials, and constantly dissolving into ordinary life and mixing with ordinary experience. This breaks the 'representational logic', as Chanter argues, a break which Rancière figures in Wincklemann's *Torso* because it 'refuse[s] to anticipate the effects of art upon the viewer, embodying rather, the indifference of the paradoxical model of art's efficacy that Rancière elaborates.'[37] While Chanter's contribution is comparative and connects Rancière to various thinkers and contemporary artists, this chapter is concerned with the detail of Rancière's account of the aesthetic regime, and attentive to the tensions within the account rather than those that arise by contrast with other kinds of theoretical approaches. In criticisms of the aesthetic regime, commentators largely ignore the work on Winckelmann. However, I argue below that Rancière's discussion of Winckelmann best displays the depth of historical evidence his account draws upon *and* also illustrates the tensions involved in his conception of aesthetic experience. In the next chapter, I provide detail on both Kant and Rancière's accounts of aesthetic experience. In this chapter, I give the background for this later discussion as a specifically modern possibility, figured – like Benjamin's modernity – in the transition from determinate ways of making sense of the world to indeterminate ones.

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[35] See Jacques Rancière, 'The sublime from Lyotard to Schiller: Two Readings of Kant and their political significance', Max Blechman (trans.), *Radical Philosophy*, Vol.126, July/August 2004, pp.8-15 and 'Aesthetics, Inaesthetics, Anti-aesthetics' in *Think Again*, Peter Hallward (ed.), pp.218-231. See also Gabriel Rockhill, *Interventions in Critical Thought*, pp.193-213 and Bram Leven, 'Heteroreductives – Rancière's disagreement with ontology', *Parallax*, 15:3, pp.50-62.
[36] See Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, Gregory Elliott (trans.), London: Verso, 2007. See also Tina Chanter, *Art, Politics and Rancière: Broken Perceptions*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, 91-92. See also Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, Elizabeth Rottenberg (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994 and Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (trans.), Cambridge: Polity, 1991.
[37] Chanter, *Art, Politics and Rancière*, 114.

The Aesthetic Regime and Kantian Aesthetic Experience

The way Rancière articulates his conception of the aesthetic regime may productively be related to the peculiarities of Kant's conception of aesthetic experience. The very claim of aesthetic experience in Kant is attributable to its subjective universality, a quality only found in the experience of the beautiful. Kant writes that

> Many things may have charm and agreeableness for him, no one will be bothered about that; but if he pronounces that something is beautiful, then he expects the very same satisfaction of others: he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says that the *thing* is beautiful, and does not count on the agreement of others with his judgment of satisfaction because he has frequently found them to be agreeable with his own, but rather *demands* it from them.[38]

Kant's conception of aesthetic experience suspends ordinary modes of judgment that are governed by concepts or interest, it expands the definition of an aesthetic object beyond 'fine art', and it claims that anyone has 'grounds for expecting a similar pleasure of everyone.'[39] The claim to universal validity must be grounded in the subjective conditions for experience, since

> there can… be no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful. Whether a garment, a house, a flower is beautiful: no one allows himself to be talked into his judgment about that by means of any grounds of fundamental principles.[40]

Aesthetic experience in Kant is newly capacious in terms of the objects that can in principle enter it as beautiful forms. Kant's third Critique also reconfigures the debate about the relation between art and life, including morals and politics.[41] Rancière's

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[38] Kant, *CJ*, §7, 5:213, 98.
[39] Ibid. §6, 5:211, 97.
[40] Ibid. §8, 5:215-216, 101.
[41] See Howard Caygill, 'Life and Aesthetic Pleasure' in *The Matter of Critique: Readings in Kant's Philosophy*, Andrea Rehberg and Rachel Jones (ed.), Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000, pp.79-92. See

'democratic aesthetics' takes up the capaciousness *and* insists on the egalitarian principle implicit in Kant, namely that everyone experiences and that their claim on aesthetic judgment must be counted.[42] Rancière avoids both an overly naturalised account of aesthetic experience as the reconciliation of nature and culture, and an overly mechanistic account of the ideological effect or origin of aesthetic experience.[43] We may ask about the specificity of aesthetic experience in Rancière's egalitarian framework. In this thesis, I am defending the claim that aesthetic experience is a specifically modern form of experience, characterised by a radical openness to ordinary objects. What is significant in Rancière's work is that the disjunction between aesthetic experience and everyday life, is parsed specifically in terms of disruptive and dis-ordering effects on hierarchical relations of sense and meaning. The claim of aesthetic experience on ordinary life is then dependent on how aesthetics as a specific field is constituted by its porosity and contradictory identity with the ordinary.

The aesthetic regime for Rancière is characterised by an expanded array of objects and meanings available to experience, by the dissolution of any hierarchical ordering of sensory material, and at the same time by a separation between form, understood as 'something given to sense', and meaning.[44] Aesthetic experience is defined by disjunctions that create an indeterminate relationship between form and meaning. The fate and significance of the *Belvedere Torso*[45] is emblematic of this relationship; the changes to its form through disrepair and fragmentation require new possibilities for meaning than the classical ideal of organic unity. A passage from Winckelmann's

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also J.M. Bernstein, 'Judging Life: Kant, Clement Greenberg and Chaim Soutine' in *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, pp.46-77.

[42] See Jean-Philippe Deranty, 'Democratic Aesthetics: On Jacques Rancière's Latest Work', *Critical Horizons*, 8:2, 2007, pp.230-255. See also for Rancière's exemplary treatment of the egalitarian presupposition, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Kristin Ross (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, which I address in chapter five in detail and in comparison to Stanley Cavell.

[43] For the former see for example Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 68ff, and for the latter see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, pp.70-101. For a nuanced account of Rancière's engagement with Bourdieu in particular see Marina van Zuylen, 'Dreaming Bourdieu Away: Rancière and the Reinvented Habitus', in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism*, Patrick M. Bray (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2017, pp.199-218. I treat these issues more extensively in the next chapter.

[44] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 1.

[45] An image of the *Torso* can be found in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), Harry Franics Musgrave (trans.), Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006, 6 in a drawing by Francesco Faraone Aquila (1704) or in photographic reproduction on the Vatican's Pio Clementino Museum website (http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/museo-pio-clementino/sala-delle-muse/torso-del-belvedere.html) (Accessed 28/09/2017).

History, which Rancière quotes at length in *Aisthesis*, describes the *Torso* as '"abused and mutilated, and without head, arms, or legs"'.[46] The marble sculpture consists of a single, heavy mass of what might have been a seated figure on a plinth, but whose remains focus our eye on the rippling back and taught muscular frame, 'full without superfluity', Winckelmann admires.[47] Its classical perfection is marred by stumps of splayed thighs and rough, textured cuts to the neck and chest. Winckelmann's famous descriptions, which have recently been associated with the classical tradition of ekphrasis (which not only describes but implies a compelling experience on the part of the beholder) rather than the sober conventions of eighteenth-century statue-description,[48] draw attention to the gap between the object's historical location and the experience of beholding.[49] Harloe writes that the 'disruptive force of his lyrical and erotic evocations of the male nude undercuts the objective pose and cool schematising of the *History*'s grand narrative, testifying to a deep-seated and implicitly acknowledged vision of antiquity as a site of sexual as well as socio-

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[46] Winckelmann in Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 1. This translation differs from that used by Zakir Paul in the translation of *Aisthesis*. Where he uses G. Henry Lodge's 1880 edition, I have elected to use the more recent translation by Harry Francis Mallgrave from 2006 for its thorough scholarly rendering of the text, unless I am quoting directly from Zakir's translation of Rancière, in which case the original is retained.

[47] Ibid. 2.

[48] See Katherine Harloe, 'Allusion and Ekphrasis in Winckelmann's Paris Description of the Apollo Belvedere', *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, 53, 2007, 237 and 246. See also Verity Platt, 'Re-membering the Belvedere Torso: Ekphrastic Restoration and the Teeth of Time', *Critical Inquiry*, 47, Autumn 2020, pp.49-75.

[49] Verity Platt, 'Re-membering the Belvedere Torso': 'Winckelmann's responses to the Belvedere Torso deal with the gaps that necessarily emerge, first, between a work of art's coming into being and later acts of beholding, and, second, between material objects and their verbal descriptions.' Cf Harloe, 'Allusion and Ekphrasis', who describes ekphrasis as 'using one's "phantasy" to recreate and re-experience the subject of the depiction as it presented itself to the mind of the artist' (242) and argues that 'Winckelmann's classical allusions aim at recreating the visuality of an ancient viewer of the statue by constructing an imaginative context in which attitudes appropriate to its ancient mode(s) of reception would be evoked.' (246) Although Harloe makes a convincing case that Winckelmann's descriptive style was inspired by classical ekphrasis (and at odds with contemporary styles of description), it is an additional interpretative step to suggest that Winckelmann *intended* the reader to access a kind of reception appropriate to the ancient model. Harloe recognises that Winckelmann attempts to provide a model to 'modern' artists that is ultimately an 'indefinable and inimitable "grace" that is the highest achievement of great art.' (242) This paradox is evident in both Rancière and Michael Fried's reading of Winckelmann: the impossible ancient ideal serves as a model for contemporary or modern practice in a comparatively fallen, degenerate world. Rancière acknowledges Winckelmann's elevation of the *Torso* as 'the highest expression of the liberty of the Greek people' (*Aisthesis*, *xiv*; see also 15), nevertheless, this connection always exists alongside the melancholic recognition that this freedom and life are located in the indifferent material of the statue: 'Greek freedom was signified by indifference in the impassivity of the stone god.' (Ibid. 32) Thus the freedom signified by the *Torso* is at once the ethical ideal embodied by Athens' golden age (already in decline, see ibid. 15) *and* the 'defection from the communitarian body' which occurs precisely in the *aesthetic* experience of freedom that elevates the *Torso* to an ideal (ibid. *xiv*).

political liberation.'[50] Winckelmann is caught in imaginative flights, '"carried onwards so swiftly and easily, as if on wings of wind… no trace of forceful effort"'[51] and invites the reader to share his enchanted 'aestheticising belletrism'.[52] The liveliness of Kantian aesthetic experience is dependent on an ambiguity that 'reflects the relation of its meaning to the idea', as Friedlander observes.[53] Winckelmann's descriptions are split between 'the expression of ambivalence, anxiety and sublimation on the one hand and a liberating site of imaginative encounter on the other.'[54] This means that one risk in this opening of possibilities is that aesthetic experience falls into precisely the abyss of endlessness, as Benjamin warned.[55] Warped and affected by both join and separation, the gap between sensuous form and the experience of that form is precisely what is productive of meaning in aesthetics. It is a central quality of the aesthetic regime of art that the relationship between form and meaning is characterised by instability and tension. Within the aesthetic regime, the identity of art is defined by its contradictory relationship with non-art, that is with ordinary, mundane materials brought in from everyday life. I will outline some of the ways that relationship is one of disjunction. By disjunction, I mean an ambivalence about the relationship between sensuous form and meaning that is neither wholly a separation nor wholly a connection, but shares aspects of both. The *Torso*'s limbs are severed, separating us from the object as a whole and from the satisfaction of unity; we are left with an experience of the object as a material form that claims our attention in ways that renew the pleasure of aesthetic judgment. The *Torso* is a figure for the dual movement of aesthetic experience that both invites and refuses determinate or final meaning, creating a state of lively reflection.

For Rancière, aesthetics is the name for the gap between form and meaning and the movement within it. There is, according to Rancière, 'such a thing as art in general by virtue of a regime of identification – of disjunction – that gives visibility and signification to practices of arranging words, displaying colours and modelling the

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[50] Harloe, 'Allusion and Ekphrasis', 232-233.
[51] Winckelmann in Harloe, 'Allusion and Ekphrasis', 248.
[52] Platt, 'Re-membering the Belvedere Torso', 68.
[53] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 22.
[54] Platt, 'Re-membering the Belvedere Torso', 68.
[55] See Ross, *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image*, 62-63. I address this problem at the end of the chapter in relation to completion.

volume or evolution of bodies.'[56] The notion of art developed by Rancière is not that of an 'eternal essence', as Rockhill writes, in contrast to what he calls Rancière's 'transhistorical' definition of politics.[57] Instead, Rancière writes later in *Aisthesis* that the

> mobility of the concept reminds us that art is always more than an art, more than the meeting of specific means of organizing speech, sounds, colours, volumes and movement. It is an idea of what art does.[58]

This is what Rancière means when he refers to art as designating a specific form of experience. Art is not the materials themselves but the way in which they are perceptible and intelligible through specific, historical frames. Part of the notion of art then, is its capacity to contradict itself, or to incorporate contradictory materials and impulses.[59] Art challenges the very form of intelligibility that makes it possible, negating itself by turning art into life, and transforming its specific beholder into one without a particular identity. In Rancière's treatment, the concept of 'Art' is always moving towards its opposite in the life and experience of those who perceive and make it. Modifying Hegel's concept of art, Rancière argues that 'the sensible form of art cannot be the result of the pure will to art; it can only be born in the encounter with what is not art, with forms of education and the life of a community.'[60]

Rancière's aesthetic regime is a 'specific sensorium that stands out as an exception from the normal regime of the sensible.'[61] Yet within this specific sensorium it is not immediately clear how objects come to be appraised as art. Rancière proposes a porous relationship between ordinary life and art through which unexpected materials

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[56] Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 74.
[57] Rockhill, 'The Hermeneutics of Art and Political History in Rancière' in *Interventions in Contemporary* Thought, 221-122.
[58] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 129.
[59] This is clearly perceptible in the analysis of 'anti-aesthetics' as an artistic and critical framework. See *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* Hal Foster (ed.), Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983 and *Beyond the Aesthetic and Anti-Aesthetic*, James Elkins (ed.), University Park: Penn State University Press, 2013.
[60] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 185. See Alison Ross, 'Equality in the Romantic Art Form: The Hegelian Background to Jacques Rancière's 'Aesthetic Revolution'' in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality*, Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (eds.), London: Bloomsbury, 2012, pp.87-98.
[61] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy', *New Left Review*, 14, March-April 2002, 135, note 1.

can move, from the desire to incorporate 'high' art into everyday life to the injection of ruins, fragments and detritus into art. In the aesthetic regime, the hierarchy of materials itself is ruined, disrupting and redistributing the relationship between matter and meaning. Unencumbered by an authority designating what is proper to art, the materials of art as well as its subjects and practices become entirely open and available. This is connected to Rancière's commitment to an axiom of equality that reaches from and through aesthetics. He writes:

> Now, that kind of equality ultimately meant the indiscernibility of art and life. On the other hand, aesthetics meant that works of art were grasped, as such, in a specific sphere of experience where – in Kantian terms – they were free from the forms of sensory connection either to objects of knowledge or to the objects of desire.[62]

Art and life are indiscernible from one another because they share the same material, yet the meaning of the form taken by that material differs considerably once it enters aesthetic experience. Disjunction is what propels the object and experience of it out of ordinary experience and into the sphere of aesthetics. (What happens when it gets there is [the] art [part].[63] Or, as Stanley Cavell writes 'Art begins where explanations leave off, or before they start.'[64]) Aesthetic experience begins where ordinary experience is disrupted. However, as I argued in the first chapter, this disruption occurs within the ordinary world. Moreover, ordinary objects play a key role in Rancière's account of the dynamic contradictions of the aesthetic regime. Rancière's aesthetic regime explains this dynamic disjunction and connects it to the political desire to reshape common life.

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[62] Rancière, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics' in *Communities of Sense*, 37.
[63] As Wendy MacLeod puts it in her 'Poetry FAQ' (*McSweeney's*, 2012): 'Q. "How do you decide which words to use and how many?" A. "That is the poetry part."' (https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/poetry-faq)
[64] Stanley Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game: A reading of Beckett's *Endgame*' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 143.

Art, History and Genesis

Examining Rancière's appropriation of Winckelmann demonstrates how the aesthetic regime is conceived, and can provide a response to criticisms of Rancière's position. Hal Foster, for instance, in his review of *Aisthesis* praises Rancière for his engagement with contemporary art but writes that Rancière 'isn't so attentive to art history. Aesthetic philosophers tend to fix on one moment or one model of artistic practice to ontologise art as such, and then use this reified token for their own conceptual schemes.'[65] This criticism seems misdirected given the historical breadth of *Aisthesis*, ranging from Winckelmann's 1764 publication to Agee and Evans' 1941 publication of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Winckelmann is an important thinker for Rancière because the *History* constitutes part of the opening of art as a specific sphere of experience and thought. *History of the Art in Antiquity* is a foundational text in art history, standing out by making art as such the topic of its study, rather than history or anthropology that were dominant modes of writing about antiquity.[66] Through Winckelmann, Rancière identifies how the aesthetic regime is precisely not constituted by an ontology of art but by a specific quality of experience, and locates this experience in an historical context in relation to particular objects. Nevertheless, the account is compelling in part because, while historical, it is not determined by this historical location. Not only does *Aisthesis* present historical evidence for Rancière's claims, it also explicitly addresses the way in which history 'makes Art exist as a singular reality', even if, Rancière qualifies, 'it makes it exist within a temporal disjunction'.[67] That is to say, objects are classifiable as art only insofar as they do not belong to an historical epoch, and are not determined as the product of a particular milieu.

Besides Foster's criticism of Rancière's historical awareness is a more acute claim about the regimes of art. In Foster's view, Rancière's approach 'makes it difficult to understand how [the regimes] are determined.'[68] Similarly, Gabriel Rockhill asserts

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[65] Hal Foster, 'What's the problem with critical art?', *London Review of Books*, 35:19, October 2013, pp.14-15. See by contrast, Toni Ross, 'Image, Montage', in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*.
[66] Alex Potts, 'Introduction' in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), Harry Franics Musgrave (trans.), Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006, pp.1-6.
[67] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2013, 19.
[68] Hal Foster, 'What's the problem with critical art?', 15.

that Rancière's work lacks 'a genetic explanation that accounts for why the aesthetic regimes has emerged.'[69] Rockhill argues that

> Although Rancière fastidiously describes the silent revolution in the distribution of the sensible stretching back to Cervantes and Vico, he has yet to provide a robust genetic or genealogical account detailing the forces that facilitate and fostered the developments he describes.[70]

Like Foster, Rockhill demands a more restricted definition of art, sanctioned by 'socially recognized rituals and institutions', and argues that Rancière's account misses key aspects of the historical context for the emergence and efficacy of art.[71] He suggests that Rancière 'suffers from the ontological illusion' that de-historicises the political significance of art works.[72] According to Rockhill, this flaw is a result of Rancière having a transhistorical conception of (democratic) politics working alongside an historical concept of art.[73] Rockhill suggests that both can be historicised without 'reducing a work of art to its "context"'.[74] The absence of a genetic account for Rockhill implies that both Rancière's concept of politics is falsely universal and transhistorical, while his concept of art is 'tautological' and ahistorical.[75] Although one response would be to say that Rancière's concept of art is deliberately under-determined precisely in order to take account of its specific political effects (I will address a similar criticism and response below)[76], the approach and material of *Aisthesis* also provide ample response to this criticism. Even in earlier work such as *Mute Speech*, Rancière elucidates the dynamic tension in modern art in the 'interminable quarrel between the guardians and de-mystifiers of art [as] based on the

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[69] Rockhill, 'The Hermeneutics of Art and Political History in Rancière' in *Interventions in Contemporary Thought*, 224.
[70] Rockhill, 'Introduction' in Rancière, *Mute* Speech, 23.
[71] Rockhill, 'The Hermeneutics of Art and Political History in Rancière' in *Interventions in Contemporary Thought*, 226.
[72] Ibid. 225.
[73] Ibid. 221.
[74] Ibid. 226.
[75] Ibid. 224. Rockhill also describes Rancière's concept of art as suffering a 'crypto-essentialism when he suggests that art is detached from politics inasmuch as it is recognised as art, as if these things were necessarily mutually exclusive domains.' (Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 171) I discuss the political criticism of Rancière further below.
[76] I also consider Rancière's rejection of the sociological account of art, as represented by Bourdieu in the next chapter in detail.

infinite reversibility of the formula' he gives: 'A people makes a poem, a poem makes a people.'[77] Rancière identifies precisely the 'sites of contestation and negotiation' over the concept of art and the politics of aesthetics by noting the way particular logics and regimes of perception are taken up and made possible in certain historical situations.[78] Rancière's account of the aesthetic regime is interested in explaining the seams and gaps in ordinary experience. His approach thus contrasts with sociological approaches that consider the function of art apart from ordinary experience, thus assuming the separability of 'art'.[79] Rancière's use of scenes refuses a progressive historical narrativisation of aesthetics, however this should not obscure the wealth of historical detail and background that underpins the counter-history developed in *Aisthesis*.[80] The contradictions in the genesis of the aesthetic regime reflect one of the central features of it, namely, that it signals the possibility that art is no longer determined by historical context, that objects can no longer be simply read as expressions of an artist's life or cultural milieu, and that the relationship between matter and meaning is dis-ordered.[81] Although Rancière's development of the aesthetic regime is historical, its conceptual framework means it is applicable beyond the historical context of its genesis.

Winckelmann's description of the *Torso* shows the extent to which his experience is determined neither by his own nor the object's historical context. This feature is evident in the tensions scholars identify in Winckelmann's work, particularly when trying to assess it from the perspective of disciplinary history.[82] The *Torso* is a

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[77] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 69.
[78] Rockhill, 'The Hermeneutics of Art and Political History in Rancière' in *Interventions in Contemporary Thought*, 227.
[79] See Peter Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, especially pp.3-47 on the institutional separation of art and aesthetics from moral and political life.
[80] For Rancière's discussion of narrative (science, and politics) in history, see *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge,* Hassan Melehy (trans.), Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1994. More genetic accounts of the development of Kantian aesthetics propose continuities with rationalist aesthetics (see Rachel Zuckert, 'Kant's Rationalist Aesthetics', *Kant-Studien*, 98:4, 2007, pp.443-463), or replies to the problem posed by Hume and the legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, who asserted sympathetic sensibility over rigid classical standards (see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). The first scene of *Aisthesis* reflects Rancière's attempt to write a counter-history, spotting gaps and minor details in German and French sources that lend themselves to appropriation by later aesthetics.
[81] Hal Foster himself identifies a set of 'antinomies' as central to the origin of art history as a discipline. See *Design and Crime (And Other Diatribes)*, London and New York: Verso, 2002, pp.83-103.
[82] See Katherine Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity: History and Aesthetics in the Age of* Altertumswissenschaft, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

fragment of what it was for the Greeks who sculpted it, both in material and conceptual terms. Yet in Winckelmann's surmise it simultaneously transmits a Greek ideal of life. This paradox between its obvious visual deficiency and its elevation to an ideal signifies the emergence of a new aesthetic way of seeing. Elizabeth Prettejohn encapsulates the tensions in Winckelmann's prose:

> Winckelmann interrupts the smooth chronological flow at intervals to introduce a striking description of an existing work of ancient art, or more precisely a dramatic account of his own experience of such a work. Abruptly, at these points, the perspective shifts away from scholarship, from history, from the past tense, from third-person narrative. Suddenly, the emphasis is on the visual, on the present, on the singularity of the work rather than its position in a historical sequence, on the way "I" (Winckelmann) experience it rather than on its objective properties.[83]

Alex Potts addresses this disjunction as what defines aesthetic writing in contrast to antiquarian scholarship.[84] Scholarship, in this case, would involve piecing together the historical context that created the object, or devising a theory for why objects like the *Torso* were produced, and what their function would have been in the ancient world. On the one hand, Potts explains that Winckelmann gathers a 'comprehensive account' of all the 'existing evidence' about the arts in antiquity, providing the material conditions for art.[85] On the other hand, the text shows him 'thinking of better ways of making sense' of the material.[86] The disjunction between the modes of historical reconstruction and aesthetic judgment is 'integral to his project', however it is the way in which these 'two impulses come together' that makes Winckelmann stand out.[87]

Similarly, Rancière's aim for the scenes in *Aisthesis* is that each 'abolishes the difference between the language of the object and the language of explanation'.[88]

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[83] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art: 1750-2000*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 18-19. See also Harloe, 'Allusion and Ekphrasis', 229-230.
[84] Potts 'Introduction' in Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 12.
[85] Ibid. 12.
[86] Ibid. 12.
[87] Ibid. 17.
[88] Rancière and Davis, 'On *Aisthesis*' in *Rancière Now*, 203.

Bringing together the 'scholarly and the aestheticising mode of address', as Potts phrases it, allows us to attend to the ways both are working in aesthetics.[89] It shows that the disjunctions of aesthetics both join and separate the form and meaning of our experience in different ways. An object, Rancière proposes, 'can be withdrawn from its condition of common use and viewed as a poetic body wearing the traces of its history.'[90] Art becomes intelligible as an object of specific experience through disjunction that sheds determinate perception. But to register that specific experience as the possibility of a transformation in the sensible fabric is to recognise the 'cost of constantly merging [art's] own reasons with those belonging to other spheres of experience.'[91] Aesthetics is the site of exchange between different modes of intelligibility, and different articulations of the relation between form and meaning just as much as it is a distinct sphere of sensible experience.[92]

The *Torso* and the Separation of Art and Life

> *Only he who can view his own past as an abortion sprung from compulsion and need can use it to full advantage in every present. For what one has lived is at best comparable to a beautiful statue that has had all its limbs broken off in transit, and that now yields nothing but the precious block out of which the image of one's future must be hewn.*
> Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*

The object that gives the first scene its 'singular artistic proposition' is the *Belvedere Torso*, which, in Rancière's words, 'shows a seated body deprived of every limb capable of performing any action requiring force or skill.'[93] The rough fragmentation of the body has severed its legs at the knee, its two arms at the shoulders and its head has been cleaved at an angle that carves a chunk from its heavy chest, leaving a rough surface of marble. Winckelmann encountered the *Torso* after arriving in Rome in late

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[89] Potts 'Introduction' in Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 17.
[90] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes', 143.
[91] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, *xi*.
[92] See also Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015, 118-119. I discuss Ngai's defence of the political function of aesthetic analysis alongside my examination of Cavell in chapter six.
[93] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2.

1755, and entered the now-famous description into the second part of *History of the Art of Antiquity*, in which he elucidates the development of Greek art in relation to the 'External Circumstances of the Time'.[94] Winckelmann contributed to a re-evaluation of the *Torso*'s provenance, locating it in a 'renewal of the arts in Greece… some time after Alexander the Great', however this attribution has since been modified.[95] What is important is that Winckelmann adopts from the Renaissance's classical revival a reverence for antique objects, and at the same time departs from that tradition. For this reason, Alex Potts gives Winckelmann a foundational role in art history as a discipline combining scholarship and aesthetic judgment.[96] In contrast, Paul Guyer tames Winckelmann's challenge to the tradition.[97] Placing greater emphasis on the essay published before the *History*,[98] Guyer argues that Winckelmann

> clearly belongs to the tradition that finds beauty in the truthful representation of the objective perfections of the body and mind rather than in the stimulation of the play of mental powers of the audience of beauty.[99]

Guyer's account makes him primarily into an influence on Lessing's study of *Laocoön*, fixing him as a rung in a teleological ladder from eighteenth-century sensibility to modern Kantian aesthetics. The Winckelmann adopted by Rancière, however, is a far more complex and interesting figure. Winckelmann remains indelibly attached to his scholarly predecessors, and constantly searching for that

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[94] Part Two is called, 'History of the Art of Antiquity with Regard to the External Circumstances of the Time Among the Greeks', and begins with Winckelmann announcing that it will be concerned more narrowly than the first part with 'what we call *history*' (original emphasis). 'Namely', he writes, 'the fate of art among the Greeks in relation to the external circumstances in Greece that had the greatest influence on art.' Although this gives it an historicist angle, he continues to wish 'to present a history of art, not artists'. (299) Part One is called 'Investigation of Art with Regard to Its Essence' and considers the arts of different ancient cultures including Egyptian, Phoenician, Persian, Etruscan, Greek and Roman.

[95] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 323.

[96] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*: This origin comes with all the antinomies identified by Hal Foster of history, archaeology, the now-archaic-itself antiquarianism, and of art and aesthetics built in, and some even identified by Winckelmann himself in the 'Preface' to the *History of the Art of Antiquity* (pp.71-80). See Foster's *Design and Crime*, 83-103. Similarly, Rancière identifies such an antimony in the 'interminable quarrel between the guardians and de-mystifiers of art [as] based on the infinite reversibility of the formula' he gives above: 'A people makes a poem, a poem makes a people.' (*Mute Speech*, 69)

[97] Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.363-70. See by contrast, Prettejohn, *Art and Beauty*, 40.

[98] Winckelmann, *On the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1755) in *Winckelmann: Writings on Art*, David Irwin, ed., London: Phaidon, 1972, pp.61-85.

[99] Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, 365.

restoration of antique ideals and forms that he understands as unavailable to modernity.[100] For Michael Fried, the 'experience of lack' is precisely what characterises Winckelmann's conception of *both* antiquity and modernity. While in antiquity, the Greek's were not 'satisfied simply to represent' the 'supreme physical perfection' of the body and 'fullness' of natural beauty, the moderns have before them a 'more attenuated, either meager or flabby mode of presence…'[101] At the conclusion of his *History*, Winckelmann eulogises this ideal as he likens himself to a 'beloved [who] stands on the seashore and follows with tearful eyes her departing sweetheart, with no hope of seeing him again, and believes she can glimpse even in the distant sail the image of her lover…'[102] This recalls the element of pathos in modern experience, evinced by in the disjunction between the wish and its fulfilment in Benjamin's work, which I examined in the previous chapter.

The description of aesthetic experience offered by Winckelmann is one in which what is absent becomes a motive force for the promise of modernity. The loss of the *Torso*'s wholeness creates a dynamic between the desire for a complete, meaningful object and the separation from final judgment by the fragmentation of the form. That means, according to Rancière, that Winckelmann's admiration 'was not free of paradox.'[103] In this case, the paradox means the attribution of 'virtue' to the statue's lack of limbs. It is the paradox of beauty being founded in absence. The statue cannot depict the nobility of heroic action, nor 'joyful recollection and meditation' in a unified ideal.[104] It stands as an example of the highest beauty, despite being 'abused and mutilated in the extreme.'[105] But the *Torso*'s lack of limbs is just one form of separation that is made exemplary of the various disjunctions that distinguish Winckelmann's aesthetic sense. Rancière highlights Winckelmann's superlative style of commentary, such as his remark that

[100] Unlike Guyer, Prettejohn connects Winckelmann and Kant more closely, especially on the point of the primacy of the experience of a work, rather than its position in a systematic theory or history of art. See *Beauty and Art*, 40.
[101] Fried, 'Antiquity Now', 88.
[102] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 351.
[103] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2.
[104] Ibid. 2.
[105] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 323.

> to those capable of looking into the mysteries of art [the sculpture appears] in a blaze of its former beauty. In this Herakles, the artist has figured a high ideal of a body raised above nature… elevated to a state of divine contentment.[106]

The paradox, then, is that for Winckelmann the accidental effect of degradation and disrepair that fragments the *Torso* 'manifests its essential virtue.'[107] As Rancière transcribes Winckelmann's praise he finds further internal tensions: 'the radical impersonality of a material movement very similar to immobility: the perpetual oscillation of waves on a calm sea.'[108] This phrase characterises aesthetic experience itself, as being moved or affected, and yet being unable to fix that movement to its origin or its end. The *Torso*'s form seems to hover at the edges, inviting the imagination to complete it without offering any finality. Such is the effect of fragmentation as described by Winckelmann.

The *Torso* can be freely perceived, it must also be separated from historical determination. For Winckelmann, history persists in the material of the object as the outlines of a Greek ideal of life, but like the hand that 'always arrives too late to copy' the flowing beauty of the *Torso*, 'it is everywhere and nowhere on the surface that withdraws what it offers.'[109] The aesthetic object's sensuous form does not transmit the form of life that made it, just as the aesthetic object's beauty cannot, in Winckelmann's view, be 'copied'.[110] Objects like the *Torso*, in Rancière's terms, 'come to us as the product of a collective life, but on the condition of keeping us away from it.'[111] Rancière's identification of a paradox in Winckelmann's aesthetic appraisal only works, however, if the Greek freedom that created the *Torso* is, at least in the eyes of Winckelmann, the same as the freedom of its beauty. That is not to say that they *are* in fact the same, merely that Winckelmann believes and desires that they be so. The ancient world is both accessible through the sensuous material it leaves

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[106] Ibid. 323.
[107] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 3.
[108] Ibid. 3. As Prettejohn notes, this stylistic motif is adopted by Goethe in his own description of antique Greek sculpture: '"I would reaildy say, as the [Laocoön] group is now exposed, it is a flash of lightning fixed, a wave petrified at the instant when it is approaching the shore."' (Goethe in Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art*, 27)
[109] Ibid. 5 and 18.
[110] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 323.
[111] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 19.

behind, and inaccessible precisely because the form leaves the world behind when it enters aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience suspends the determining effect of historical scholarship, which attempts to reconstruct the world that produced the *Torso*. The *Torso*, in Rancière's words,

> has the perfection of a collectivity which is no longer there, of a body that cannot be actualised. The beautiful inactivity of the god of stone was the product of the free activity of a people. From now on, the indifference of the statue alone lends a figure to this free activity.[112]

To say the *Torso*'s fragmented form cannot become an 'actual' whole, is analogous to saying the ideal of life cannot be realised through this material part it has left behind. Nevertheless, it is through the *Torso* that Winckelmann sustains an ideal of the ancient world, particularly Greece, in modernity. Michael Fried describes the difference Winckelmann perceives between ancient and modern as involving 'a contrast between a certain fullness of presence… and a weaker, more attenuated, either meagre or flabby mode of presence associated with modernity.'[113] The desire to resolve the difference is necessary in order to connect the aesthetic experience of the *Torso* to the Greek ideal, transferring the promise of freedom from the latter (political freedom) to the former (free play of sense perception). That desire motivates Winckelmann's veneration for the *Torso*, and elevation of it into an ideal for modern artists.[114] The fulfilment of Winckelmann's desire would resolve the paradox and close the separation between an object and its history, but in aesthetic experience, the separation remains open and fissile.

Art, Life and the Fragment

> *It was here that this man who had experienced so much would discover the richness and abundance of life. Bodies whose every part was will, and mouths taking on the forms of cries that seemed to rise from the bowels of the*

[112] Ibid. 18.
[113] Fried, 'Antiquity Now', 88.
[114] This is especially true of Winckelmann's earlier essay *On the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*.

earth… Like a man who searches widely for some object, becoming more and more desperate, distracted, hurried, wreaking destruction all around him, accumulating things as if he could force them to join his search, but sowing disorder in the process – these are the gestures of a humanity that could not find meaning… They don't resemble those movements preserved in ancient sculptures, those gestures whose births and deaths were everything… Grasping had become different, as had waving, releasing, holding. They were possessed of much more experience, but also much more ignorance…
Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*

In Rancière's aesthetic regime, the aesthetic object is both a manifestation of the world and the sign of its absence left in the material remnant. According to Rancière, Winckelmann views the *Torso* and other antique objects not in terms of the 'distribution of criteria of academic excellence, but rather by their embodiment of the freedom of a people', the ancient Greek people.[115] Instead, the beauty of the object is founded on the experience of a lost ideal that leads us back to the material presence. The loss of the ideal in fact renews our attention in the ordinary material substance of the object. Rancière writes that Winckelmann's image of ancient Greek life was a 'German Greece, an ideal land where art was born from the soil'.[116] The longing for the world of the artwork is that which Rancière finds in the 'mad fervour of romanticism and German idealism' that succeeded Winckelmann, and after him, Kant.[117] Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, in *Athenaeum* fragment 149 writes of Winckelmann as the ground for the 'conditions of the absolute identity of ancient and modern in the past, present and future.'[118] This offers evidence for Rancière's claim that romanticism 'nourished the utopia of art's destiny, which destined it to negate itself in order to become what it used to be once: the fabric of sensible forms of a people's life.'[119] Romanticism's dream of the unity of art and life, Rancière argues, relies on the productive tension between art and life, which also keeps them separate. That is also to say, there is no distinction between art and life in this idealisation, and

[115] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 25.
[116] Ibid. 15.
[117] Ibid. 15.
[118] Friedrich Schlegel, 'Athenaeum Fragments' in *Philosophical Fragments*, Peter Firchow (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, 37.
[119] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 15.

so there is no art as defined by Rancière. Aesthetic experience thrives on the difference between the art and the life. The desire to realise a life as an artwork, Rancière argues, 'would feed the "totalitarian" dream of identification between the life of art and of a people celebrating its unity.'[120] If art objects are treated and experienced as merely a sign of their world, or an avenue to it, art ceases to exist as a specific field. Modern experience, for Rancière, is heterodox enough to simultaneously sustain both aesthetic and non-aesthetic ways of perceiving an object: an 'object can be withdrawn from its condition of common use and viewed as a poetic body wearing the traces of its history.'[121] An aesthetic experience of the object includes, without the domination of any, various ways of judging. It incorporates potentially conflicting features of judgment by neutralising the hierarchy of faculties within determinate judgment. This is figured in the still calmness of the waves, combining oscillation and stasis, the experience of subjective freedom with the solidity of objective material presence.

What appears in the material form of the artwork is precisely its separation from its world. The marble surface of the *Torso* bears the marks of a sculptor and a way of life, but they appear in the negative because it is nothing more (and nothing less) than the material surface itself. Winckelmann might read into each of its lines the product of free labour, but there is no way of saying conclusively what each aspect of the sculpture represents, nor saying what each part means in relation to life. Rancière imagines that the *Torso*'s dismemberment is a figure for the aesthetic object's separation from determinate attachment to a way of life. In his words, the 'very brutality of the operation accentuates the constitutive paradox of art's new place' as both evidence of a way of life and irreducible to it.[122] With each scene, Rancière notes a shift in the way artworks are perceived. One common effect of the aesthetic interruption articulated in each scene is 'an entire regime of interpretation that undoes

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[120] Ibid. 15. Peter Bürger puts it more sympathetically: 'modernisation gives rise to a certain kind of fundamental critique of bourgeois society. Though this critique is oriented at traditional ways of life (Herder and the young Goethe, for example, take up impulses from the traditionalist Juster Möser), we cannot simply classify it as traditionalist. The ardent desire for a life experienced in its totality is opposed to the principle of utility, to the submission of all spheres to mechanization and to the fragmentation of activities. The desire is based on experiences in traditional contexts of life, but was only to be formulated under the impact of modernization.' (*The Decline of Modernism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, 11)
[121] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes', 143.
[122] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 24,

the traditional articulation between the art of sculpture and the organic model.'[123] For example, Winckelmann

> dissociated the beauty of forms from their science. To appreciate this beauty liberated from expressive convention, one must stop examining it for a precise and functional muscular outline, which allows one to recognise the artist's anatomical knowledge and his capacity to translate it into the production of forms.[124]

In the aesthetic regime**,** harmonious proportion, the hierarchy of bodily parts and their assigned ways of meaning lost their status as the organising principle of artistic creation and evaluation. Closely following Kant's formulation in the *Critique of Judgment*, Rancière defines the new idea of the beautiful as 'that which pleases without a concept.'[125] Contorted or heroic bodies need no longer signify fixed emotions, but can be experienced as possibilities for material and intelligible forms. The head no longer represents thought; thought can now be found in the arch of the *Torso*'s back. The body does not even have to be whole. The value ascribed to the fragmented *Torso* reflects an openness to ordinary and new materials in art in the aesthetic regime.

The fragment's literary and artistic history illuminates the aesthetic regime's relation to antiquity as well as its development in modernity. The German literary tradition that succeeded Winckelmann was infused with examples of fragmentary writing that either posed as, or evoked the ancient world.[126] Examples such as Lessing's attempt to publish the writing of Hermann Samuel Reimarus and Wieland's 'Dialogues' posing as fragments of Diogenes show the way in which radical, disruptive material was given voice in fragmentary form. The effect of the fragment is to leave a space for the unknown or indeterminate. It is precisely this quality, about which Benjamin was

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[123] Rancière and Davis, 'On *Aisthesis*' in *Rancière Now*, 209.
[124] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 10.
[125] Ibid. 10. See the second moment of Kant's definition of the beautiful in *The Critique of Judgment*, §6-9, 5:211-5:219, pp.96-104.
[126] See Matthew Bell, 'The Idea of Fragmentariness in German Literature and Philosophy, 1760-1800', *The Modern Language Review*, 1994, pp.372-392, see also Rodolphe Gasché, 'Foreword: Ideality in Fragmentation' in Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, Peter Firchow (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, pp.*vii-xxxii*.

suspicious, that for Rancière energises the concept of art in its indistinction from life. Despite warning of the 'totalitarian dream' of romanticism, Rancière is nevertheless sensitive to the equivocation and aesthetic possibilities in the movement. The Romantic fragment can be seen 'not [as] the detotalisation that founds literature as an experience of the impossible, but rather the resolution of the new totality's contradictions'.[127] Following Benjamin, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy emphasise the significance of art – and specifically the fragment – as the achievement of Romantic systematicity.[128] On the tension between totality and fragmentation, they write,

> The properly romantic – poietic – task is not to dissipate or reabsorb chaos, but to construct it or to make a *Work* from disorganisation. For "potential organic beings", organisation and generation can and must occur in the midst of disorganisation, both as a parody of themselves and in keeping with the true "method and symmetry" of the System.[129]

The work of art, instead of resolving the contradictions, then, internalises them, so that the 'fragment closes and interrupts itself at the same point…'[130] Instead of enclosing art in a world of untouchable, or inaccessible reverence (aesthetic fragmentation risks mystification), Rancière identifies the opposite impulse working in Winckelmann.[131] Artworks, like the *Torso*, are fully present as material objects without giving us direct access to their world. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, call Winckelmann's new perspective a 'previously imperceptible hiatus'.[132] The fragment, for Rancière, is not a mystifying sign of an incomplete whole but in fact a new conception of a complete aesthetic object, which suspends the finality in judgment. Winckelmann opens the experience of the object to an aesthetic that recognises no

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[127] Rancière, *Mute Speech,* 78.
[128] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (trans.), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, 46.
[129] Ibid. 51.
[130] Ibid. 57.
[131] Benjamin identified the 'mystical impulse' in early German Romanticism, along with the importance of the concept of art in Romantic systematicity. See 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', *SW I*, 138. See also Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin, 'Walter Benjamin's Critical Romanticism: An Introduction' in *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (ed.), New York and London: Continuum, 2002, 2.
[132] Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 10.

boundaries or distinctions, and thereby expands the possible objects and materials available to art.

Despite the erasure of boundaries and distinctions immanent in Winckelmann's aesthetic experience, art remains a specific field for experience characterised precisely by its openness to any material at all. Rancière describes the 'contradictions' of romanticism in terms of the

> entry of poetry and art into the era of their dissolution. The principle of this dissolution is the incompatibility of the two organising principles of antirepresentative poetics: the principle that makes poetry a specific mode of language and the principle that decrees the indifference of the form to the subject represented.[133]

By 'antirepresentative' poetics, Rancière means the aesthetic regime, in contrast to the representative regime of art. The representative regime

> did not mean an imitation of a reality by the techniques of art. It meant a legislation of imitation that subjected the practices of art to a whole set of rules that determined which objects or characters could or could not be the subject matter of art and what artistic form fit such and such matter, according to its high or low value… [It] implied the inscription of artistic practices in a whole system of adequation… a correspondence between artistic rules and laws of nature, which in reality are laws of a hierarchical social order.[134]

Rancière draws on a Hegelian principle elucidated in the second scene of *Aisthesis* that examines the implications of Hegel's analysis of Murillo's 'Beggar Boys Eating Grapes and Melons' (1645).[135] At the conclusion to his section on the romantic art

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[133] Rancière, *Mute Speech,* 86.
[134] Rancière, 'Rethinking Modernity', *Diacritics*, 42:3, 2014, 7. For the kind of misunderstanding Rancière is trying to correct, see David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2019, 9.
[135] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, and see Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, T.M. Knox (ed. and trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 170.

form, Hegel ascribes a characteristic to art in this era that 'every form and every material is now at the service and command of the artist whose talent and genius is explicitly freed from the earlier limitation to one specific art-form.'[136] The passage Rancière selects from Hegel's lectures on fine art, in which he admires Murillo's 'Beggar Boys', bears remarkable similarities to Winckelmann's praise for the *Torso*. The sense of contentedness in the boys – analogous to the lack of need like the *Torso* 'rendered with no need for human nourishment'[137] – 'shines forth', and is

> nothing but complete absence of care and concern… We see that they have no wider interests and aims, yet not at all because of stupidity; rather do they squat on the ground content and serene, almost like the gods of Olympus.[138]

Their comparison to the gods highlights the disjunction between the 'vulgarity' of the subject matter and the aesthetic quality the work attains.[139] It also resonates with Winckelmann's comment that the *Torso* appears to have 'attained immortality and a seat among the gods', despite its 'abused and mutilated' fragmentation.[140] The determinate relationship between edifying subject matter and beautiful form has become unstuck. Any material can enter aesthetic experience, and its appearance is no evaluated in terms of fixed ideas about proportion or appropriateness. The materials of art, like words or stone, now share a

> structural equality. This means that they are indifferent to the use made of them or meaning assigned to them. Rancière expresses the implications of

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[136] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 606.
[137] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 323. See also Platt, 'Re-membering the Belvedere Torso', 67 and 73 on the distinction with a consumptive aesthetic. I discussed consumption and aesthetic pleasure in Benjamin's criticism of aesthetic experience in the first chapter. Platt writes that Winckelmann's ekphrastic descriptions 'reminders of the images they describe and markers of absence that, to borrow Winckelmann's phrase, allow the reader "only to enjoy and not to consume." As supplements to the image, ekphrases thus engage in an eternal play of deferral whereby one verbal account embroiders another in a series of linguistic formulations that render objects themselves absent signifiers and risk occluding them altogether.' (73) I suggest that the first point – that aesthetic pleasure is non-consumptive – does not have to lead to infinite deferral of meaning or the absence of the object. Rancière's Kantian account of aesthetic experience accommodates non-consumptive aesthetic pleasure as I argue below and in the next chapter. See also Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*: the ideal of beauty for Winckelmann 'was an image of power, of austere elevation, of something that resisted being appropriated to conventional forms of gratification and consumption.' (114)
[138] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 170.
[139] Ibid. 171.
[140] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 323.

> this idea by describing words as "silent" or "mute"; that is to say, they always stand ready for further elaboration or adaption.[141]

Like the boys in Murillo's painting, of whom 'we have the idea that anything may come', the matter of art is at once silent to its uses, making it freely available, and endlessly talkative.[142] Rancière calls it an 'overly loquacious muteness', a quality that renders all available material to artistic transformation and aesthetic experience.[143] Matter itself does not determine in advance the meaning we find in it, however it is not therefore secretive or concealing a withdrawn essence that could be mystified.[144] Without a determinate hierarchy to legislate over which materials and forms belong to which subject matter, or to demand conformity of the objects to a particular way of living, art's material is boundless. Yet, insofar as art is boundless it is always dissolving into life, from which it must be held apart to remain art.[145] The sphere of aesthetic experience is specific because in it the regulated, normal relation between appropriate forms and materials is suspended. But it is precisely the quality of disorder and non-specificity that leads to the paradoxical indistinction between art and life, made only more evident by the apparent separation of the aesthetic sensorium from both historical and contemporary lives. Art is both: working against the norms of the social order or hierarchical determinations of meaning, and constantly being brought back into the lives of those who experience aesthetic objects in a dual movement of separation and connection.

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[141] Ross, 'Equality in the Romantic Art Form' in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, 93.
[142] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 170.
[143] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 95.
[144] Similarly averting the risk of melancholy that is pervasive in accounts of modern art and modernity influenced by Adorno, such as Gregg Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001 or J.M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. These accounts are not wholly melancholic, however, the premise is that, as Bernstein puts it in *The Fate of Art*, modern art is 'memorial'.
[145] See for instance on this issue of holding art and life apart by demonstrating the ruinous consequences of their meeting, Rancière, 'Why Emma Bovary Had To Be Killed', *Critical Inquiry*, 34, 2008, pp.233-248. Rancière states the 'democratic threat' felt and addressed by Flaubert in the following question: 'if the future of Art lies in the equivalence of Art and nonartistic life, and if that equivalence is available to anybody, what remains specific to Art?' (238) In order to avert the death of Art, and so keep 'the book *as a book*', Bovary must be killed. See also on Flaubert, Rancière, 'Literary Misunderstanding', *Paragraph*, 28:2, 2005, 97-98 and *Mute Speech*, pp.113-127.

The Life and Politics of the Aesthetic Regime

Artworks are produced by a 'form of life', like the *Torso*'s antique origins, and made sense of within a particular milieu.[146] However, the meaning of the work cannot be integrated into a systematic or determinate framework that makes it into a lesson for life, or politics. '[A]rt is art to the extent that it is something else than art. It is always "aestheticised", meaning that it is always posed as a "form of life"'.[147] Aesthetics is defined by its disjunction from the hierarchies and determinations of the social and political order of modern life; it cannot instruct us how to act (or rule, or order our society).[148] Rancière describes *Aisthesis* as 'the history of the paradoxical links between the aesthetic paradigm and political community.'[149] The very reason art has 'political valence' is in its separation from the norms of politics, refusing to be caught in the 'hierarchical divisions of the perceptible [by] framing a common sensorium… aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity.'[150] The notion of art Rancière develops is closely connected to Rancière's political egalitarianism.[151] In the aesthetic regime, art does not propose a politics. Instead, it has a 'way of producing its own politics, proposing to politics [the] rearrangement of its space, reconfiguring art as a political issue, or asserting itself as true politics.'[152] However, Rancière warns that 'aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity.'[153] In the aesthetic

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[146] In *The Flesh and the Ideal*, Potts notes concurrent impulses to Winckelmann's specific appraisal of the *Torso* including the relationship between the 'Northern' and 'Southern' European climate and culture, the idealization of Greek antiquity (over Roman) in Germany (see 68), and the transmuted or sublimated homosexual desire Winckelmann sought to express obliquely. Potts suggests that Winckelmann could praise the *Torso* as a beautiful masculine ideal precisely because of its fragmentation that protected his position from mere lust. See 5, and 47-49.
[147] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes', 137.
[148] Rancière makes the same deflationary point of 'political art' and agitprop. See *The Emancipated Spectator*: 'What was broken was the continuity between thought and its signs on bodies, and also the performance of living bodies and its effect on other bodies. "Aesthetics" above all means that very collapse; in the first instance, it means the rupture of the harmony that enabled correspondence between the texture of the work and its efficacy.' (62)
[149] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, *xiv*.
[150] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes', 150-51: The phrase 'political valence' comes from Rockhill's assessment of Rancière's aesthetic and its connection to politics, following my point above that 'works of art are sites of contestation and negotiation in which meaning is dynamically produced and reproduced.' ('The Hermeneutics of Art and Political History in Rancière' in *Interventions in Contemporary Thought*, 227)
[151] I examine this claim in greater detail in the next chapter on Rancière's conception of disinterest in Kant.
[152] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes', 137.
[153] Ibid. 150-51.

regime, objects are rendered free from what they might otherwise communicate in a political context. To use an obvious example, a flag is no longer a patriotic emblem but a formal arrangement of colours in Jasper Johns' *Flag* (1954-55).[154] Art objects are 'separated from their former destinations: they are no longer illustrations of the truths of religion or the majesty of princes or even picturesque representations of popular life destined for the pleasure of aristocrats.'[155] Without a proper audience, or determined message, an object loses its attachment to a hierarchical way of life and begins to speak to anyone, with 'the infinite openness of the field of art'.[156] Aesthetic experience is in principle available to anyone at all, and welcomes anything at all as the material of art. It suspends the hierarchical and regimented spaces of politics and social order in favour of a radically egalitarian community of sense.

Rancière's notion of disjunction and separation is distinct from the kind of aesthetic autonomy and medium specificity propounded by high modernists such as Clement Greenberg.[157] Although they share a Kantian background, Rancière interprets Greenberg's position as essentially *anti*-aesthetic insofar as he attempts to install borders between art and life, high and low and establish medium specificity.[158] Rancière argues that the

> notion of aesthetic modernity conceals – without conceptualising in the least – the singularity of a particular regime of the arts, that is to say of a specific type of connection between ways of producing works of art or developing practices, forms of visibility that disclose them, and ways of conceptualising the former and the latter.[159]

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[154] See https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78805 (Accessed 5/08/2021). For a discussion of Johns and post-war aesthetics, see Seth McCormick, 'Neo-Dada, 1951-54: Between the Aesthetics of Persecution and the Politics of Identity' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Beth Hinderliter et al. (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, pp.238-266.
[155] Jacques Rancière, 'Aesthetic Heterotopia', *Philosophy Today*, 54, 2010, 17.
[156] Rancière, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics' in *Communities of Sense*, 37.
[157] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 262. See Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 103 and Rancière, Andrew McNamara and Toni Ross, 'On Medium Specificity And Discipline Crossovers in Modern Art', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 8:1, 2007, pp.98-107.
[158] Rancière and Davis, 'On *Aisthesis*' in *Rancière Now*, 205. See also Diarmuid Costello, 'Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65:2, 2007, pp.217-228.
[159] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 20.

In characteristic style, Rancière finds that the questions and problems of modernism confuse more than they clarify insofar as they are premised upon the resurrection of boundaries.[160] Part of Rancière's project is to propose 'first of all a counter-affirmation about modernity' within modernism itself.[161] Winckelmann's praise of the mutilated *Torso* as the highest form of beauty is an example of such a liberating disjunction within modern experience. [162] It is from the disjunction between the 'entirely material conditions' and the 'modes of perception and regimes of emotion, categories that identify them, thought patterns that categorise them and interpret them' – between form and meaning – that aesthetics becomes possible.[163] Aesthetics for Rancière is a 're-configuration of sensible experience' defined as 'a relation between sense and sense, between a power that provides sensible datum and a power that makes sense of it.'[164] However, Rancière's conceptualisation of the separation of art works from determinate political significance has been misunderstood as endorsing a politics of 'visibility' over one concerned with material inequality and injustice.[165]

There are a number of clear limitations to Walter Benn Michaels' criticism of Rancière's aesthetics. Michaels analyses in detail only one minor text of Rancière's and takes it as a general statement of his position;[166] he de-contextualises the argument of this piece from Rancière's oeuvre; he takes what Rancière offers as an explanation for the suspension of determinate political significance as an endorsement of an 'egalitarian social vision' as the *sine qua non* of politics; and finally, he takes this latter as congruent with the post-war social justice programs associated with a progressive political project of ending discrimination by correcting our hierarchical

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[160] See Rancière, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics' in *Communities of Sense*, 37-40.
[161] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 62.
[162] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*: 'the idea of the highest beauty… requires no philosophical knowledge of man, no investigation of the passions of the soul and their expression.' (196)
[163] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, *ix*.
[164] Rancière, 'Aesthetic Heterotopia', 15.
[165] See Walter Benn Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy, Economy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, pp.54-63.
[166] For instance, Michaels criticises Rancière's 'understanding of the injustice of class difference' (193, note 34) largely through an analysis of Rancière's discussion of Walker Evans and James Agee's journalistic project *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (London: Penguin, 2006), a far more complex evaluation of which is offered in *Aisthesis*, Peden identifies the issue that Michaels focuses on the photography (by Evans), while Rancière turns to Agee, and also to the relationship between the word and the image. See 'Grace and Equality', 198-201.

vision.[167] Michaels reduces Rancière's argument to one in which all hierarchies are both a product of and redressable through a transformation of vision, and conflates what Rancière clearly differentiates, namely the 'politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics'.[168]

Michaels argument, however, questions two philosophical aspects of Rancière's project: the identity of art and non-art, and the separation of art and life, specifically from the perspective of politics. Michaels connects the refusal of 'the distinction between art and "non-art"' with 'the changes in capitalism… [primarily] a commitment to the importance of efficient markets and an egalitarianism defined as equality of access to those markets.'[169] Similarly, Clune argues that Rancière's aesthetics lacks the resources to 'distinguish art from neoliberalism… [that is] distinguishing aesthetic value from market value' in a way that would defeat the indistinction between art and non-art (or *Madame Bovary* and *The Apprentice*, to use Clune's example).[170] As Davide Panagia shows, Rancière is perfectly aware of the difference between 'indistinction' and 'indifferentism' (which would be real target of Clune's criticism), the latter of which would deny 'the possibility of judgment, and hence also its political potential of critique and disruption.'[171] Michaels conflates Rancière's neutrality with respect to the identity of the exploited worker with

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[167] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 58-59. Michael W. Clune makes similar mistakes in trying to criticise Rancière on the basis that his principle of equality cannot distinguish 'between art and the market'. See 'Judgment and Equality', *Critical Inquiry*, 45, Summer 2019, 913. The missing term in Clune's analysis of Rancière is experience; Clune assumes the stability of the category of art and the objects that belong to it and so misses the key suspension in Rancière's concept of aesthetic equality. Clune argues that without standards of value, we have no way to distinguish the proper objects of aesthetic experience. Like Michaels, Clune by-passes the *experience* of the beholder as the site of judgment and political valence, in part because Clune thinks that uneducated experience is determined or dominated by market values. Missing also is a substantial discussion of the role of the concept of beauty in Kantian aesthetics.

[168] Ibid. 61 and Rancière, 'The Method of Equality', in *Jacques Rancière*, 285. Rancière notes, 'The politics of aesthetics would more accurately be named as a metapolitics: a politics without *dēmos*, an attempt to accomplish – better than politics, in the place of politics – the task of configuring a new community by leaving the superficial stage of democratic dissensus and reframing instead of the concrete forms of sensory experience and everyday life.' (326, note 8) He writes that 'The modern politics of emancipation has been entangled from the beginning with the meta-politics of the aesthetic revolution. But this does not mean that it has to be identified with that meta-politics.' (287)

[169] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 68-69.

[170] Michael Clune, 'Judgment and Equality', 912-913.

[171] Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 22. See also Peter Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, who argues that without judgment, the '"pluralist" runs the danger of recognizing everything equally and falling prey to an eclecticism which likes everything indiscriminately. Art thus threatens to become an insipid complement to everyday life.' (44)

'radicalised anti-intentionalism' in aesthetics.[172] However, as Peden writes, Rancière's view is not that intention is imperceptible or irrelevant, but that there is a 'discrepancy' or disjunction

> between artist and subject (-matter) and artist and spectator… The intentional production of art which seeks an end is essential to the production of art… But once produced, the result is a finality without end: a bounded unity that is inexhaustibly interpretable, but only interpretable because it is the consequence of action.[173]

For Michaels, Rancière's putative anti-intentionalism collapses the distinction between art and mere objects, and so occludes our capacity to see the world as a product of intentional actions, rather than, say, natural outcomes.[174] Michaels associates the egalitarian vision of the identity of art and non-art with a political project that occludes material hierarchies in favour of those based on products of vision. He calls it 'neoliberal aesthetics [in which] the structural difference between capital and labour (a difference that no degree of identification can alter) is imagined out of existence.'[175]

This would indeed be a disappointing result for Rancière's aesthetics. However, the political significance of aesthetics for Rancière is not reducible to a generic equality of objects, nor to an 'aesthetics of indeterminacy.'[176] For Michaels, the separation of art from life which allows the sharecropper's lives in Evans and Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* to be occasions for beauty, profoundly misrecognises the extent to which the sense of beauty is '"a *class* privilege"' and that the work demonstrates

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[172] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 69.
[173] Peden, 'Grace and Equality', 201.
[174] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 67-69. See Peden, "Grace and Equality": 'The risk here is that beauty becomes an emergent natural property rather than the aesthetic consequence of the formal framing of "a social problem."' (200) Michaels criticism of the Kantian background to Rancière (56) is premised on a misunderstanding of Kantian aesthetics as negating the role of the artist. See Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 66-67 and Peden, 'Grace and Equality', 202-203.
[175] Ibid. 67. The egalitarianism of Rancière's ontology of photography is 'critical of hierarchies of vision but has no purchase on the hierarchies embodied in rising Gini coefficients and the redistribution of wealth upward. Rather, the political meaning of the refusal of form (the political meaning fo the critique of the work's "cohere") is the indifferent to those social structures that, not produced by how we see, cannot be overcome by seeing differently.' (63)
[176] Peden, 'Grace and Equality', 202.

'what it is to be so "appallingly damaged" that you no longer have any such capacities, and the beauty of the photographs themselves makes this statement…'[177] The sharecropper's inability to perceive the beauty of Evans' photographs for Michaels 'is the index of class inequality that obtains between the artists and the subjects of their work. Rancière's sin is to treat class as an identity among others, a matter of place, that is rendered superfluous by the forms of vision promoted in Agee and Evans's art.'[178] As Peden shows that Rancière accepts the significance of the material difference between the sharecroppers and the artists.[179] As with Winckelmann's *Torso*, however, Rancière proposes that what is crucial in appraising Agee and Evans' work is not the original intention or experience of the creator, nor its historical context, but

> To see each thing as a consecrated object and as a scar: for James Agee, this programme demands description that makes sensible at the same time both the beauty present at the heart of misery and the misery of not being able to perceive this beauty.[180]

What is at stake in the politics of the concept of art is also the beholder's experience, which Michaels seeks to bypass using Michael Fried's notion of absorption: the artistic photograph is

> not only *of* something, it's *about* something, and its *aboutness* is what separates it from the things it's *of*. Indeed, it's the irrelevance of the beholder's point of view (what it's about is not in any way determined by how the beholder sees it) and the photographer's view (what it's about is not necessarily what the photographer saw) that is the mark of its intentionality.[181]

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[177] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 61.
[178] Ibid. 200.
[179] Peden, 'Grace and Equality', 201.
[180] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 253.
[181] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 67. See for a discussion of Michaels' concept of intention, Mathew Abbott, 'Recognising Human Action', *nonsite*, 32, September 2020, https://nonsite.org/recognizing-human-action/ (Accessed 28/07/2021). One might explain Michaels position in Rancière's terms as a defence of the 'representative regime', with which the aesthetic regime 'breaks', but 'what *mimesis* and representation mean has to be understood. What they mean is a regime of concordance between sense and sense', in other words a 'conjunction' rather than a

Michaels and Clune defend a concept of aesthetic value that is independent of the particular experiences of that value. Rancière is also concerned to disarticulate particular identities from hierarchical political functions.[182] Although Clune's attempt to neutralise the specificities of a particular person's aesthetic experience[183] is similar to Rancière's account of disidentification and disinterest, which I detail in the next chapter, it is not clear why the political payoff sought by Clune and Michaels *needs* art at all. Indeed, to some extent, their project amounts to a defence of epistemology in the same way that Clune's argument for aesthetic education amounts to a defence of expertise.[184] Art, for Clune and Michaels, as the above quoted passage suggests, is a privileged form of depiction of a social problem.[185] Peden connects this project with Althusser's development of an interpretation of Marx that 'would make the structures of capitalism visible in a moment when their effects were positively binding.'[186] What Michaels is missing, and Clune finds difficult to explain, is the relationship between art and collective action that would explain their turn to art as a way of revealing intention or structure (of inequality), and thus making something available for criticism.[187]

'disjunction' between the construction of material forms and the life of the community. See Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 58-60.

[182] See Rancière, 'Politics, Identification and Subjectivization', *October*, 61, Summer 1992, pp.58-64.

[183] Clune, *A Defense of Judgment*: 'the experience of the self tends to dull and diminish the intensity of experience.' (129) Although this position is not compatible with the Kantian account of aesthetic pleasure, Clune elsewhere proposes that 'the effort is not to get out of subjective experience to some special selfless experience but to descend into an experience sufficiently deeply to prevent the extrinsic constituents of the sense of self from taking hold. And while this is a special kind of experience, it is not rare.' (126) There seems to be an underlying confusion about the terms of Kantian aesthetic experience in Clune and Michaels, which it is not the aim of this chapter to redress. Cf. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 'the exceptional is always ordinary.' (213)

[184] Clune, 'Judgment and Equality'.

[185] See Clune, *A Defense of Judgment*, pp.153-179 and Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, pp.63-70.

[186] Knox Peden, 'To Have Done with Alienation: Or, How to Orient Oneself in Ideology', in *The Concept in Crisis:* Reading Capital *Today*, Nick Nesbitt (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, 74.

[187] See Peden, 'To Have Done with Alienation': 'Michaels' conception of political ideology works by an appeal to facts that are explicable in terms of the reasons for them; when those reasons are located in human action they become politically contestable… Yet his account of intention more or less requires it to be a discrete event located in a discrete individual, which is usually typified by the artist. But, once he departs from the artwork as exemplar, Michaels has no way to link structure and intention conceptually because he has no operative concept of collective action and the idea of collective intention such a concept presupposes.' (75)

For Michaels, art is marked as a particular kind of intentional action that is linked to a knowable state of the world. For Rancière, art is marked by a particular kind of disjunction between the intentions that produced it and the experience of those who call it art. This disjunction is not reducible to the anti-intentionalism Michaels ascribes to Rancière.[188] The disjunction between material and experience is precisely what gives aesthetics its distinctive connection to politics for Rancière, a disjunction Michaels and Clune seek to avoid, and hence eliminate the genuinely aesthetic dimension of art. Michaels and Clune's approach partly reduces to epistemology to the exclusion of the aesthetic, but it is notable that they are unable to explain the problem of political indifference. This reveals what is significant about the aesthetic dimension of politics insofar as it is defined by the desire for the unification of art and life, evinced by Agee's confrontation with the problem of 'a response to the violence of a condition, simultaneously the product of an art of living and doing and a scar from a double-wound – a wound from being subject to necessity and the pain of knowing that the response will never match the intensity of the violence.'[189] The pathos of Agee and Evans' project is the recognition not only that in order to perceive the beauty in the sharecropper's life, or in the mutilated *Torso*, 'one has to be there accidentally, a spectator coming from elsewhere…', it is also the knowledge that their efforts to represent the life cannot 'restore each element of the inventory to the dignity of what it is'.[190] No matter how exhaustive their inventory, and no matter how comprehensive Winckelmann's chronological narrative of the development of Greek art and politics is, they cannot decisively connect experience with a determinate message, political or epistemological. This key tension – between the completeness of the material object, and the suspension of finality in the experience – is one I return to at the end of the chapter.

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[188] Michaels associates Rancière with the view that the meaning of the work 'exists only in the experience of the beholder' (*The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 49) or that 'the only thing that matters is the audience's response.' (51) Rancière is, however, sensitive to the intentions of artists, but does not think they settle the question of the (political) meaning of art works. See *The Emancipated Spectator*, 58.

[189] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 253. See also *The Emancipated Spectator*: 'the solid end-product of the activity that "twists" the materials of sculpture or painting remains somewhere between the *cry* of the suffering and struggling people and the "earth's song", between a voice of human division and the melody of cosmic – inhuman – harmony.' (57)

[190] Ibid. 253.

Rancière's turn to aesthetics has also been criticised as taking an anti-political or melancholic position.[191] But as Deranty points out we should not 'make the mistake of seeking an explicit political theory in a book of aesthetics.'[192] The link between aesthetics and social emancipation for Rancière occurs not in the connection between the message of art and a politics of truth but in the disconnection between

> a certain order of bodies, a certain harmony between the places and functions of a social order and capacities or incapacities of the bodies located in this or that place, devoted to this or that function. According to this idea of a "social nature", forms of domination were a function of sensory inequality… Social emancipation was an aesthetic matter because it meant the dismemberment of the body animated by that "belief."[193]

The political force of aesthetic experience is less to produce the effect of a corrected vision that cannot perceive material differences, as Michaels and Clune charge,[194] but rather 'a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the very rupturing of any determinate link between cause and effect.'[195] This rupture frees objects and people from their naturalised roles in the social body determined by hierarchies of sense.

> Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations… It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are "equipped" to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation. However, this political effect occurs under the

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[191] Nicolas Vieillescazes, 'Strategies of distinction', *Radical Philosophy*, 177, January/February 2013, 31.
[192] Deranty, 'The Symbolic and the Material', 143.
[193] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 70.
[194] Clune, 'Judgment and Equality', 912. Indeed it's not clear what would constitute aesthetic experience besides sensitivity to material differences, albeit to the exclusion of sociological categories that normally determine them.
[195] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 63.

> condition of an original disjunction, an original effect, which is the suspension of any direct relationship between cause and effect. The aesthetic effect is initially an effect of dis-identification. The aesthetic community is a community of dis-identified persons.[196]

Rancière proposes a politics of aesthetics that re-frames the world of objects and people but does not prescribe a course of political action. This is not simply art as 'the figure of renunciation, retreat and the failure of politics', as Nicolas Vieillescazes argues.[197] Artistic and political events for Rancière are not sites where something is resolved but where the normal, hierarchical ordering of beings and ordinary experience is disrupted. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how or why counter-hegemonic politics gains a foothold without such experiences.[198] New possibilities emerge as a result of this disruption, but they are unpredictable and not determined. As Rockhill writes, 'it is up to political actors to capitalise (or not) on aesthetic possibilities.'[199] Nevertheless, in the place of a hierarchical order of beings, 'the aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection.'[200]

Rancière finds this community founded in disconnection 'emblematised by the body of a crippled and beheaded statue', namely the *Torso* and Winckelmann's description of it.[201] The *Torso* for Winckelmann embodies a freedom that removes the body from the circuit of willing and desiring, and so of its function in an orderly communal

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[196] Ibid. 72-73.
[197] Vieillescazes, 'Strategies of distinction', 31.
[198] This problem is precisely and ironically addressed by Clune in his criticism of Rancière. Clune asks how 'aesthetic education is to reach anyone' without existing 'possession of it' ('Judgment and Equality', 912). Clune's way of posing the problem begs the question of *who* has possession of it in the first place (and whether possession of 'it' is indeed possible), and why *even if* some group of experts 'had' it, anyone would be motivated to seek it out. In other words, the problem Clune poses to Rancière rebounds on himself. However, Rancière's own version of aesthetic autonomy is guided by the assumption that *anyone* can have an aesthetic experience, and that *anyone* might claim it. This version is further defined by the presupposition of equality that insists that there is no expertise proper to either political rule or aesthetic judgment. I discuss this further in the two following chapters, including Rancière's objection to aesthetic expertise in chapter four and the question of expertise and authority in aesthetic education in the fifth chapter. To answer an obvious objection to Rancière, his claim is not that the aesthetic experience obviates the worker's exploitation but that the experience exceeds that exploitation, in the sense that it overlays an actual, material situation of exploitation with an experience of freedom, showing the seams and gaps within the determinate sociological situation within which opposition might occur. See Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, John Drury (trans.), London: Verso, 2012, 82.
[199] Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, 170.
[200] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 59.
[201] Ibid. 64.

whole. At the same time, its material surface glimmers with 'folds' that delight '"apart from any concept"', as Kant puts it.[202] Winckelmann's appreciation is then free aesthetic experience, unconstrained by the parameters of knowledge and desire. Rancière's point is that Winckelmann's elevation of the *Torso* to the ideal of (Greek) art and freedom is only possible on the basis of a 'disconnected community between two sensoria – the sensorium of artistic fabrication and the sensorium of its enjoyment.'[203] Material objects can only have the kind of disruptive force they have in aesthetic experience *because* of a separation from the life that created them. If the connection between this disruption and its politics is indeterminate,

> such indeterminacy is merely an index of the fortuity of the encounter, a fortuity that evaporates once the determinations of intelligibility take hold and form. This fortuity is the equality of intelligence, the fact that anyone could see or could have seen, that anyone could have been or could be exposed to signs and images that lead one to see otherwise.[204]

In other words, the possibility of disruption is a constant possibility created by the contradictory logics of art and life which are connected by the shared world of ordinary materials. In contrast to Michaels and Clune, for whom certain objects have epistemological significance and require standards of judgment, Rancière proposes that it is precisely the fact that ordinary materials move between art and life which gives aesthetic experience its disruptive political potential.

Completeness and Finality in Art and Life

> *… at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest… It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of* instantaneousness*… a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.*

[202] Ibid 64-65.
[203] Ibid. 64.
[204] Peden, 'Grace and Equality', 201.

Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood'

The condition for the entry of art into everyday life is precisely linked to the autonomy of the aesthetic. The aesthetic makes a claim on life by virtue of its differentiation, not only in the disinterested and non-conceptual quality of experience but also in the treatment of objects not as useful or objects of science but as complete and available to perception. Their completion is what gives them significance for our lives, even though it cuts them off from ordinary life. Moreover, to claim that the *Torso* is complete seems paradoxical given its fragmentation. Yet in aesthetic experience, the sensible presence is all that is available to the judgment of the beholder. When we are considering how art turns back on the life of the beholder, in their experience of the work and beyond it, Rancière details 'a specific separation; [the unity of art and life] always presupposes a lack or a supplement, something that is aside, imperfect, supplementary, useless, or endless. Let us call it the aesthetic separation.'[205] Paradoxically, the specific separation of aesthetics is constituted by a constant over-reaching of the boundaries between art and life. The beholder's experience of art is always moving back into life. The experiences in art and those of ordinary life are distinguishable because of the way concepts are detached and re-attached to sensible forms in aesthetic experience. [206] The fragment is a paradoxical symbol of over-reaching, lacking limbs with which to reach. But Rancière shows how fragmentation might in fact be the condition for (a) life in the aesthetic regime of art. Discussing Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Rancière argues that the

> ecstatic vitality of the body is expressed through the very dismemberment that makes its limbs look like the pieces of a machine. *Vitality is expressed through fragmentation*. The dismemberment of the body… expresses the vitality of the new life through the extreme fragmentation of the shots showing all the gestures that cooperate the weave the fabric of a

[205] Jacques Rancière, 'Art, Life, Finality: The Metamorphoses of Beauty' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.43, Spring 2017, 597.
[206] In the sixth chapter and conclusion I return to the role of concepts in aesthetic experience.

> new life, the fabric of a living community identical with a working community.[207]

Fragmentation can be the very occasion for a new form of life because it forces us into new ways of relating thought and the sensible. Fragmented bodies ruin the order of intelligibility that 'linked the appearance of beauty to the realization of a science of proportion and expression'.[208] Winckelmann reads the *Torso*'s undulating back[209] rather than its absent head as 'curved in lofty contemplation'.[210] And for Rancière it 'is nothing but pure thought, but this concentration is only indicated by the curve of the back that assumes the weight of this thought'.[211] The 'accidental loss' of a head leaves cognition in suspension (or what Kant calls 'free play'[212]), floating both downwards into the spine and upwards into the free space vacated by the head.[213]

What Vertov's fragmentation shares with the *Torso*'s is the gap between complete form and the determination of meaning. In each case, the sensible presence of the object is complete to the beholder. It simply *is* all that is there for the beholder, not underneath or inside, nor beyond the surface as Diana's arrows are to *Niobe*'s form for Winckelmann. The *Torso* is a figure of art,

> unleashing the sensible potential hidden in inexpressiveness, indifference or immobility, composing the conflicting movements of the dancing body, but also the sentence, the surface, or the coloured touch that arrests the story while telling it, that suspend meaning by making it pass by or avoid the very figure they designate.[214]

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[207] Rancière, 'Art, Life, Finality', 614-15, my emphasis. Rancière may be alluding to Marx's analysis of the role of machinery in the 'development of the social individual' in the *Grundrisse*. See Karl Marx, 'The *Grundrisse*' in *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Ed.*, Robert C. Tucker (ed), New York: Norton, 1978, 284.
[208] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 4.
[209] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*: 'subtle, blown like molten glass into scarcely visible undulations and more apparent to the touch than to sight.' (203)
[210] Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 323.
[211] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2.
[212] See for example Kant, *CJ*, §9, 5: 217: 'The powers of cognition that are set into play by this representation are hereby in a free play, since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition.' (102) See chapter five for further discussion of free play, specifically in the context of rule following.
[213] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 4.
[214] Ibid. 9.

In the aesthetic regime of art, anything at all can constitute a complete aesthetic object. The fragment reflects the extent to which it is possible for anything to mean, or as with Walt Whitman's poetry, for the 'fragment detached from the whole [to] carr[y] the potential of the whole'.[215] As Schlegel's fragment has it, 'A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a porcupine.'[216] All of the *Torso*'s indeterminacy, its lack of finality, and its endlessness of meaning is to be found in the material of the sculpture; it is not a mystified symbol of a higher unity but a complete material presence whose form invites judgment to renew its pleasure in contemplation. It is complete in itself without being final.

An object is aesthetic when the beholder always has more to say about it, and its meaning is not final even though the object is complete. The freedom and indeterminacy of meaning in aesthetics is like 'continuous movement, a movement that unrelentingly engenders another movement. This continuous movement dismisses the very opposition of movement and repose.'[217] Such movement cannot but over-reach into the life of the beholder, turning aesthetic experience outwards, giving it the 'sense of necessity' Cavell reports.[218] Yet that sense of necessity can only ever be explained in subjective terms attached to the sensuous experience of the beholder. As I noted at the beginning of the chapter, Kant attributes the strictly subjective universality of aesthetic experience to its freedom from conceptual determination. Kant suggests that the experience of beauty leads us to 'expect the same satisfaction of others', and '*demand* it from them', in what Sianne Ngai calls a 'socially inconvenient compulsion'. [219] Rancière's aesthetic regime provides an account of why aesthetic experience originates in and leads to connections with ordinary life, even though it is marked by its suspension of ordinary judgment.

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[215] Ibid. 64.
[216] Schlegel, '*Athenaeum* Fragments' in *Philosophical Fragments*, 54. See also for a reading of the porcupine (or hedgehog) as a symbol of 'the wholeness of the organic individual' in contrast to its 'completion and totality', Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 43.
[217] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 17.
[218] Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy' in *Must We Say What We Mean?*, 93.
[219] Kant, *CJ*, §7, 5:213, 98. See Ngai, 'Interview with Sianne Ngai (with Kevin Brazil)', *The White Review*, October 2020, https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-sianne-ngai/ (Accessed 20/07/2021). For further discussion of Kant and Ngai, and the sociality of aesthetic experience, see the sixth chapter.

Life Without Finality

> *See, now we must bear the pieces and parts together, as if they were whole.*
> *Helping you will be hard.*
> Rilke, *The Sonnets to Orpheus*

The material of art being both available to all and potentially anything at all creates a radical openness in the meaning that can be ascribed by a beholder to mundane, ordinary objects. With only their own experience to give as explanation for that meaning, the over-reaching of aesthetics into life creates what Rancière calls 'the anxiety about the enforcement of proper order and boundaries both in art and in politics, as well as in their intertwining.'[220] Such anxiety is a register for the proliferation of forms out of the hands of particular people, and meaning out of a particular person into the neutral 'anyone' of the aesthetic beholder.[221] It is the fear that we will no longer be able to say for certain what forms mean, or which material objects can be intelligible as art. Later scenes of *Aisthesis* aim to substantiate the artistic proposition of the availability of any material, from the factories and designs of Peter Behrens to the household objects of Alabama tenant farmers. Part of what constitutes the driving force of the aesthetic regime is the desire described by Deranty for the 'ultimate reconciliation of nature or of a people in the work of art… [However,] modern art is condemned to documenting the irreducible gap between the ideal and the prosaic reality of bourgeois modernity.'[222] Yet, as I have explained, Rancière's position is not melancholic about the separation of art and politics.[223] Rather he identifies sites of historical connection, and the possibilities that emerge from the shared experience 'where old hierarchies of social and narrative order break

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[220] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 91.
[221] As Wendy Steiner notes, the defence of art (like Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs) against the charge of obscenity is mistaken if it is premised on dismissing the misunderstanding of a 'non-artistic audience' (*The Scandal of Pleasure*, 39). For Steiner, in this mode of literalism, a work has 'special value because its audience treats it in a special manner – makes it into a fetish – and not because the work "contains" this value.' (81) Chanter, by contrast, emphasizes the context within which works of art are read, see *Art, Politics and Rancière*, 154-55.
[222] Deranty, 'Democratic Aesthetics', 244.
[223] This is Nicolas Vieillescazes criticism of Rancière in his review of *Aisthesis* I discussed briefly above, 'Strategies of distinction'.

down.'[224] There were utopian dreams in the life that Winckelmann saw threaded in the surface of the *Torso*, which could be unwound and re-vivified. But

> this expression had entirely gone to stone; this fullness of life was manifested as the suspension of life, the indifferent movement of waves, the perpetually balanced attraction and withdrawal of aesthetic free play before free appearance. A hasty posterity accused these lovers of free appearances of having invented the fatal cult of a new Greece, the totalitarian passion of art turned into a form of collective life. But the statue without limbs was also a statue without a temple, displaced into museums where the only temples to be found were in the fluted columns from porticos.[225]

Rancière insists first of all on the separation between art and the utopian dream as the condition of aesthetic experience. The artwork and its life are held apart by disjunction even as desire draws them together. For art to fully become life, life must adopt the quality of completeness: it must finish. One of the consistent qualities that gives art its freedom from determination, for Rancière, is the mortification of an object.[226] The dancer, for example, becomes mechanical or 'the people of the dead we browse like a book.'[227] Yet in the aftermath of Kant's

> double opposition to the law of the understanding that makes things knowable and to the particularity of desire that wants to appropriate them… his successors strived to reunite them in order to make aesthetic contemplation the path leading from the finite intellectual determination of phenomena to absolute knowing.[228]

Rancière writes,

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[224] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 52.
[225] Ibid. 136.
[226] See the conclusion to my first chapter on Benjamin's concept of allegory as a response to aesthetic experience.
[227] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 102 and 159.
[228] Ibid. 58.

> it is this reconciliation that made the program of fusion of art and life possible. But it made it possible through a logic of lack and supplementation that made the aesthetic gap between the forms of finality reappear again and again in the very attempt to erase the gap.[229]

Hegel had argued that the 'internalisation of external finality' that would be required to fuse the gap 'set apart by Kant' between art and life must itself take place through externalization.[230] In other words, both Hegel and Winckelmann imagined that they could draw out the ideal somehow trapped within the material form, appropriating its completeness by way of a final ideal of life. Yet in order to realize the ideal, it would have to be turned back into some (other) material form, complete in itself yet lacking the finality in life to which they aspire.

Rancière's contribution to the debate about aesthetic autonomy is to turn it from an abstract, theoretical problem into a practical and historical contradiction.[231] It is a question of desire obstructed by the limits of material form, which re-opens possibilities for new forms of experience exempt from desire. This exemption – a suspension and disjunction – is what gives aesthetic experience its autonomy. The attempt to translate art's quality of completeness into a form of life redraws the aesthetic gap. It recreates the disjunction, because even if the result – the objective, material product – is complete in itself, its meaning is never final. As Peden notes, tracing Rancière's aesthetics through Kant, 'the spectator is never passive, but always active, negotiating the forms he or she brings to the scene with the forms he or she finds in the scene. *The legibility is never settled*.'[232] Deranty summarises the contradictions that interfere between art and life in Rancière's aesthetic regime:

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[229] Rancière, 'Art, Life, Finality', 602.
[230] Ibid. 602.
[231] See Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Ed.*, Robert C. Tucker (ed), New York: Norton, 1978, 79. Like Marx, it is Rancière's insistence on the experience of historical subjects, rather than the starting point of an abstract idea of art that resolves the issue of the contradictions of aesthetics: 'Give up your abstraction and you will also give up your question,' writes Marx. (Ibid. 92) The contradictions emerge from the form of life rather than in a trans-historical concept of Art. The contradictions of aesthetic experience are not equivalent to the interminable quarrel between the poets and the philosophers because neither has a specific claim to truth, while anyone can have aesthetic experience.
[232] Peden, 'Grace and Equality', 202, my emphasis.

> between the expressivity of the world and the indifference of expression; between the idea of and absolute necessity of poetic language [its specificity] and the anarchistic nature of modern literary forms [it is anything at all]; between the radical freedom of the artist… and the infinite passivity of the material this activity attempts to let speak; between the vision of art as superior knowledge and the infinite idiocy of the world, which art, however, is supposed to take to its full expression.[233]

Rancière warns that the expressivity of the world can be interpreted in two ways: 'a mystical way, as it is by the young German poets or philosophers who endlessly repeat Kant's characterization of nature as a poem written in a "cipher language"… But it can also be rationalized and seen as the testimony that mute things bear to mankind's activity.'[234] Rancière writes that 'thought is always something exposed, written and able to be shared with, and appropriated by others.'[235] At the same time, what is exposed and able to be shared is 'thought outside itself', or 'the power of a thought that has become foreign to itself…'[236] In aesthetic experience, the *meaning* that unravels without finality stands in need of translation.[237] This turns the complete artwork back into life, where it poses a challenge to our thinking, asking us to consider its meaning again and again. We do this by taking other material from life and transforming it into art, lending it completion through separation. In the next chapter, I examine the Kantian description of aesthetic experience in terms of disinterest, and continue my examination of the suspension of determination that characterizes aesthetics for Rancière. This chapter has established Rancière's grounds for the claim that aesthetic experience is separate from any specific form of life, a claim that opens experience to anyone. One key issue raised by Rancière's account is how separate individual experiences can become shared experience. Winckelmann's *Torso* illustrates how the product of a specific form of life can become available for common experience only on the basis of its separation from that form of life and its ideals. The connection between individual and common experience in Rancière is

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[233] Deranty, 'Democratic Aesthetics', 246.
[234] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 60.
[235] Rancière and Davis, 'On *Aisthesis*' in *Rancière Now*, 215.
[236] Rancière, 'Rethinking Modernity', 17 and *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 23.
[237] My fifth chapter addresses this process of translation in the context of aesthetic education.

always also one of separation, or, as I discuss in the next chapter, one of suspension and neutrality.

Disinterest and Equality in Aesthetic Experience: Rancière's Reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

> *Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal.*
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Over-Soul'

A key component of the emancipatory quality of aesthetic experience in Rancière's work is conveyed through his reworking of the Kantian concept of aesthetic disinterest. In this chapter, I argue that Rancière's distinctive account of disinterest emphasizes those aspects of Kant's account of aesthetic judgment that are egalitarian, both about the capacity for aesthetic experience and about the kinds of material suitable for such experience. Disinterest appears in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) as the guarantor of the purity and freedom of aesthetic judgment from cognitive determination or corruption by desire. Rancière adopts this principle of disinterest as an egalitarian proposition about the availability of aesthetic experience to all. Rancière's reading of Kant intervenes against a broad array of negative assessments of the notion of disinterest, some of which I outline in this chapter. Rancière's egalitarian reading of the Kantian concept of disinterest also re-frames the connection between aesthetic experience and common sense, and in this way further hones the investigation of the links between individual and collective experience treated in this thesis. Disinterest offers a way of leaving 'as little space as possible' for determinate experience, so that in aesthetic experience we 'confront the irreducible residuum' of our shared sensory faculties in tension with our indeterminate ways of making sense of them.[1] This chapter defends an account of shared experience derived from Rancière's egalitarian presupposition, which incorporates the dissolution of hierarchical definitions of experience, defined by Rancière in Kantian terms as the subordination of perception to understanding, or the desire for possession. Moreover, 'This rejection of the hierarchical relation between

[1] Michel Foucault, 'A Historian of Culture', debate with Giulio Preti in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews*, 1961-1984, John Johnston (trans.), Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), New York: Semiotext(e), 1996, 79.

the faculties that make sense involves a certain neutralization of social hierarchy.'[2] In this chapter, I demonstrate the connection Rancière makes between egalitarian politics and aesthetic experience.

The chapter has three parts. First, I outline Kant's notion of disinterest before examining various assessments of it from both the analytic and continental philosophical traditions. These assessments range from the dismissive and the incredulous to accusations that aesthetic disinterest reflects a denial of 'that most basic of human interests, the preservation of life.'[3] I clarify the issues with these interpretations, and aim to make Kant's notion of disinterest plausible and appealing. Second, I then turn to Rancière's reading of Kant via his identification of elements of disinterest in the joiner, Gabriel Gauny's written testimony. This connects the egalitarian proposition and aesthetic experience with a practical and historical possibility that is intermittently realised by unlikely people. I explain the function disinterest plays in Rancière's aesthetics, developing the previous chapter's examination of 'beauty without concept' by moving from the role of material objects in experience, to the experience itself. Throughout, I seek to contextualise both Kant and Rancière's use of disinterest in terms of an over-powering concept of interest that was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in political economy.[4] Finally, I evaluate Rancière's reading of Kant in contrast with Lyotard's emphasis on the sublime. The next chapter takes this up in the context of aesthetic education.

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[2] Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge', *Critical Inquiry*, 36:1, Autumn 2009, 2.

[3] Martin Jay, '"The Aesthetic Ideology" as Ideology: Or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticise Politics?', *Cultural Critique*, 21, Spring 1992, 44.

[4] The issue of what Rancière calls consensus and what appears in Benjamin by way of Nietzsche as 'conformity' (see for instance Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*), and Cavell by way of Emerson as conformity (in opposition to self-reliance) is shared between these thinkers. They contrast the prevailing or dominant conception of human life characterized by the impoverishment, or leveling of experience. Disinterest, like self-reliance, proposes what Emerson calls a way for man to 'pass again into his neutrality!' ('Self-Reliance' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Brooks Atkinson (ed.), New York: The Modern Library, 2000, 134). He insists that if you 'speak your latent conviction… it shall be the universal sense' ('Self-Reliance', 132), or elsewhere writes that 'But the larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appearing through them all. Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal.' ('The Over-Soul', 241) I examine Nietzsche's response to interest below. William James similarly notes the way the 'blind and dead… clamour of our own practical interests make[s] us to all other things, that it seems almost as if it were necessary to become worthless as a practical being.' ('On a certain blindness in human beings' in *On Some of Life's Ideals: On A Certain Blindness in Human Beings and What Makes A Human Life Significant*, New York: Henry Holt, 1912, 25)

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how in Rancière's aesthetic regime of art, the meaning of an object was emancipated from historical determination (as experience has been emancipated from tradition in Benjamin's assessment). In this chapter, I turn to the quality of experience engendered by such an emancipation and the possibility of not only suspending the determining force of the past, but also suspending our assumptions about the location and availability of aesthetic experience. The proposition defended in the last chapter is sustained here: aesthetic experience is available to all because it disorders the relation between sense and meaning. While the last chapter focused on this disordering or suspension at the level of the individual experience with specific objects (and their dis-connection from common life), this chapter attends to the inter-subjective dimensions of experience more closely. Such a disordering raises problems for the connection between people's experiences, which I address briefly in this chapter and more fully in the next two chapters.

Judgment and Disinterest in Kant's third *Critique*

> *If someone asks me whether I find the palace that I see before me beautiful, I may well say that I don't like that sort of thing, which is made merely to be gaped at, or, like the Iroquois sachem, that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the cook-shops; in true Rousseauesque style I might even vilify the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such superfluous things; finally I could even easily convince myself that if I were to find myself on an uninhabited island, without any hope of ever coming upon human beings again, and could conjure up such a magnificent structure through my mere wish, I would not even take the trouble of doing so if I already had a hut that was comfortable enough for me.*[5]
> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

This passage plays a pivotal role in Rancière's reading of Kant. The elements of determination which could cloud or guide judgment for a determinate end are successively eroded. The meaning of the palace, if we are to judge it beautiful, is

[5] Kant, *CJ*, 2:204-205, 10.

apprehended only by the free play of the faculties in reflection on the object's form. It is not determined by ideas of hierarchy or status, or by the wealth of its inhabitants, or cost of its construction, nor as a place to be occupied for comfort, like food for consumption. Kant insists not only that the beautiful is not 'merely to be gaped at', but also that it is not an extravagance that we critique in 'Roussueaesque style'. In reflecting on the beauty of the palace, we are told to suspend our ordinary modes of judgment – those which are all too available – and so, as Rancière writes, 'sense itself is doubled. The apprehension [of a form] puts into play a certain relation between what Kant calls the faculties: between a faculty that offers the given and a faculty that makes something out of it…'[6] The play between the faculties occurs 'without any kind of subordination'.[7] These qualifications on aesthetic judgment neutralise the role of knowledge and desire. What matters in aesthetic experience is not what the object *is*, or whether I own it or not, but the reflection on its form. The peculiarity of aesthetic judgment is that the achievement of subjective universality through disinterest gives the judgment an expectation of its validity for everyone. Kant calls it 'strange and anomalous' that since aesthetic judgment withdraws from 'any private conditions', it must be 'grounded in those [conditions] that he can also presuppose in everyone else…'[8] In determinate judgment, it is clear why others should agree with someone's assessment, 'since he has made this judgment, in accordance with the general conditions of the determining power of judgment, under the laws of a possible experience in general.'[9] Aesthetic judgment tests the limits of shared experience because we cannot presuppose that everyone is judging according to the same concept.[10] This gives it the advantage in cleaving closer to a concept of experience that is both subjective and universal, and demonstrates both our freedom of experience and our fundamental sociability.

In the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant distinguishes the reflecting power of judgment from the determining power of judgment. Kant asks whether we are judging

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[6] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 1.
[7] Ibid. 2.
[8] Kant, *CJ*, 5:191, 77 and §6, 5:212, 97.
[9] Ibid. 5:191, 77.
[10] I examine shared judgment or experience in the absence of concepts, or rules in the following chapter.

> for the sake of a concept that is thereby made possible, or as a faculty for *determining* an underlying concept through a given *empirical* representation. In the first case it is the *reflecting*, in the second case the *determining power of judgment*. *To reflect* (to consider [*Reflectiren* (*überlegen*)], however, is to compare and to hold together given representations with others or with one's faculty of cognition, in relation to a concept thereby made possible.[11]

In reflective judgment, we do not begin with 'empty cognitive stock', as some propose, but rather 'compare and hold together different representations'.[12] Although reflective judgment involves a suspension of determination, it does not abandon the cognitive resources used in determinate judgment. Indeed, it expands them. As Eli Friedlander notes, aesthetic judgment involves similarities with *both* cognition and desire.[13] In Kant's distinction above, he asserts that in reflecting, we make new concepts (and possibly new desires) available by putting together different representations. Linda Zerilli, who defends a democratic reading of Kant similar in some ways to Rancière's egalitarian reading, argues that in the *Critique of Judgment* Kant is 'expanding the very idea of a concept and in this way opening the space for thinking about judging outside the rule-governed framework.'[14] Kant presents a unique account of the relation of judgment to purpose, positing that

> no subjective end can ground the judgment of taste. But further no representation of an objective end… can determine the judgment of taste, because it is an aesthetic judgment and not a cognitive judgment, which thus does not concern any concept of the constitution and internal or external possibility of the object, through this or that cause, but concerns only the

[11] Ibid. 20:211, 15.
[12] See Christopher Janaway, 'Kant's Aesthetics and the "Empty Cognitive Stock"' in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, Paul Guyer and Ted Cohen (ed.), Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp.67-86.
[13] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 14. See also Dieter Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992: '… aesthetic judgments are compatible with every conceivable way of classifying and theorizing over a given object – provided we are exposed to that object in a perceptual situation.' (43)
[14] Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, 71.

> relation of the powers of representation to each other insofar as they are determined by a representation.[15]

The satisfaction we derive from aesthetic judgment is then grounded in 'nothing other than the subjective purposiveness in the representation of an object without an end…'[16] This means, further, that 'the pleasure in the aesthetic judgment… is merely contemplative and *does not produce an interest in the object*...'[17] We gain pleasure neither from determining the object via concepts, nor acquiring or consuming it and so fulfilling desire. Instead, in aesthetic judgment we derive pleasure from the experience itself and in particular from the proximity to the 'ground of the activity of the subject with regard to the animation of its cognitive powers, thus an internal causality (which is purposive) with regard to cognition in general…'[18] In other words, as Friedlander summarises, 'What is significant engages me, it is such to reveal me to myself… Intimacy with the beautiful must be revealing, must bring me out not quite as I know myself but, so to speak, in my potentiality as a judging subject.'[19] Without concepts or desire, judgment intends nothing other than the representation of form to myself. And yet, as Kant presents it, aesthetic judgment touches on the fundamental ground of experience and the 'grounds of satisfaction' which I share with everyone.[20] Disinterest enables the connection between fully subjective experience and the claim that experience makes to universal validity. Disinterest, in other words, accomplishes this connection between my experience and that of others and allows us to speak with each other about deeply subjective experiences. Kant writes that we can achieve such a universal validity in judgment

> since it is not grounded in any inclination of the subject (not in any other underlying interest), but rather the person making the judgment feels himself completely *free* with regard to the satisfaction that he devotes to the object, he cannot discover as grounds of the satisfaction any private conditions,

[15] Kant, *CJ*, §11, 5:221, 106.
[16] Ibid. 106.
[17] Ibid. §12, 5:222, 107, my emphasis.
[18] Ibid. 107.
[19] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 19.
[20] Kant, *CJ*, §6, 5:211, 96-97.

> pertaining to his subject alone, and must therefore regard it as grounded in those that he can also presuppose in everyone else.[21]

In pure aesthetic judgment, interest in the existence of the object is disbarred, just as for the *Torso*, the organic unity of the life of the Greek makers was cut off. Freedom of experience is signified by the separation of judgment from determination by concepts or desire. Disinterest both opens and narrows the scope of judgment: it suspends any determinate judgment based on conceptual determination or acquisitive or consumptive desire. Aesthetic experience opens judgment to new possibilities of relation between concepts and the faculties as they can interact in free play. Disinterest subtracts experience to its most basic activity. Paradoxically, with external influences on judgment minimized, and the subjectivity of judgment enhanced, what disinterest achieves is an experience that makes a universal claim.

In the second chapter, I identified ways in which Benjamin's concept of fulfilled experience involved a disjunction between the experience (or the dream, the wish, or childhood memory) and its fulfillment. Similarly, disinterest provides just such a disjunction, between the receptive and the active elements of cognition, or rather between the lack of interest I have in the existence of the object and its yield of pleasure in the activity of judgment. Rancière imagines such a 'presence of thought outside itself' as 'the equivalence of movement and stillness, of activity and inactivity.'[22] Similarly, Derrida characterizes Kant's notion of disinterest in terms of my capacity to give pleasure to myself in the feeling of the activity of the mind:

> I take pleasure in what does not interest me, in something of which it is at least a matter of indifference whether I like it or not. I do not take this pleasure that I take, it would seem rather that I return it, I return what I take, I receive what I return, I do not take what I receive. And yet I give it to myself. Can I say that I give it to myself? It is so universally objective – in

[21] Ibid. 96-97.
[22] Jacques Rancière, 'Rethinking Modernity', *Diacritics*, 42:3, 2014, 13.

> the claim made by my judgment and by common sense – that it can only come from a pure outside. Unassimilable.[23]

Derrida suggests, playfully, that in Kant's conception of disinterest, it is not interesting to have taste. The activity of cognition cannot be stimulated by interest. The pleasure of judgment, then, is grounded only in the activity of the mind reflecting on a beautiful form. And yet, the give and take of purely disinterested pleasure is, Kant qualifies, 'very *interesting*, i.e., it is not grounded on any interest but it produces an interest; all pure moral judgments are like this. But the pure judgment of taste does not in itself even ground any interest. Only in society does it become *interesting* to have taste…'[24] Having extricated myself from interest (which is something I 'take', in Derrida's terms), I return myself to a more fundamental level of experience, one in which new concepts and desires and *interests* themselves become possible. As Derrida suggests, in *taking* pleasure, I also return it or *give it*; similarly, the purely subjective source of pleasure connects me to a common level of experience. Disinterest ensures that the path between my judgment and that of others is unclouded. It expands experience both towards the possibilities afforded by the contemplation of form, and towards the common aspects of experience.

Negative Assessments of Disinterest: Conceptual and Psychological Objections in Kant Scholarship

> *… a kind of fence-sitting*
> *raised to the level of an esthetic ideal.*
> John Ashbery, 'Soonest Mended'

[23] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting,* Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (trans.), Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987, 48. For Rancière's commentary on the role of aesthetics in Derrida's politics, see 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 13.

[24] Kant, *CJ*, §2, 5:205, 91. See also §41, 5:296-97, 176-177. See also Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*: 'The aesthetic would then mark an interest in community, as well as signify a different relation to objects that had been severed by reason and understanding in their strict legislative sense.' (54) Bernstein reminds us that the conception of 'society' in the aftermath of aesthetic judgment must be re-considered in light of the suspension of determinate modes of cognition and acquisitive, desiring modes of relating to the world.

Much of the contemporary scholarship on Kant's aesthetics treats the notion of disinterest with derision. Of all the aspects of aesthetic experience outlined in the third *Critique*, philosophers have treated disinterest as either the least plausible or least desirable aspect. Rancière's reading of Kant stands out in this field as an affirmative conceptual appropriation and historical vindication of disinterest. In the following sections, I will analyse a series of assessments of disinterest by leading Kantian scholars and prominent European philosophers. These assessments demonstrate the significance of Rancière's reading insofar as he has been able to both conceptually affirm disinterest for aesthetic experience, as well as demonstrate its appearance in historically unlikely subjects and modern poetic effusions.

Paul Guyer, a prominent Kant scholar, excoriates disinterest as among the theories that 'suffer in our estimation because… their conclusions conflict with well-entrenched beliefs and intuitions. Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment, at least traditionally interpreted, is such a theory.'[25] Guyer targets Kant's claim that 'One must not be in the least biased in favour of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in matters of taste.'[26] Guyer condemns the idea that 'the beauty of an object cannot *engender* a genuine desire or concern for it, for further experience of it, for its maintenance and preservation, even, circumstances permitting, for ownership of it – in short, an interest in it – [as] absurd.'[27] Henry Allison responds that for disinterest to be plausible, 'the agreeable and the good… must be shown [to] exhaust all the species of interest.'[28] This puts an artificial limitation on what could interest us *in* judgment, which becomes important for the social and moral significance of taste. Allison's objection

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[25] Paul Guyer, 'Disinterestedness and Desire in Kant's Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36:4, Summer, 1978, 449. In more recent work, disinterest does not rate a mention. See for instance Guyer, 'The Psychology of Kant's Aesthetics', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 38, 2008, pp.483-494. Guyer places Kant's account of aesthetics 'within the confines of eighteenth-century aesthetics' and rates his attempt to 'establish a genuinely *a priori* or transcendental principle that all human beings have the same disposition to experience a free play of their cognitive powers' a 'failure' (483).

[26] Kant, *CJ*, §2, 5:205, 91. Longuenesse interprets Kant's claim in light of the argument that he is less interested in refuting scepticism (about the existence of objects, say) and more interested in refuting solipsism: ''To say that aesthetic pleasure is disinterested is not to say that the object does not need to exist for the pleasure to be elicited. Rather, it is to say that the object's existence is not what causes our pleasure; nor does our faculty of desire strive to cause the existence of the object.' (Beatrice Longuenesse, *Kant on the Human Standpoint*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 268)

[27] Guyer, 'Disinterestedness and Desire', 450.

[28] Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 90.

to Guyer makes sense in terms of the possible grounds of pleasure, but Guyer's target is the role of (dis)interest in the (further) activity of judgment.[29]

Similarly, Ivan Soll questions the purity of Kant's notion of disinterest, characterizing as implausible 'the distinction between merely admiring something and satisfying one's desires in it… If there is a clear distinction to be drawn between the objects of our desires and those whose beauty we admire, we cannot draw it in the way that Kant proposes.'[30] Soll posits that Kant 'presents our experiences of beauty as unconnected to all interests and desires, but it seems incontrovertible that we *want* to experience beauty and the pleasure it brings.'[31] This restores the break Kant had tried to make with the rationalist aesthetics of Christian Wolff for whom 'if… aesthetic experience represents something perfect or excellent, it follows that we must… have a desire for that perfection or excellence.'[32] As I argued in the previous chapter, Kant's notion of beauty is explicitly *not* premised on a concept of perfection or excellence.[33] It would not make sense, within Kant's aesthetic theory, to look around for good objects with which to have an experience of the beautiful. The predicate of aesthetic judgments is not 'the beautiful' but the feeling of pleasure it elicits, as Beatrice Longuenesse notes.[34]

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[29] Guyer repeats his criticism in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 100-107. Guyer identifies two concepts of disinterest in the *Critique* and concludes that the disinterest in the existence of an object is implausible. He proposes that disinterest serves the aim of connecting aesthetic experience to morality. He writes 'We can now see how Kant can consistently reconcile this notion of disinterestedness with his concluding claim that taste for the beautiful is ultimately a faculty for rendering moral ideas sensible in a way in which even the experience of sublimity is not.' (106-107) This overstates the connection Kant draws between the beautiful and morality, however another key issue in Guyer's discussion and contextualization of 'disinterest' is that he restricts himself exclusively to 'aestheticians', which ignores the crucial development of a concept of 'interest' in political economy. I return to this later in the chapter in relation to Miezskowski's *Labours of Imagination*. As Bernstein argues, disinterest can only be 'measured against, and perhaps determined by, the powerful interests from which it withdraws.' (*The Fate of Art*, 25) See also Adorno: 'If it is to be more than mere indifference, the Kantian "without interest" must be shadowed by the wildest interest, and there is much to be said for the idea that the dignity of artworks depends on the intensity of the interest from which they are wrested… Aesthetic disinterestedness has broadened interest beyond particularity.' (*Aesthetic Theory*, 14)

[30] Ivan Soll, 'Some Thoughts on the Development of Disinterestedness in Aesthetics', in *Aesthetics and Aisthesis: New Perspectives and (Re)Discoveries*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002, 153.

[31] Ibid. 154, note 5.

[32] Frederick C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 60. See also Guyer, 'The Psychology of Kant's Aesthetics', 2008, pp.483-494, which argues that there is significant continuity between Kant and pre-Kantian aesthetics.

[33] Kant, *CJ*, §15, 5:226-229, 111ff.

[34] Longuenesse, *Kant on the Human Standpoint*, 267. See also Agamben, *Man Without Content*: 'the judgment identifies the determinations of beauty only in a purely negative fashion.' (41)

Both Soll and Guyer shift the pleasure in beauty from the activity of the mind to a focus on the object, either as something we cannot help but take an interest in, or as a class of objects that reliably supplies a particular type of pleasurable experience.[35] Kant distinguishes two types of pleasures as a 'state of mind in which a representation is in agreement with itself, as a ground, either merely for preserving this state itself (for the state of the powers of the mind reciprocally promoting each other in a representation preserves itself) or for producing its object.'[36] The former is properly aesthetic, for Kant, while the latter is 'an aesthetic-pathological or an aesthetic-practical judgment.'[37] Kant readily concedes that there are mixed forms of judgment.[38] 'Strictly speaking, however, 'perfection does not gain by beauty, nor does beauty gain by perfection…'[39] Guyer and Soll misunderstand the significance of the suspension of our ordinary modes of judgment which do involve desire and concepts.[40] Aesthetic experience interrupts ordinary experience, which gives it its distinctive claim and role in, for instance, Rancière's politics of the aesthetic. The effort to make aesthetic experience more continuous and comprehensible within the confines of ordinary experience – like the attempt to suture together life and art I

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[35] Arata Kamawaki proposes that both 'objectivist' (like Guyer) and 'subjectivist' accounts are misleading, and suggests a 'third position.' He states that the objectivist treats 'beauty as the property of an object' (107). See 'Kant on Beauty and the Normative Force of Feeling', *Philosophical Topics*, 34:1/2, 2006, pp.107-144.
[36] Kant, *CJ*, 20:230-32, 33.
[37] Ibid. 33.
[38] Crowther argues that there are *only* mixed forms of judgment and the pure form of judgment imagined by Kant is illusory. See *The Kantian Aesthetic: From Knowledge to the Avant-Garde*, 2010.
[39] Ibid. §16, 5:231, 115.
[40] See also Crowther, *The Kantian Aesthetic*: 'To follow Guyer's strategy would distort this, through introducing the constraints of a definitive concept.' (61 note 1) Hannah Ginsborg also seeks to address Guyer's interpretation in *The Normativity of Nature*. She argues that 'the difficulty can be avoided if we appeal to the self-referential act of judgment… For this allows us to explain the self-maintaining character of the pleasure in taste without making reference to any desire or interest… In engaging with this self-referential act of judgment… I am in effect demanding that all perceivers of the object in question should judge it as I do, and thus that they all ought share the mental state that corresponds to my act of judging. But this demand, being universal, applies just as much to myself as to any other perceiver of the object… My mental state thus consist in the consciousness that I ought to be in the very same mental state as that in which I presently find myself.' (44) Although Ginsborg's interpretation is significant, I do not wish to comment on it at length, since it is not directly related to the notion of disinterest, however two aspects strike me as sources of difficulty. The first is the idea of a mental state justifying itself in the act of judgment. Self-justification does not seem to be Kant's intention in identifying the demand that judgment places on us. (Guyer makes similar criticisms, albeit with a great deal more characteristic incredulity in 'One Act or Two? Hannah Ginsborg on Aesthetic Judgment', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 57:4, 2017, 416.) Moreover, Ginsborg's identification of similarity in the 'mental state' of judgers is, in my view, misguided. I address this issue in the next chapter when I consider what it means to share a judgment (or follow a rule) together using the example of aesthetic education.

examined in the last chapter – in fact collapses the significance of the aesthetic.[41] Scholars have been led by Guyer in debating the plausibility of disinterest, narrowing the treatment of Kant's *Critique* and assuming that the nature of disinterest is settled. Guyer and Allison, for example, debate whether 'the disinterestedness of judgments of taste and formalism of beauty are actually included in the meaning of the concept of beauty, as Allison contends, or not'.[42] The options left by Guyer in framing this debate are to either abandon disinterest as conceptually confused and empirically unlikely or, on the defensive side, modify its distinctive claim to make it more similar to normal judgment. Some, such as Kirk Pillow, go so far as to claim that disinterest is simply undesirable, especially in proposing the connection between aesthetic and cognitive understanding. He writes,

> One might hold that the aesthetic dimension of human understanding can only be impure, motivated by specific interest, but attempt to preserve Kant's judgment of taste in some noncognitive realm of pure aestheticism. But there exists little reason to imagine that such a land of untrammeled aesthetic value actually exists and little reason to wish for it. Few philosophers working in the field of aesthetics today, and even fewer art-critical practitioners in our arts institutions, take strict disinterestedness seriously as a requirement of cultivated aesthetic judgment. There is in fact little relation between taste as it is cultivated by reasonable people today and the disinterestedness requirement of classical German aesthetic theory.[43]

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[41] This claim should be distinguished from the claim that aesthetic experience is common. Against assessments of Kant's idea of 'universal assent' is 'too trivial to bear the weight of transcendental argument for the *a priori* condition of judgments of taste' (Schaper, 'Kant on Aesthetic Appraisals', *Kant-Studien*, 64:4, 1973, 449), Bernstein writes that 'the applicability of the categories to experience… [is] a non-trivial achievement.' (*The Fate of Art*, 57-58) Similarly, Ginsborg argues that aesthetic judgment 'manifests an activity which is required for all cognition.' (*The Normativity of Nature*, 46) It is, therefore, neither trivial nor so rarified as to be accessible only to a few. It is what we all share at a basic level and yet require disinterest in order to achieve at the level of experience.

[42] Guyer in Paul Guyer and Henry E. Allison, 'Dialogue: Paul Guyer and Henry Allison on Allison's *Kant's Theory of Taste*' in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Rebecca Kukla (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 98.

[43] Kirk Pillow, 'Understanding Aestheticised' in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Rebecca Kukla, (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 262-263.

Like Guyer, Pillow argues that the aesthetic can only gain significance 'so long as we are not tempted by the chimera of pure aesthetic disinterest.'[44] His approach, which seeks to build the cognitive elements of judgment back into the aesthetic as the means to give it credence, is mirrored by the vindication of the aesthetic by isolating it from cognition and positing it as a realm of pure affect or sensation.[45] Pillow offers an account of understanding that retains all the elements of ordinary determinate judgment but gives them 'an ineliminably aesthetic dimension'.[46] Kukla summarises Pillow's position that our understanding of an object

> might encompass not only determining of which general concepts it instantiates, but also grasping how to use it, its history, its relationship to other objects and human practices, its symbolic meanings, its location within a system of property rights, and so forth. Such understanding is governed not just by the ideal of truth, but also by a host of cognitive values driven by our collective interests…[47]

Although others posit that there are significant continuities between aesthetic understanding and cognitive understanding, in Pillow's case the latter takes priority and the aesthetic is given a merely supplementary function.[48] Moreover, Pillow entirely abandons the suspension of habitual modes of judgment that marks out the distinctiveness of aesthetic judgment in Kant. Only in the disjunction between ordinary and aesthetic modes of judgment can the former be placed in a new light, and brought into free play with new conceptual and affective effects. By denying disinterest, Pillow and others foreclose the interrogation of normal determination that is possible on the basis of their suspension. The point of aesthetic judgment is that we do not know (ahead of time) what will interest us, and so we are open to the discovery

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[44] Rebecca Kukla, 'Introduction: Placing the Aesthetic in Kant's Critical Epistemology' in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Rebecca Kukla (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 31.
[45] See for an account of this tendency, Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.239-261. See on sensation, Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §39, 5:291-293, 171ff. See also Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, 64.
[46] Kukla, 'Introduction' in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, 31.
[47] Ibid. 30-31.
[48] See for example, on Cavell and aesthetic understanding, J.M. Bernstein, 'Aesthetics, Modernism, Literature: Cavell's Transformations of Philosophy' in *Stanley Cavell*, Richard Eldridge (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.107-142.

of new concepts of interest, new ways of using objects (for instance in art), different historical connections, and the stultifying role of private property on such collective interests. Indeed, not only are our fundamental interests open to question by the suspension, but the meaning and constitution of the collective is crucially made newly significant. It cannot be taken for granted, and, via Kant's 'epistemologically impertinent'[49] notion of common sense and universal validity, must be given its widest definition so as to constantly include the unthought, and the heteronomous at the centre of the autonomous judging subject.

Negative Assessments of Disinterest: Political and Sociological Objections

> *The disinterested aesthetic judgment is the privilege of only those who can abstract themselves – or who believe that they can abstract themselves – from the sociological law that accords each class of society the judgments of taste corresponding to their ethos, that is, to the manner of being and of feeling that their condition imposes on them. Disinterested judgment of the formal beauty of the palace is in fact reserved for those who are neither the owners of the palace nor its builders. It is the judgment of the petit-bourgeois intellectual, who, free from the worries of work or capital, indulges him- or herself by adopting the position of universal thought and disinterested taste.*
> Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension'

Along with accusations of conceptual and psychological implausibility I presented above, Kant's account of disinterest has also attracted criticism for privileging and reifying an experience that seems only available to a certain class of people who can separate themselves from physical need. These criticisms follow Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of taste in terms of class location, as well as criticisms of the ideology of taste as implicated in the reproduction of class dynamics.[50] Before turning to the criticism that Rancière addresses directly – namely, Bourdieu's – I will briefly

[49] Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 143.
[50] See Bourdieu, *Distinction* and Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. This style of critique also reaches scholarship in analytic aesthetics and the history of philosophy; see Richard Shusterman, 'Of the scandal of taste: social privilege as nature in the aesthetic theories of Hume and Kant', pp.96-119 and David Summers, 'Why did Kant call taste a "common sense"?', pp.120-151 in *Cambridge Companion to Aesthetics*, Paul Mattick, Jr. (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

consider an attempt to describe Kant's aesthetics in democratic terms that rejects disinterest. Christopher Janaway follows Richard Wollheim's suggestion that it was Kant's '"heroic proposal"' to '"ensure the democracy of art"' by '"defining the ideal critic as one whose cognitive stock is empty, or who brings to bear upon the art zero knowledge, beliefs and concepts."'[51] Yet Wollheim is sceptical of this 'empty cognitive stock', which has '"little to recommend it but its aim. It is all but impossible to put into practice, and, if it could be, would lead to critical judgments that would be universally *un*acceptable."'[52] Janaway defends the idea of empty cognitive stock in order to uphold the idea of a democratic theory of aesthetics, however, he proposes that we must 'fight Kant's case in the arena of free beauty' that does not 'demand the nonsense of "non-conceptual engagement" with the object that is judged beautiful.'[53] Janaway believes that the

> "social mobility of aesthetic judgment"… allows, for example, that even relatively untutored children of ten [can] apprehend and judge beauty in things they encounter, even works of art, and their experience and judgment need not differ in kind from those of the world's aesthetic expert on some artist or genre.[54]

Janaway assumes that this social mobility entails a democratic potential in judgment.[55] Janaway includes the 'untutored' and immature on a 'continuum' of

> progressive mastery of conceptual distinctions… The elaborations of critical discourse enable one to see and judge beauty more finely and in more challenging material, but should not be mistaken for the acquisition of the capacity to apprehend beauty.[56]

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[51] Wollheim in Janaway, 'Kant's Aesthetics and the "Empty Cognitive Stock"', 67.
[52] Ibid. 67.
[53] Ibid. 69.
[54] Ibid. 69.
[55] It could be characterised as a progressive view, of the kind criticised by Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. I explain Rancière's position in the next chapter. Janaway's position is similar to Michael Clune's position on aesthetic education, see 'Equality and Judgment'.
[56] 'Kant's Aesthetics and the "Empty Cognitive Stock"', 69.

Aesthetic perception, for Janaway, appears as a primitive capacity that can be refined by the addition of conceptual content to judgment. This does not accord with Kant's granting the highest status in terms of aesthetic judgment to pure judgments, yet Janaway believes that the 'superior conceptualisation' of the practiced critic 'enlarges the scope of what can be experienced with pleasure.'[57] For Janaway, everyone can access the 'genuineness' of aesthetic experience, however only those with a cultivated sense can access 'authoritativeness'. He seeks to

> show (a) that critics whose cognitive stock is brim-full and actively deployed can make pure Kantian judgments of taste no less genuine than those of a critic applying a diminished conceptual repertoire; and (b) that the conceptually informed critic may excel on the dimension of authoritativeness.[58]

Janaway's argument for the democratic credentials of Kant amounts to a defensive account of the role of the critic, which entails the re-introduction of conceptual determination into the picture of pure judgments of taste. Janaway's account can be explained with Rancière's 'representative regime of the arts' in which the critic plays the role of

> evaluating and demonstrating the propriety with which the artist has managed to link the "ways of being, acting and saying" of its characters. The critic has the task of verifying whether kings speak and behave as kings are supposed to, and peasants as peasants, and revealing the implicit moral of the story.[59]

In other words, the critic not only engages in conceptual determination by linking the king to regal speech, but also determines the proper positions occupied by members of the social order. The 'untutored' and immature judge should know their place beneath the conceptually armed critic. Janaway achieves an abortive democratic account of judgment that places everyone within the sphere of taste, but ranks them

[57] Ibid. 85.
[58] Ibid. 83.
[59] Deranty, 'Democratic Aesthetics', 243.

on a continuum. His distorted account works on the basis of the exclusion of disinterest.

Janaway's ranks of taste coincides with Pierre Bourdieu's influential analysis of taste in terms of class.[60] Richard Shusterman articulates in broad terms the sociological critique of disinterest:

> But who, then, can afford to be disinterested? Who can take the time and trouble to peruse things closely with exclusive regard to their form and no regard at all to their instrumentality in satisfying wants and needs? Obviously only those who have the ease, leisure, and capacity to do so, those whose essential wants and needs are most adequately satisfied, those who have acquired the unnatural aesthetic attitude of detachment from need, of consideration of form over substance, in short the socioeconomically and culturally privileged. Only they can meet the conditions of pure aesthetic judgment and set the standards of taste.[61]

Shusterman's rendition of the critique tacitly endorses the ranking or continuum picture deployed in Janaway. The possibility of wayward experience is restricted by material conditions, with little reflection on how the latter might produce the former.[62]

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[60] See Bourdieu, *Distinction*, for instance: 'the apprehension and appreciation of the work also depend on the beholder's intention, which is itself a product of the conventional norms governing the relation to the work of art in a certain historical and social situation and also of the beholder's capacity to conform to those norms' (30). Cascardi sums up the historicist reading of aesthetic judgment, including disinterest, in the 'tradition of Marx and Louis Althusser, Kantian aesthetic theory has often been cast as part of a concealed effort on the part of idealist philosophy to confer legitimacy on a political order driven by the interests of the modern state… These and similar attempts to historicise aesthetics are designed to rescue the theory of reflective judgment from abstraction and to reduce what is sometimes regarded as the formalism of Kant's third *Critique*… In part by appealing to the notion of ideology as a mode of distortion rooted in the negation of the material basis of consciousness, such efforts purport to correct Kant's aesthetic theory by specifying both the political circumstances of its genesis [as we saw in the previous chapter] and the social objects of its analysis [as discussed in the first chapter, in relation to the commodity], thus offering a determinate point of reference for what in Kant may seem not just indeterminate but hopelessly vague and abstract.' ('The Difficulty of Art', 38-39) Cascardi argues that even these attempts to historicise aesthetics tend to involve a universalising moment in which beauty is experienced at a disjunction from the circumstances of its historical production, as I showed in the previous chapter. See ibid. 39-40.

[61] Shusterman, 'Of the scandal of taste' in *The Cambridge Companion to Aesthetics*, 115. See Bourdieu, *Distinction*: 'The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends… can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves…' (54)

[62] Cf. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2019.

He posits a threshold of 'most adequately satisfied', as though aesthetic experience were continuous with or a supererogatory bonus to the satisfaction of consumptive needs. Aesthetic experience is neither enabled by nor added to by the possession of luxurious objects nor sanctioned time for leisure. Indeed, the genealogy of disinterest reveals it to be explicitly opposed to consumptive and commercial *interests* and the atrophy of experience into the unending satisfaction of private self-interest.[63] The portrayal of the role of class supposes that the poor (timeless) and the workers (who treat everything instrumentally) 'are not capable of "being anything other than the sum of material circumstances incorporated into their habitus and ethos"'.[64] Like Bourdieu, Shusterman re-introduces the decidedly *un*Kantian notion of 'standards of taste'[65] by supposing that '[h]istorically privileged subjective preferences are reified into an ahistorical ontological standard, a necessary standard for all subjects and all times.'[66] This is an ironic way in which to criticise Kant, however, if, following Rancière, we accept that it was precisely Kant's radical disruption of the ontological standard that linked particular people to particular taste. The subjective claim judgment makes on everyone is possible only in virtue of its suspension of sectional interests. Snobbery is not what Kant called taste. Moreover, Shusterman's analysis of the reification of an ontological standard applies better, perhaps, to Bourdieu or other criticisms of aesthetics as the purview of the leisure classes, since it presumes that this is a stable category, and that the workers and wealthy who have only venal interests are also a stable category.[67] Bourdieu's sensitivity to the function of taste for social class has also led to the identification of styles of judgment, particularly in art criticism, that are typically founded on the 'effacement of any reflection on social class,' Benjamin Buchloh writes. 'After all, the enduring and comprehensive amnesia of class is a foundational condition for the culture of the neoliberalist petite

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[63] See Mieskowski, *Labours of Imagination*, 177-78, note 3.
[64] Devin Zane Shaw, *Egalitarian Moments: From Descartes to Rancière*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 109.
[65] Crowther similarly reintroduces standards of taste, modifying Kant's account such that 'whilst beauty is focused on the individual perceptual encounter, it is learnt in a social context and this entail initiation into correct and incorrect ways of applying the term.' (*The Kantian Aesthetic*, 95) 'Correct' and 'incorrect' is not a substantial part of Kant's idiom; we cannot be *wrong* in aesthetic judgment in the same way as we can be wrong about empirical judgments ('It's a goldfinch') or conceptual reasoning.
[66] Shusterman, 'Of the scandal of taste', 98.
[67] Cf Jacques Rancière, *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, David Fernbach (trans.), London: Verso, 2011, especially pp.21-33 and pp.175-232.

bourgeoisie.'[68] The disinterested beholder, for Buchloh and others, is simply a part of this bourgeois cultural paradigm and serves to disguise the function of class in the distribution of sense.[69]

These criticisms of disinterest echo Bourdieu's analysis, which, according to Mariana van Zuylen 'tends to trace even the most successful reinventions of selfhood to a tangible genealogy…'[70] Thus aesthetic experience involving autotelic contemplation or the idleness or reverie Rancière illuminates 'could not exist in [their] own right unless [their] practitioner had already cultivated the rarefied ability to contemplate with no practical end in sight… Thinking, let along daydreaming, is not a given, but a practice.'[71] Bourdieu's analysis is not only linked to a determinate relation between the location of a person in society and their taste (and power), but also to the role of the theorist or political intellectual in determining the path to emancipation.[72] Rancière writes, recalling his criticism of Althusserian Marxism,

> … the argument of ideology reads: they are where they are because they don't know why they are where they are. And they don't know why they are where they are because they are where they are. The positiv[ist] conclusion had it that they could step out of that place only if they were given a true

[68] Benjamin Buchloh, *Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2015, *xxxix*. Walter Benn Michaels makes a similar argument attacking Rancière's conception of photography as egalitarian. Michaels contends that Rancière's egalitarian aesthetics occludes the role of economic class in determining inequality and the availability of aesthetic perception. See *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, pp.43-70. See the previous chapter for critical comments on Michaels. Unlike other critics, discussed here, Michaels and Michael Clune do not repudiate disinterest, although they are critical of Kantian aesthetics. Rather, they reject the subjectivisation of aesthetic experience. See Clune, *A Defence of Judgment*.

[69] One way in which this criticism is inconsistent on its own terms is the simultaneous attribution of the ideal of aesthetic judgment to a particular class – the bourgeois – determined (mostly) by its material conditions, and at the same time, the view that this class *uses* aesthetic judgment in some way to maintain its ascendancy or hegemony. Negt and Kluge, in *The Public Sphere of Experience* attribute to the bourgeois less a disinterested aesthetic experience, than the epitome of an 'interested' experience, in the desiring sense: '"Having experience" within this [bourgeois] public sphere means to have dominant knowledge – a specialized knowledge of how to exploit this public sphere properly.' (11) As I detail below, Rancière's discussion of Gabriel Gauny's appropriation of the aesthetic gaze is aimed at complicating the link between a class identity and kind of private experience.

[70] Marina Van Zuylen, 'Dreaming Bourdieu Away: Rancière and the Reinvented Habitus' in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism*, Patrick M. Bray (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 210.

[71] Ibid. 214.

[72] For some, this is an advantage of Bourdieu's account over Rancière's insofar as the former offers a negative critique of the dis-abling inequality of normal political life. See Lois McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political: Social Weightlessness in Radical Democratic Theory*, Cambridge: Polity, 2014, 160-166.

> scientific knowledge and right artistic representation of the reasons for their being there.[73]

Bourdieu's account of aesthetics obeys the demand for a genetic account that I addressed in the last chapter. It falls into the trap of determination that installs a tautology at the heart of both aesthetic experience and political emancipation; only those who are in the right place can have it, and those who are not cannot.[74] Kant recognises the crowding force of physical necessity in determining desire and dominating attention. The disinterested mode is available if 'I already had a hut that was comfortable enough for me.'[75] The economy of Kantian aesthetics, Derrida argues, relies on the capacity of the mind to 'occupy itself, excite and satisfy itself without having any end [*but*] in view and independently of any salary.'[76]

Social distinctions of taste are undoubtedly deployed as a 'social orienting device ("*une sorte de sense de l'orientation sociale*"), maintaining subjects' attachments to particular positions in social space.'[77] For Bourdieu, taste is always an expression and function of class position and serves the reinforcement of strict boundaries. Disinterested aesthetic judgment 'as a judgment independent of all interest amounts to an illusion or a mystification.'[78] As Freed-Thall highlights, however, such an illusion is hardly successful. In fact, it is often startlingly obvious when, for instance, characters make

> fools of themselves when they try to derive cultural capital from displays of "disinterested" aesthetic pleasure. They froth at the mouth waxing poetic

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[73] Rancière, 'The Method of Equality', 275. See for instance Bourdieu, *Distinction*: 'people's image of the classification is a function of their position within it.' (473) Rancière demonstrates in 'Good Times' (*Staging the People*, pp.175-232) how the search for 'right artistic representations' in the era of aesthetics is bound to fail insofar as both representations of the real condition of workers were demoralizing and representations of 'good' workers were bad (that is, unenjoyable), lost the element of identification with the workers themselves, or were open to ironic re-interpretation by audiences in which bourgeois bohemians mixed with working class moralists and poets alike.
[74] Van Zuylen, 'Dreaming Bourdieu Away' in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism*, 214.
[75] Kant, *CJ*, 2:204-205, 10.
[76] Jacques Derrida, 'Economimesis', R. Klein (trans.), *Diacritics*, 11:2, 1981, 4.
[77] Hannah Freed-Thall, *Spoiled Distinctions: Aesthetics and the Ordinary in French Modernism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 46. See Bourdieu, *Distinction*: 'the aesthetic disposition… is also a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space…' (56)
[78] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 6.

> about Chopin, make absurdly exaggerated claims to musical sensitivity, mispronounce names, knock objects off the table, lose track of time…[79]

The apparent mystification of cultural capital is in fact perfectly obvious in ordinary speech. Wittgenstein notes that 'It is remarkable that in real life, when aesthetic judgments are made, aesthetic adjectives such as "beautiful", "fine", etc., play hardly any role at all.'[80] Aesthetic experiences are aligned as much 'with infelicitous speech acts [as] with eloquent judgments' and 'cannot be reduced to name recognition or the exercise of worldly erudition' as Janaway's account of the critic implied.[81] Freed-Thall continues, 'the aesthetic sign is inherently ambivalent: it indexes an immense and heterogeneous network of references…'[82] Even within a sociological schema, then, the relation between taste and class is far from simple. Efforts to police the relationship often fail, both in terms of the correct representations of particular classes (the king speaks like a king; the worker like a worker), and affects ordered according to the hierarchical social structure of which art objects are a product and from which aesthetic experience emerges.[83]

Negative Assessments of Disinterest: Nietzsche and the Ascetic Spectator

> *To our inert and disinterested idea of art an authentic culture opposes a violently egoistic and magical, i.e., interested idea.*
> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*

Although, as Heidegger notes, Nietzsche's criticism of Kant is a misreading, nevertheless it has been influential in branding disinterest as a bloodless and ascetic

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[79] Freed-Thall, *Spoiled Distinctions*, 30.
[80] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology & Religious Belief*, Cyril Barrett (ed.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978, 3 and '("Beautiful" is an odd word to talk about because it's hardly ever used.)' (2) See also Lionel Trilling, 'The Fate of Pleasure' in *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays*, Leon Wieseltier (ed.), New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2000: 'In our praise of [a work] we are not likely to use the word "beauty"…' (438)
[81] Freed-Thall, *Spoiled Distinctions*, 15.
[82] Ibid. 119.
[83] Rancière, 'Good Times, Or, Pleasure at the Barrière' in *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, David Fernbach (trans.), London: Verso, 2011, pp.175-232.

ideal.[84] Disinterest, for Nietzsche, represents a pallid negation of life because Kant 'gave prominence' to those 'predicates of beauty' that 'establish the honour of knowledge: impersonality and universality.'[85] Nietzsche argues that the notion of disinterest gives precedence to the passive and removed spectator over the active creativity of the artist.[86] Nietzsche accuses Kant of having

> offered us, from the beginning, definitions in which, as in Kant's famous definition of the beautiful, a lack of any refined first-hand experience reposes in the shape of a fat worm of error. "That is beautiful," said Kant, "which gives us pleasure *without interest*." Without interest! … If our aestheticians never weary of asserting in Kant's favour that, under the spell of beauty, one can *even* view undraped female statues "without interest", one may laugh a little at their expense: the experiences of *artists* on this ticklish point are more "interesting", and Pygmalion was in any event *not* necessarily an "unaesthetic man." Let us think the more highly of the innocence of our aestheticians which is reflected in such arguments; let us, for example, credit it to the honour of Kant that he should expatiate on the peculiar properties of the sense of touch with the naiveté of a country parson![87]

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[84] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art and Volume II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, David Farrell Krell (trans.), New York: Harper Collins, 1991, 110-11.
[85] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), Walter Kaufman (ed.), New York: Vintage, 1989,103. Cf Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §23, 5:245: the beautiful 'directly brings with it a feeling of the promotion of life…' (128)
[86] Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 103. Cf Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market*, 26-27. And for spectatorship in Kant, see Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Ronald Beiner (ed.), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989: 'What constituted the appropriate public realm for this particular event [i.e. the French Revolution, for Kant] were not the actors but the acclaiming spectators… And this critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator; without this critical, judging faculty the doer or maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived. Or, to put it another way, still in Kantian terms: the very originality of the artist depends on his making himself understood by those who are not artists. And while one can speak of genius in the singular because of his originality, one can never speak, as Pythagoras did, in the same way of *the* spectator. Spectators exist in the plural. The spectator is not involved in the act, but he is always involved with fellow spectators… the faculty they have in common is the faculty of judgment.' (61-63)
[87] Ibid. 103. Clive Bell agrees: 'When an ordinary man speaks of a beautiful woman he certainly does not mean that she moves him aesthetically; but when an artist calls a withered old hag beautiful he may sometimes mean what he means when he calls a battered torso beautiful… We live in a nice age. With the man-in-the-street 'beautiful' is more often than not synonymous with 'desirable'; the word does not necessarily connote any aesthetic reaction whatever, and I am tempted to believe that in the minds of many the sexual flavour of the word is stronger than the aesthetic.' ('The Aesthetic Hypothesis' in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison and Deirdre Paul (ed.), New York: Westview Press, 1987, 70)

Nietzsche finds Kantian aesthetics impoverished from the point of view of the artist. Disinterest denies what is lively about the arts for Nietzsche; Kantian aesthetics fails to affirm the activity of life, defined for Nietzsche by desire and striving for 'an optimum of favourable conditions under which it can achieve its maximal power…'[88] For Nietzsche, Kantian aesthetics takes what is vital about the pleasure of art and transmutes it into an ascetic pleasure that he associates with nihilism.[89]

Nietzsche's reading of Kant is derived from Schopenhauer's, for whom 'aesthetic contemplation… counteracts *sexual* "interestedness" and through which he is '"delivered from the vile urgency of the will".[90] However, Nietzsche specifies that Schopenhauer is 'no less sensual', and

> by no means understood the Kantian definition of the beautiful in the Kantian sense – that he, too, was pleased by the beautiful from an "interested" viewpoint, even from the very strongest, most personal interest: that of a tortured man who gains release from his torture…[91]

Nietzsche then correctly identifies that disinterest serves to suspend an overpowering interest, even if he mis-identifies the source of the interest. Nietzsche writes, '"What does it *mean* when a philosopher pays homage to the ascetic ideal?"… he wants to *gain release from a torture*.'[92] The torture for Kant is not sensuous pleasure, however,

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[88] Ibid. 107.
[89] Ibid. 92. Nietzsche's approach is taken up by Deleuze in his aesthetics, as Daniel W. Smith notes, writing 'Deleuze's aesthetic theory is not a theory of reception, an analytic of the spectator's judgments of a work of art, but a theory of aesthetics written from the point of view of creation… In light of this question,… Deleuze's philosophy of "difference" overcomes the duality with which aesthetics has been encumbered since Kant. On the one hand, in breaking with the model of recognition and common sense, and the image of thought from which they are derived, Deleuze locates the element of sensation, not in a recognisable object but in an encountered sign… The artist uses these intensive syntheses to produce a bloc of sensations… In this way, Deleuze's logic of sensation reunites the two dissociated halves of [Kantian] aesthetics: the theory of forms of experience (as "the being of the sensible") and the work of art as experimentation (as "a pure being of sensation").' (48-49) See 'Deleuze's Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Duality' in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Paul Patton (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp.29-56. For a comparison between Rancière and Deleuze's aesthetics see Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, pp.21-44. See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*: 'The more inexorably the world is ruled throughout, ever-the-same, by the universal, the more easily the rudiments of the particular are mistaken for immediacy and confused with concretion, even though their contingency is in fact the stamp of abstract necessity.' (130)
[90] Ibid. 104-105.
[91] Ibid. 105-106.
[92] Ibid. 106.

but what Nietzsche himself named the 'morality of mores and the social straitjacket' through which 'man was actually made calculable.'[93] In other words, like Kant, Nietzsche objected to the standardisation of experience under the banner of 'interests', which rendered a breadth of desires legible to political economy by transmuting them into discrete, measureable and exchangeable sensations.[94] In disinterest, Kant sought release not only from the torture of venal desire, but also from the confinement of pleasure in the frame of interest. Interest, by the late eighteenth century, serves the function of '*predictability*', specifically for the new art of modern governing, and putting people 'to good uses in human society.'[95] British aesthetics made the necessary '*je ne sais quoi*' (Shaftesbury) 'specif[iable] as the artificial, historically produced formal utility of society.'[96] The concept of interest authorizes the reification of human experience and desire so that they can be ordered and made productive for society as a whole even though they remain entirely *self-*interested or private.[97] In his pre-critical writing, Kant himself noted this tendency, as Arendt underlines:

> men… have only their best-loved selves before their eyes as the only point of reference for their exertions, and… seek to turn everything around on *self-interest* as around the great axis. Nothing can be more advantageous than this, for these are the mostly diligently ordered, and prudent; they give support and solidity to the whole, while *without intending to do so* they serve the common good.[98]

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[93] Ibid. 59.
[94] Negt and Kluge put this well in *The Public Sphere of Experience*: 'the valorization interest accommodates itself to real needs, but must simultaneously model all real needs so that it can slot them into its abstract system. Everyday experience is confronted with a confusing picture: the context of living clearly becomes part of production and the public sphere; at the same time, it is excluded because it is not recognised in its concrete totality as an autonomous whole.' (17) See Mieskowski, *Labors of Imagination* and Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*.
[95] Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 49 and 13-14. See also Judith Shklar, 'Subversive Genealogies', *Daedalus*, 101:1, Winter 1972, 144. A coterie of writers have noted the way in which certain ways of communicating judgments, such as 'Like' buttons are rendering our experience more predictable, and narrowing the range of pleasures we are able to appreciate. See for instance Richard Seymour, *The Twittering Machine*, London: The Indigo Press, 2019 and Brett Frischmann and Evan Selinger, *Re-engineering Humanity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
[96] Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgment*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, 74.
[97] Mieskowski, *Labours of Imagination*, 13-14.
[98] Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* in Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 18.

This comment vindicates Mieskowski's claim that Kant and Adam Smith 'inaugurate parallel discourses'.[99] However in the third *Critique*, disinterest operates as a counter-claim or antidote to the uniformity of interests in the new discourse of political economy.[100] Both Kant and Nietzsche oppose the hypocrisy of private reason which says that '"the passions of men who are entirely occupied in the pursuit of their private utility are transformed into a civil order which permits men to live in human society."'[101] Disinterest opposes the historical link between the Puritan asceticism and aesthetic pleasure.[102] Weber describes how the 'toleration of pleasure in cultural goods, which contributed to purely aesthetic enjoyment' was limited by the idea that 'they must not cost anything.'[103] Consumption is sanctioned by abnegating the 'spontaneous enjoyment of possessions' (what Benjamin, like Nietzsche called the festival, which more often than not involves giving *away* these possessions)[104]: 'When the limitation of consumption [for pleasure] is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through the ascetic compulsion to save.'[105] I identified this tendency in the very structure of modern experience in the first chapter, noting the accumulation of objects and stuffy interiors that Benjamin linked to the endlessness of aestheticised bourgeois contemplation of the world, and ultimately its mortification. I argue that Kant's notion of disinterest should be seen in response to these features of modernity. Kant renders the link between a specific class of people and the enjoyment of refined aesthetic pleasure defunct. However, his critics, including Bourdieu and Nietzsche, mistake this

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[99] Mieskowski, *Labors of Imagination*, *xi*.
[100] See also Miguel de Beistegui, *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.
[101] Vico in Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 17.
[102] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 114. Woodmansee, *Art, The Author and the Market*, pp.11-34.
[103] Ibid. 114. Recall Derrida's formulation above.
[104] See Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis 'Naples' in *Reflections*, 288. As Alison Ross writes, 'The seeming interpenetration of festive and ordinary days receives particular attention [*SW II*, 417]. In the same vein, in his essay on surrealism Benjamin comments on the revolutionary "virtue" of living in a glass house and praises the surrealists' acuity in perceiving the revolutionary potential in the "outmoded" [*SW II*, 209–10]. These experiences look past prosaic activities and their schedule to an everyday existence that has taken on the colour of a festival. Similarly, they disregard the received hierarchical categorising of things and attempt to bring out the significance of the discarded and the disreputable. Thus illuminated, such phenomena are credited with a unique cognitive capacity.' (*Revolution*, 2) Goethe wrote, 'The Roman carnival is a festival that is *not actually given to the people, but which the people give to themselves*.' See Ingrid Broszeit-Reiger, 'Transforming Classicism into Romanticism and Beyond in Goethe's "Roman Carnival", *Neophilologus*, 94, 2010, 130, note 9.
[105] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 115-16.

for the reification of a class-specific attitude that masks the hypocritical activity of ascetic accumulation.

Although Rancière is rare in recognizing the egalitarian implications latent in Kant's notion of disinterest, he is not alone in correcting these abiding mis-readings. Heidegger's correction of Nietzsche clarifies the Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment and adds to the remit of disinterest. Rather than sacrificing pleasure in consumption (and yet still acquiring), disinterest liberates us 'from wanting to have it for oneself as a possession, to have disposition and control over it.'[106] Heidegger argues that Nietzsche was misled by Schopenhauer into positioning disinterest as an end of aesthetic contemplation rather than understanding it by 'what it methodologically tries to achieve'.[107] Disinterest is 'preparatory and path-breaking', and should be evaluated in terms of what *remains*… when interest in the object falls away.'[108] As I have suggested above, Kant and Nietzsche's positions were much closer than Nietzsche recognised. Heidegger writes that

> … to the extent that Kant grasps more keenly the essence of interest and therefore excludes it from aesthetic behaviour, he does not make such behaviour indifferent; rather, he makes it possible for such comportment toward the beautiful object to be all the purer and more intimate. Kant's interpretation of aesthetic behaviour as "pleasure of reflection" propels us toward a basic state of human being in which man for the first time arrives at the well-grounded fullness of his essence. It is the state that Schiller conceives of as the condition of the possibility of man's existence as historical, grounding history.[109]

[106] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 109.
[107] Ibid. 110.
[108] Ibid. 110. Adorno associates an interpretation of Kantian disinterest with the idea of art as 'the plenipotentiary of a better praxis than that which has to date predominated, but is equally the critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the hear of the status quo and in its service.' (*Aesthetic Theory*, 15) As I describe below, Heidegger's view implies that Kantian aesthetic disinterest methodologically opens different ways of valuing, and Adorno similarly argues that 'art does not come to rest in disinterestedness. For disinterestedness immanently reproduces – and transforms – interest.' (Ibid. 16)
[109] Ibid. 115-16

For Heidegger, disinterest opens up experience for 'unconstrained favouring' that 'release[s] what has proper worth in itself'.[110] Although Heidegger's reading of disinterest is distinct from Rancière's,[111] they share the view that the annulling force of disinterest is also a moment of possibility related to the realization of human freedom.[112]

Rancière's Reading of Kant: Disinterest and Gabriel Gauny's 'Personalised Paraphrase'

> *Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of the room so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out onto the garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms a moment and glides in imagination towards the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighbouring residences.*
> Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*

In his account of Kant, Rancière is guided by the discovery in the archive of French workers' journals the experience of disinterested aesthetic pleasure. This discovery vindicates Rancière's use of Kant's description of disinterested judgment for egalitarian politics and gives weight to the historical and psychological realization of aesthetic experience for unlikely subjects. Rancière returns to the 'personalised paraphrase' of the Analytic of the Beautiful numerous times in his writing on history

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[110] Ibid. 109.
[111] For further comparison of Heidegger and Rancière, see Tina Chanter, *Art, Politics and Rancière*, pp.121-143. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics is at odds with his broader characterization of modern aesthetics, for which see Ingvild Torsen, 'Disinterest and Truth: On Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant's Aesthetics', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 56:1, 2016, pp.15-32. For instance, like Gadamer (as I discuss in the introduction to the thesis), Heidegger identifies Kant's aesthetics as 'subjectivist': 'The subjectivist thesis emphasizes the subject of aesthetic experience and the object is considered only insofar as it occasions such an experience. By contrast, Heidegger thinks of the event of art as primary, since it is the event that sets up this relationship in which subject and object are moments. This more primordial happening, what we might call the precondition for the aesthetic comportment, is overlooked by the subjectivist thesis.' (18)
[112] They both also read Kant to some extent through Schiller, see Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 108 and Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays*, London: Verso, 2018, 62. See Rancière, 'From Politics to Aesthetics?', *Paragraph*, 28:1, 2005: 'the Kantian assertion of a specific sensorium invalidating the hierarchy of form and matter or understanding and sensibility, and the Schillerian conceptualization of the aesthetic state, proved to be much closer to the social experience of emancipation than the Bourdieusian analysis in terms of aesthetic illusion.' (15)

and aesthetics.[113] For Rancière, Gabriel Gauny's recounting of his experience on an unfinished job animates the claim that aesthetic experience is available to anyone, including those for whom the demands of physical necessity are a pervasive feature of existence. In another moment, Rancière records Gauny's search for work as a joiner:

> If his inquiring efforts are fruitless, he puts off his pursuit of work to the next day and walks for a long time to satisfy his need for action and to enjoy, as a plebian philosopher, the ravishing nonchalance of liberty, which is filled to overflowing with serenity and energy by the pomp of the sun, the breath of the wind, and his own thoughts in line with the impetuosities of nature.[114]

In both instances, the necessity of labour is put off and interrupted by the double negation of aesthetic experience. Rancière highlights the purposelessness of the experience by emphasizing that the work is unfinished or unfound. The worker's pleasure is not predicated on the fulfillment of his work or satisfaction of a need or desire. Nor, as the phrase 'better than the possessors' underscores, is the worker's pleasure envious or acquisitive. Disinterest in Rancière's reading relates not only to a disruption of the ordinary ways of perceiving, but also to the disordering of who is expected to perceive what. Rancière writes that

> the place where the joiner works becomes a viewpoint from which the surrounding edifices and their perspective are no longer seen as objects of knowledge, desire and frustration… The "disinterested" look at the palace and the look of the floor-layer through the window disrupt the set of relations linking what people see with what they do, and what they do with what they are, and what they are with what they can do and be.[115]

Rancière's reading of Kant through the 'personalised paraphrase' accentuates the suspension of ordinary experience in disinterested aesthetic judgment. Kant's successive qualifications in the passage describing the appreciation for the palace are

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[113] See primarily *Proletarian Nights*, as well as 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 7 and *The Emancipated Spectator*, 71.
[114] Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, 83.
[115] Rancière, 'Aesthetic Heterotopia', 20. See also 'The Politics of Aesthetic Indetermination', 25.

echoed in Rancière paraphrasing of Gauny's description of the quality of aesthetic experience. In similar terms to Winckelmann's appreciation of the *Torso*, Gauny elevates the unfinished status of the work, rupturing the link to an ideal of perfection or to the utility of the residence. Gauny's is an appreciation of mere form.

Rancière's paraphrase works in the vein of Kant, but also responds to the Marxist tradition, which, as I described above, links the possibility of aesthetic experience directly to class location, and describes the identity of the worker in terms that restrict the scope of feeling available to them. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx offers an account of the alienation of the worker from himself: 'The worker… only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is *at home* when he is not working, and *when he is working he is not at home*.'[116] Yet Gauny's writing suggests that the conjunction between material location and experience does not neatly produce alienation.[117] Material exploitation does not necessarily subject the worker to a particular quality of experience. Indeed, it is the unlikeliness of the worker's aesthetic appreciation that makes Gauny stand out, and it is the possibility of such a disjunction or suspension of the relation between pleasure and work that makes aesthetics a productive site for emancipation. For Rancière, aesthetic experience is defined by a

> disjunction between sensible equipment and the ends that it must serve. The joiner agrees with Kant on a decisive point: the singularity of aesthetic experience is the singularity of an as if. The aesthetic judgment acts as if the palace were not an object of possession or domination. The joiner acts as if he possessed the perspective.[118]

The exploitation of the worker's body does not determine the worker's experience. The rhythm of work itself is interrupted by an aesthetic experience. Moreover, the association between middle-class and bourgeois leisure and aesthetic capacity is

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[116] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 74, my emphasis.
[117] Marx's distinction between 'work' and 'home' was not experienced as such by workers; the identity of the worker is founded on a link to 'work', while homes could be sites of disobedience and conformity to workplace expectations and morals. See Jacques Rancière, *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, David Fernbach (trans.), London: Verso, 2011.
[118] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 8.

interrupted by the worker's disidentification. He no longer works, and he no longer *feels* as a worker ought to feel. It is a moment of disidentification defined not by new political action or identity but by their suspension.[119]

Disinterest persists in Rancière's characterization of aesthetic experience, and provides the theoretical framework for some of the rich descriptions he highlights in artistic works. For example, in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Rancière describes Julien's happiness in terms of 'a simple formula: to enjoy the quality of sensible experience that one reaches when one stops calculating, wanting and waiting, as soon as one resolves to do nothing.'[120] Like the joiner, Gauny, the experience emerges from a suspension of everyday modes of perception, 'thinking of nothing except the present moment, enjoying nothing other than the pure feeling of existence, and maybe the pleasure of sharing it with an *equally* sensible soul.'[121] According to Alison Ross, the experience Rancière describes by reference to Kant is an amalgamation of 'seemingly incompatible' notions of

> the timeless reverie (Stendhal-Kant-Rousseau) and the knowledge that dissolves action in its return state of non-knowledge (Ibsen-Freud-Nietzsche)… The fusion of active and passive, of the axes of sense making in the dissolution of meaning, intimate that meaning now emerges from the absence of sense. They signal that sense and non-sense have changed positions and significations.[122]

The aesthetic regime of art makes visible a new form of experience newly available in modernity in which the disruption of sense takes precedence over the ordering of materials. Reverie and disruption work together in the new age of industrial capitalism.

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[119] We should not, then, mistake – as Walter Benn Michaels does in *The Beauty of a Social Problem* – the moment of aesthetic equality for a realization of political equality. I have already discussed the separation of art and life in Rancière's work in the previous chapter, and the same demarcation applies here. Rancière *is* interested in the aesthetic disruption of the sensible as an invalidation of hierarchies, but he does not assume that they materially disappear in this moment of disruption.
[120] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 45.
[121] Ibid. 45.
[122] Alison Ross, 'The Conception of the Will in Rancière's Aesthetic Regime of the Arts: Pathos and Reverie in Stendhal, Ibsen, and Freud' in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism*, Patrick M. Bray (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 195.

Nevertheless, disinterest is not a practical principle of political struggle for Rancière. The egalitarian principle in aesthetic experience does not translate into either material equality, the dissolution of classes or ideology or political action. It does not, as Walter Benn Michaels suggests, negate inequality or compensate for material domination.[123] Aesthetic experience is characterized instead by a 'neutralisation' of activity and passivity, which Rancière derives from Schiller's

> play drive – the drive that suspends the form and sense drives, and is thus his version of Kantian disinterest – leading not only to the notion of activity without a goal, but "an activity that is equal to inactivity", and further contrasts play's freedom with "the servitude of work".[124]

In the case of the artwork, like Murillo's 'beggar boys' described in Hegel's lectures on fine art, 'the freedom of the work signifies its indifference to its represented content.'[125] In the case of the beholder, aesthetic experience, like reverie, 'dislocates prevailing schemas of division of labour in so far as it supposes the cessation of labour… Crucially, it is the disengaged status of the will from action that motivates [Rancière's] analysis.'[126] Similarly, the role of the will is disengaged from ends in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment, which, according to Friedlander, 'never aims to achieve anything but only to exhibit the capacity for judgment itself.'[127] Rancière develops this quality of aesthetic experience in connection with an egalitarian politics. Doing nothing means 'annulling *hic et nunc* the barriers of social hierarchy and the torment of confronting them, in the equality of pure sensation, in the uncalculated sharing of the sensible moment.'[128] Such an experience claims political significance not because it proves, finally, an equality that was ignored or occluded by ideology or

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[123] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem*, 58-59. See also for evaluative comments on Michaels and critical analysis of his discussion of aesthetics, Knox Peden, 'To Have Done with Alienation: or, How to Orient Oneself in Ideology', in *The Concept in Crisis:* Reading Capital *Today*, Nick Nesbitt (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, pp.70-89.
[124] J.M. Bernstein, 'Movies as the Great Democratic Art Form of the Modern World (Notes on Rancière)' in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2012, 25.
[125] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 30.
[126] Ross, ''The Conception of the Will in Rancière's Aesthetic Regime of the Arts' in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism*, 182.
[127] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 17.
[128] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 52.

inequality. Rather, the political significance of the experience is its rupture from the determinations made about people on the basis of such inequality. It interrupts and suspends – for a moment, here and now – the

> question of to whom the perspective actually belongs in the same way the Kantian beholder has to ignore the vanity and sweat of the people incorporated in the palace. This ignorance is not a lack of knowledge. It is a shift in the distribution of knowledge and ignorance, a shift in the relation between the science of means and the science of ends.[129]

Not only does such a shift offer a rejoinder to the assumption that there is a clear path between art and politics, and in fact disrupts both the progressive and the conservative attempts to claim art for its own, this shift reveals possibilities for egalitarian reconfigurations. Rancière opens up the possibility of reading Kant's account of disinterest as directed against a hegemonic notion of interest that incorporates each and every claim into its determining schema.

As Rockhill identifies, Gauny exemplifies the disjunction with 'the determined sensory registers of experience' for Rancière.[130] Gauny's case illustrates the disjunction between

> an entire sensory framework imposed by the dominant order, a framework that dictates ways of seeing, speaking, acting, and thinking, as well as a specific distribution of space and time. However, when he gazes out the window, he breaks with this dominant order; he creates a fissure within the system of determination by appropriating the privileged activity – spectatorship – of the aesthete.[131]

Rockhill notes that this does not negate Gauny's exploitation as a worker, but it reveals the possibility of appropriating a space within that exploitation, and exposes the contingency and moments of excess of the dominant order of sense. Not only is

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[129] Rancière, 'Aesthetic Heterotopia', 20.
[130] Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 174.
[131] Ibid. 174.

Gauny's experience exemplary of the aesthetic disruption of the distribution of the sensible, it is also exemplary of the connection between aesthetics and politics. Rancière's description of Gauny turns the experience into a labour strike in miniature, 'the bell no longer makes itself heard or, above all, heeded, [so] the master is dispossessed of the sovereignty of his gaze and is no more than the accountant of social exploitation…'[132] It is not, however, a strike for better working conditions, 'not just a bargain promising the master a better return in exchange for the freedom of the worker's movements but the formation of a type of worker belonging to a different history than that of mastery.'[133] As such, the politics that result from aesthetic experience do not 'produce politics proper by creating a *we* of collective enunciation.'[134] The question of the collective voice directly connects aesthetics and politics.[135] For Rancière, the political question of who speaks for whom is in part also a question of '[w]hich subjects are able to see and voice what is common', just as 'aesthetic description is in its proper place in a revolutionary newspaper [like the one Gauny writes in] because this dismantling of the worker's body of experience is the condition for a worker's political voice.'[136] Aesthetics provides for Rancière a space within which the prevailing relations between the voice, identity and experience are held in suspense.[137]

Although the specific indetermination that bothers Rockhill amongst others[138] can be viewed in terms of Rancière's political background, and the appropriation of the voice of the workers by 'New Philosophers' in the post-'68 era,[139] this indetermination also has a philosophical pedigree in Kant's account of common sense and the universal

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[132] Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, 82.
[133] Ibid. 82.
[134] Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, 175.
[135] I consider the concept of the voice in more detail in the final chapter using the work of Stanley Cavell.
[136] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 8-9. See also Rancière, 'From Politics to Aesthetics?', *Paragraph*, 28:1, 2005, 13.
[137] See Rancière, 'Work, Identity and Subject' in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2012, pp.205-216, and Rancière, 'Politics, Identification and Subjectivisation' *October*, 61, 1992, pp.58-64 for the triangulation of these terms.
[138] Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, 174-176. See also my evaluation of Walter Benn Michaels (in *The Beauty of a Social Problem*) and Michael W. Clune ('Judgment and Equality') in the previous chapter.
[139] See Rancière and Danielle Rancière, 'The Philosopher's Tale: Intellectuals and the Trajectory of *Gauchisme*', *The Intellectual and His People*, London: Verso, 2012, pp.75-100. See also Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002 which I discuss further below.

voice in the *Critique of Judgment*. Rockhill's criticism also recalls the separation of aesthetics and politics I elucidated in the previous chapter, illustrating how any attempt to represent the experience of an individual as exemplary of the collective is subject to the same dispersive power that produced the individual experience in the first place.[140] Rancière writes, 'The course from proletarian to apostle is unthinkable in terms of career.'[141] The 'home' created by Gauny's day dream in the unfinished room has

> nothing to do with the patriarchal daydreams of those philanthropists who would like to reconstruct the lost unity of work and the family order through the ordered disposition of social palaces… Being at home means fleeing the workshop of the master, but not for the sake of a place more inhabited by human warmth or humanitarian kindness. Fleeing, on the contrary, to that deserted space that is not yet a residence: a vacant place where the masons have finished their work but the owners have not yet installed their belonging – hence, a place where for this brief interval the constraint is broken that wedges the labourer between the entrepreneur, master of work, and the bourgeois man, master of the proprietary order, so that the floor-layer will be able to arrange a staging of his work that will be both the semblance of his ownership and the reality of his liberty.[142]

Gauny's experience is exemplary for the way it escapes classification, and embodies a kind of freedom that cannot be defined with the terms of the society or politics in which he lives and is engaged.[143] Aesthetic experience points to what is common not

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[140] Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, 175-176.
[141] Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, 76.
[142] Ibid. 78-79.
[143] Rancière contests the characterisation of Kantian aesthetic experience that is common in critical theory. Alongside Eagleton (see *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*), Negt and Kluge's more interesting re-framing of experience that recalls Benjamin still maintains that 'The bourgeois property owners – the raw material of the Kantian construct – were not interested in the formation of public *experience*. Their knowledge of the market is [necessarily] private.' (*The Public Sphere of Experience*, 11) I discussed the way the modern concept of 'interests' intersects in political economy and aesthetics to limit our concept of experience above. Robert Pippin also notes that it is characteristic of the contempt the bourgeois class that they 'cannot act as the nobleman paradigmatically acts – *independently*, in majestic indifference to what unworthy others think of what he does.' (*The Persistence of Subjectivity*, 3) The bourgeois are thus paradigmatically *interested*. Suspicion for the new merchant class runs through nineteenth century English fiction as a trope, as Mrs Reed demonstrates by sneering at Jane Eyre's 'kinfolk': '"she called him afterwards a 'sneaking tradesman.' My Robert believes he was a wine-merchant."' (Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992, 80) See also

by gathering or locating a common identity but by making space, and neutralizing existing identities and their grip over the possibility of common experience. Rancière's account of Kantian common sense emphasizes this aspect of disidentification and the possibility of a disruption that re-opens the definition of the common experience.

Evaluating Rancière's Reading of Kant: Lyotard and the Sublime

> *This extreme experience of the inhuman confronts no impossibility of representation; nor is there a language peculiar to it.*
> Jacques Rancière, 'Are Some Things Unrepresentable?'

Rancière's reading of Kant is consciously selective and directed against other readings that limit the availability of aesthetic experience or restrict its scope and political significance. I have described Bourdieu's class critique of aesthetics and Rancière's response above. Here I address Rancière's argument for the significance of the Analytic of the Beautiful over the Analytic of the Sublime in Kant's *Critique*, and his opposition to Lyotard's appropriation of the sublime in the name of ethical obligation. Rancière's preference for beauty is unusual in recent French philosophy, which, although finding in 'reflective judgment a way of thinking singularity', exhibits a predilection for the sublime.[144] Deleuze and Lyotard inflate the significance of the sublime, which, in the wake of the failure to complete the critical project and 'restore unity to philosophy', provides a principle of excess or a gesture beyond, what Deleuze calls 'the emancipation of dissonance.'[145] Derrida's assessment is, according to Ross, 'less generous' than Deleuze, however 'closer to the valence Kant intends for

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Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, London: Collins, 2011: '"I might ha' been nothing just as good for nothing as Mrs Fitz-Adam's Rosy, who struck for wages… I said I was not one to go and serve Mammon at that rate…"' (171; also 176-177)

[144] See for a brief survey of recent French philosophical views on Kantian aesthetics, Alison Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 176-178, note 6. See also Jean-Luc Nancy et al., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, Jeffrey S. Librett (trans.), Albany, New York: State University Of New York Press, 1993.

[145] Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 1 and Deleuze, *Essays Clinical and Critical*, 35. See also Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, 50-52.

the various parts of his final *Critique*.'[146] For example, Derrida notes that the negative pleasure of the sublime 'suspends play and elevates to seriousness [sic]. In that measure it constitutes an occupation related to the moral law. It has an essential relation to morality (*Sittlichkeit*), which presupposes also violence done to the senses.'[147] In contrast, Lyotard attributes precisely to sensation the power of excess: 'Only through its sensation can the thought that imagines be aware of this "presence" without presentation.'[148] For both Deleuze and Lyotard, the sublime unravels the subject of Kantian aesthetic experience. 'There is a tempest in the chasm opened up inside the subject,' writes Deleuze.[149] Lyotard maintains that Kant's *sensus communis* and the pleasure in the beautiful rests on the unity of the subject's faculties, whose 'synthesis in aesthetical [sic] pleasure is at the same time more radical, less graspable, and wider in scope' than the 'originary synthetic unity of apperception' of the first *Critique*.[150] For Lyotard, the 'affinity' of the faculties cannot be described as 'experienced by the subject' since it is temporally prior: 'This is why each pleasure in beauty is a birth.'[151] As Lacoue-Labarthe notes, with the sublime 'the ground of aesthetics itself begins to yawn.'[152] Both Lyotard and Lacoue-Labarthe argue that Kant's sublime poses a problem for presentation, however the differences in their formulations are illustrative of the tendency towards hypertrophic experience. Lyotard's formula for the sublime posits '"presenting that the unpresentable exists"', or, as Lacoue-Labarthe puts it 'to take up the formula of Lyotard, the presentation (of this:) that there is the nonpresentable.'[153] Lyotard's view 'substantialises or hypostatises' the unpresentable, as separate from presentation, whereas Lacoue-Labarthe argues that 'the problem that needs to be addressed is "that there is presentation, not *of* what is beyond presentation, but *that* there is something beyond presentation."… The difference in other words is between the Kantian demarcation of

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[146] Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy*, 172, note 6. See Derrida, 'Economimesis', 21-22 and *The Truth in Painting*, 103-135.
[147] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 130. See Kant, *CJ*, 5:267: 'That is *sublime* which pleases immediately through its resistance to the interest of the senses.' (150)
[148] Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 152.
[149] Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 35.
[150] Jean-Francois Lyotard, '*Sensus communis*: The Subject in *statu nascendi*', Marian Hobson (trans.) in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (ed.), New York and London: Routledge, 1991, 232.
[151] Ibid. 233.
[152] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'Sublime Truth' in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, Jeffrey S. Librett (trans.), Albany, New York: State University Of New York Press, 1993, 83.
[153] Ibid. 74.

the limits of presentation *within* presentation, from the *hypostatization* in presentation of *what* is beyond it.'[154]

Alongside Lacoue-Labarthe's criticism of the treatment of presentation and the unpresentable in Lyotard, Rancière contributes a broader criticism of the politics and temporality of the unpresentable, and its associated deconstruction of the subject. For Rancière, 'thoughts of tomorrow establish themselves in the twilight times that begin with the advent of the unthinkable.'[155] Moreover, Rancière suggests that 'discourse on time and discourse on the other constitute a common system and closure.'[156] The proclamation of the limit of presentation or the end of the subject makes room, Rancière argues, for 'a discourse whose gravity of utterance is due to its accounting for the common destiny of humanity, but which at the same time divides (as in the seventh book of the *Laws*) the watchman of the beginning of the night from the sleep of the oblivious masses.'[157] This echoes Rancière's critique of the posture of intellectual mastery and the designation of specific roles that divides and occludes the distribution of the sensible.[158] The denunciation of the subject exacted by the likes of Lyotard stands in contrast to Rancière's own attempt 'to deconstruct the fiction' of the

> privileged *other* of political modernity' by investigating historical events in which 'individuals separated from their fellows because they had been led

[154] Ross, 'The Art of the Sublime: Lyotard and the Politics of the Avant-Garde', *Philosophy Today*, 49:1, 2005, 44 note 29. See Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, 90.
[155] Jacques Rancière, 'After What', Christina Davis (trans.) in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (ed.), New York and London: Routledge, 1991, 247. For an account of the use of historical catastrophe and the temporality of trauma that is similar to Rancière's criticism of Lyotard, see Ruth Leys criticism of Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma in *Trauma: A Genealogy*, pp.266-297. Leys comments that Caruth's 'commitment to making victimhood unlocatable in any particular person or place' permits it to 'migrate and spread contagiously to others.' (296) Caruth's concept of trauma shares with Lyotard's the problem of something beyond presentation, since it is defined not by its representation or experience by only ever by the rupture in representation. It is, then, essentially unpresentable, and the (ethical) role of the scholar is simply to passively bear witness (268-269).
[156] Ibid. 251.
[157] Ibid. 248. At the end of the adventurous deconstruction of the subject, Rancière also notes a reactionary moment when 'the guardian of the temple announces betrayal by the corporation: we must return to the previous assurance of the subject who gathers meanings and assigns values… Yet again, the corporation, once proud of daring voyages far from the paternal lands of the subject, closes ranks in order to protect from any attempt at parricide the thinker of the end of metaphysics…' (247) This is a none-too-subtle portrait of the 'New Philosophers', for which see below for a brief discussion.
[158] See Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, and see also the following chapter for a critique of intellectual mastery.

> into circuits of a word come from elsewhere and drawn into endorsing the discourse of class and the movement, to give them an identity precisely because they could not create it on their own.[159]

Since the hypostatization of the 'beyond' empties out the subject and further disconnects it from historical events (like Lyotard's concept of the avant-garde)[160], Rancière suggests that 'discourse on time and discourse on the other constitute a common system and closure.'[161] A similar problem occurs in Lyotard's analysis of the avant-garde and modernist art.

Lyotard analysed the sublime as an experience of both radical separation from ordinary experience and the foundation of ethical obligation, both in his readings of Kant and writings on art and the avant-garde.[162] Rancière shares with Lyotard the description of aesthetic experience as a suspension of interests and calculation that characterizes determinate judgment under capitalism.[163] 'For Lyotard the techno-scientific mechanisms of the capitalist marketplace assert the hegemony of the will over time, or in Kantian parlance, the use of nature (here materials) for our ends (the economic means of innovation which is without any greater end).'[164] Lyotard writes that the 'experience of the human subject – individual and collective – and the aura that surrounds this experience, are being dissolved into the calculation of profitability, the satisfaction of needs, self-affirmation through success.'[165] Lyotard 'inverts' Kant's articulation of the feeling of the sublime:

> Instead of a privation of an object, seen as inadequate to the thought of the subject and the negative use of nature that is its correlate, there is in avant-garde art a privation of the mind's presumption of its control over time…

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[159] Ibid. 250.
[160] Ross, 'The Art of the Sublime': Lyotard's definition of the sublime 'acts as a principle of authenticity that cuts art works off from their status as events to furnish a ready-made criterion for their judgment.' (41)
[161] Rancière, 'After What' in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, 251.
[162] See Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* and *The Inhuman* especially, pp.108-118 and pp.135-143.
[163] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 111.
[164] Ross, 'The Art of the Sublime', 38.
[165] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 105.

> This asceticism defines the avant-garde against the structure of novelty in the capitalist economy whose end is consumer gratification [without end].[166]

Lyotard enshrines the value of 'indeterminacy' in Burke's observations on the sublime, and applies it to the sequence of avant-garde artistic movements throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[167] In aesthetic experience, for Lyotard, the urgency and immiseration of experience under the pressure of work 'stops. With the occurrence, the will is defeated. The avant-gardist task remains that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation.'[168] Lyotard contrasts this with the beautiful, proposing that Kant's *Critique* contains two different aesthetics.[169] The sublime is

> not regulated by taste. That taste is a disinterested pleasure which in principle can be shared, and which proceeds from the free accord between the faculty of conceiving an "object" and that of presenting in the sensible field an example of that "object". Avant-garde painting escapes *ex hypothesi* from the aesthetic of the beautiful, its works do not call for the "common sense" of shared pleasure.[170]

Lyotard's reading makes the mistake of assuming that the end of aesthetic judgment is to classify objects as beautiful and present them as an example that unifies the public's taste.[171] But, Rancière argues, it is 'pointless to argue that Lyotard has misread Kant. It would be more relevant to ask why he reads Kant the way he does.'[172] Although scholars have debated whether the Analytic of the Sublime properly belongs in Kant's critical project, Rancière is not interested in disputes about

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[166] Ross, 'The Art of the Sublime', 38.
[167] Ibid. 101.
[168] Ibid. 107.
[169] Lyotard, '*Sensus communis*' in *Who Comes After the Subject?*: 'Kant resists with all his might an aesthetic of matter. At least when beauty is in question. For the sublime, it is another matter.' (228)
[170] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 125.
[171] Rancière notes that Lyotard 'collages' Burke with Kant to produce the category that has no place in Kant's *Critique* of 'sublime art'. See *The Future of the Image*, 132. My discussion here is not about the status of the image or (re)presentation, however, as Rancière identifies, there is a contradiction in the concept of sublime art as Lyotard conceives it: 'one cannot have sublimity both in the form of the commandment prohibiting the image and in the form of an image witnessing to the prohibition.' (132)
[172] Rancière, 'The sublime from Lyotard to Schiller', 10. Lyotard admits as much in the opening of his reading: 'This book does not exempt one from reading Kant's text; on the contrary, it requires one to read it.' (*Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, *ix*)

Kant's original intention.[173] Rather, he criticizes Lyotard for the way in which what Engström calls 'an excessive concern for concepts of the excessive' lends itself to the re-establishment of either conceptual mastery or ethical subordination (or both).[174]

Although in both the sublime and the beautiful there is an initial break with interest, Lyotard argues that a kind of purified interest in the ethical returns in the sublime.[175] The mind, when confronted with 'an anti-landscape [that] exceeds all putting into form, the more the power of pure (practical) reason finds itself "extended" or actualized, the more its greatness is revealed.'[176] He writes, 'In this way the sublime is none other than the sacrificial announcement of the ethical in the aesthetic field… This heralds the end of an aesthetics, that of the beautiful, in the name of the final destination of the mind, which is freedom.'[177] This sacrifice of aesthetic disinterest clears the ground for 'a pure, disinterested obedience' to a principle that is radically heteronymous to human reason and unpresentable.[178] In trying to avoid the calculating economy that Lyotard perceives in the beautiful, in which nature and the mind 'fit' each other,[179] he elevates the sublime overcoming of representation to

> the *condition* of respect… This surrender also disorganizes the very principle of practical reason, which is precisely the unconditioned of the law and the regard owed to it. Thus the general economy of the faculties is affected by this crisis.[180]

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[173] See for instance Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012, 126, note 1.
[174] Timothy H. Engström, 'The Postmodern Sublime?: Philosophical Rehabilitations and Pragmatic Evasions', *boundary 2*, 20:2, 1993, 191.
[175] Lyotard's connection of an aesthetic to the ethical through the sublime is not the only way in which moral significance appears in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment, as Lyotard admits (see *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, pp.159-190). Alison Ross connects disinterest with the recognition of moral vocation, arguing that 'the refined pleasure won in the disinterest of taste mirrors the feeling of elevation that occurs when one follows the edicts of moral law rather than the calculations of self-interest.' ('The Moral Efficacy of Aesthetic Experience', 405) See also Dieter Henrich, *The Moral Image of the World*, pp.3-28.
[176] Lyotard, *Lesson*, 187. See Kant, *CJ*, 5:274: 'where the senses no longer see anything before them, yet the unmistakable and inextinguishable idea of morality remains…' (156)
[177] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 137.
[178] Lyotard, *Lesson on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 189.
[179] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 137
[180] Lyotard, *Lesson on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 190.

Rancière notes that Lyotard's inversion of the 'aesthetic promise' that 'inscribe[s] in the practice of art the necessity of the ethical detour' also fails to sustain the disruptive moment.[181] By making the 'unpresentable' the principle of the disruption between 'the perceptible and the intelligible', Lyotard provides

> an exit from the representative universe – that is, from a universe defining criteria of unrepresentability. If there is a failing of the representative adjustment, it means, contrary to Lyotard, that exhibition and signification can be harmonized *ad infinitum*, and that their point of agreement is everywhere and nowhere.[182]

As well as this philosophical disagreement, the sublime and the unpresentable that ushers it in also play a dubious political role. The role of the unpresentable in enacting or inciting the 'end' of aesthetics turns the philosopher into a privileged interpreter of something that cannot, in principle, appear for everyone.[183] As Rancière warns, agreement is 'everywhere and nowhere'. This move withdraws experience from communicability, as was the tendency of some post-war European thought. Kristin Ross provides context for this tendency among the so-called 'New Philosophers' in France, who 'wielded the weapon of scale, rendering every action negligible or suspect, dwarfed or criminalized in the face of the twin catastrophes of the Gulag and the Holocaust.'[184] As I argued in my introduction, experience on this view is caught between hypertrophic catastrophe that insists that the aesthetic must terminate in the ethical, and the literalism of mute sensation.[185] Both sought to break with the norms

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[181] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes', 150.
[182] Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 123.
[183] See Rancière, 'After What' in *Who Comes After the Subject?*. See also Leys, *Trauma*: 'The transmission of the unrepresentable – a transmission imagined by Caruth simultaneously as an ineluctable process of infection and as involving an ethical obligation on the part of the listener – therefore implicates those of us who were not there by making us, as Dori Laub has put it, participants and coowners of the traumatic event… [F]or Caruth… an act of narration risks betraying the truth of the trauma defined as an incomprehensible event that defies all representation. Accordingly, she calls for a mode of responding to trauma that ensures the transmission of the break or gap in meaning that constitutes history as inherently traumatic. From this perspective, if history is a symptom of trauma it is a symptom which must not, indeed cannot, be cured but simply transmitted, passed on.' (269)
[184] Kristin Ross, 'Historicising Untimeliness' in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 21.
[185] This tendency occurs among readers of Rancière such as Davide Panagia (see *Rancière's Sentiments* for example). See also Laura Quintana, 'Jacques Rancière and the Emancipation of Bodies', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 45:2, 2019, pp.212-238 for a reading of Rancière inflected by a focus on 'affect'. In debating his conception of the aesthetic interruption of politics, Linda Zerilli contends (echoing Rancière's point that the regime of 'rules' is liable to be re-instated after the sublime rupture)

and standards of the representative regime, but Lyotard and others 'sought to locate the ruin of representation and the watchword of modernity in sublime disproportion.'[186] Unlike the beautiful, which introduces a gap between art and life as the previous chapter argued, the 'power of the sublime' was a

> supplement that sent art's rules back and savoir-faire back to their living source, and thus allowed them to verify their agreement with the affects of sensible being in general. The sublime supplement sanctified the supreme principle of representative logic: harmony, at the heart of one and the same nature, between the abilities implemented in the production of the arts and the affects of those for whom they were destined.[187]

Lyotard's analysis of aesthetics ironically shares with Bourdieu the posture of mastery in which the philosopher is uniquely able to decipher the ethical significance or ideological illusion in the aesthetic. Although both accounts are presented as though they prioritise a concrete moment of affect or social knowledge, they require the elevation of the position of the scholar above the mute material.[188] This elevation renders the subject of history (or putative bearer of social knowledge) mute and passive, since 'beyond the subject… remains only consent to *is happening*, in which *some* one can substitute for any other in the darkness of the indiscernible.'[189] The aesthetic rupture of the beautiful, in which the quality of experience is rendered indifferent to social positions, is repaired by the theorist's establishment of a new connection on the basis of a special decipherment. Although Bourdieu and Lyotard's versions of a critique of aesthetics are quite distinct, the function of the philosopher in both instances is to settle the interruption into either scientific knowledge or ethical obligation. Crucially, they rely on a non-aesthetic moment that blocks the availability

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'what punctured subjects have in common is not the world but the uncommunicable experience of its loss… [Limit experiences like puncturing] could just as well lead us back to those very known rules that any such experience might challenge, or it might lead to complete indifference and so undermine care for the world.' ('Judging Politically', *Political Theory*, 46:4, 2016, 638) See also Jason Franks, 'Jacques Rancière's Politics of the Ordinary', *Distributions of the Sensible: Rancière, between Aesthetics and Politics*, Scott Durham and Dilip Gaonkar, Northwestern University Press, 38-39.

[186] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 10.

[187] Ibid. 10.

[188] For Lois McNay, the emphasis on concrete social suffering in Bourdieu (and to some extent Axel Honneth) contrasts with the 'social weightlessness' of accounts of radical democracy in thinkers like Chantal Mouffe and Rancière. See *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 2014.

[189] Rancière, 'After What' in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, 250.

of the experience of interruption to anyone. For Lyotard it is the unpresentable, while for Bourdieu it is the structural inability of people to know the cause of their own ignorance.

Disinterest and Disidentification: Ordinary and Common Experience

> *Taste judges the world in its appearance and in its worldliness; its interest in the world is purely "disinterested"… Wherever people judge the things of the world that are common to them, there is more implied in their judgments than these things. By his manner of judging, the person discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is, and this disclosure, which is involuntary, gains in validity to the degree that it has liberated itself from merely individual idiosyncrasies.*
> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*

Although Rancière's account of the aesthetic seeks to preserve its difference from ordinary experience, nevertheless it is compatible with interpretations of Kant that emphasise the continuity between ordinary and aesthetic experience. I have already noted that Rancière's reading of Kant is inflected by the influence of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which suggests 'the promise of art of living incorporating the sense of freedom and the equal capacity experienced in the aesthetic free play.'[190] As Jane Kneller writes, Schiller's 'account of the mediating and humanizing drive to "play" (*der Spieltrieb*) would have been impossible without Kant's account of the free play of the imagination and the disinterested nature of judgments of taste.'[191] Schiller's influence provides to Rancière's account of aesthetic experience significance for ordinary life. Indeed, the disinterested free play that suspends the hierarchies between the faculties provides a model for political (dis-)association, or what Rancière calls disidentification.[192] Like the aesthetic 'as if', in

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[190] Rancière, 'Art, Life, Finality', 601.
[191] Jane Kneller, 'Imaginative Freedom and German Enlightenment' in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, Paul Guyer and Ted Cohen (ed.), 2003, 194.
[192] See for instance, Jacques Rancière, 'Work, Identity, Subject' in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2012, pp.205-216, and 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivisation', *October*, 61, 1992, pp.58-64: '*Proletarians* was thus well-suited for the workers as the name of anyone, the name of the outcast: those who do not belong to the order of castes, indeed, those who are pleased to undo this order (the

which judgment takes on the position of anyone at all, 'the political subject acts in the mode of as if; it acts as if the demos were the demos, that is, as the whole made by those who are not countable as qualified parts of the community.'[193] Aesthetic experience achieves a kind of finality, Rancière suggests, not in a restored ethical community. Rather, 'the finality of the beautiful is to animate the life of the faculties of the subject, to produce a consciousness of their free play, to strengthen this state of animation and allow it to reproduce itself.'[194] It is not finality in the sense of 'external finality, which is its utility', nor the 'internal perfection of the work, seen as the achievement of an artistic will.'[195] These are suspended in aesthetic experience.

Uncharacteristically, Rancière grants the possibility of a 'conjunction [rather than a disjunction] between the absence of the end of the beautiful and the commitment of art to the production of a collective life where utility is no more governed by the principle of subordination of the means to an external end, where utility becomes use and when use becomes the blossoming of a form of life.'[196] The desire for collective life is both interrupted and enhanced by disinterested judgment. It is enhanced not by the addition of knowledge or the satisfaction of interests, but by the constant demand placed on judgment to deepen the claim of experience. For Chanter, Rancière's reading of Kant

> harbours radical potential because it is a site of play with regard to form, a play which mixes up and reformulates the relation between subjects and objects inasmuch as it repudiates the canons that supported classical conceptions of the mastery of form over matter, activity over passivity and voluntary, subjective intention imposed on an inert world.[197]

Disinterest means that any material at all can incite the play of faculties without any subordination, and it also means that any subject at all makes a claim on the judgment

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class that dissolves classes, as Marx said). In this way, a process of subjectivization is a process of disidentification or declassification.' (61)

[193] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 11.

[194] Rancière, 'Art, Life, Finality', 598.

[195] Ibid. 599.

[196] Ibid. 600.

[197] Chanter, *Art, Politics and Rancière,* 126.

of everyone else.[198] The disruption of hierarchy means that the consensus about who is qualified to make judgments, whether aesthetic or political, is challenged. But it is challenged not in the name of individual experience alone, but in the name of a common stratum of experience that is obscured by material inequality. Building on Rancière's own accounts of disidentification, Kristin Ross illustrates how during the May '68 movement,

> practices were developed… that acted to constitute a common – though far from consensual – space and time. And those practices verified the immediate irrelevance of the division of labour – what for Durkheim was nothing more and nothing less than that which holds society together and guarantees the continuity of its reproduction.[199]

But this creation of a new common space and time was premised on 'the manifestation of political subjectivity – first and foremost in an experience of disidentification or declassification, and not in an experience of shared community.'[200] Disidentification, like disinterest, brackets existing identities through which the experiences of particular classes of people are determined. In the suspension of hierarchical modes of judgment and classification, it creates a space for shared – though not identical – experience. In the next chapter, I investigate the ways in which shared but not identical experience can be applied and illustrated in the context of aesthetic education. The harmonious free play of the faculties in Kant is translated by Rancière into a principle of equality, where neither the understanding nor the imagination rule, and judgment is determined neither by knowledge or desire.

Aesthetic experience is analogous with political subjectivity for Rancière insofar as it suspends hierarchy, demonstrates a fundamental equality, and does not depend on an existing consensus. Elsewhere in Rancière's corpus, he places greater emphasis on the work of communicating experience, which provides further substance to the claim for

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[198] See Kant, *CJ*, §41, 5:297: 'it cannot fail that taste should so be regarded as a faculty for judging everything by means of which one can communicate his feeling to everyone else…' (176-177)
[199] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 74.
[200] Ibid. 57.

something common to emerge. For example, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which I treat in detail in the next chapter, he argues that

> what brings *people* together, what unites them, is nonaggregation. Let's rid ourselves of the social centre that hardened the minds of the postrevolutionary age. People are united because they are people, that is to say, *distant* beings. Language doesn't unite them. On the contrary, it is the arbitrariness of language that makes them try to communicate by forcing them to translate – but also puts them in a community of intelligence.[201]

Rancière resists the definition of a community or shared experience by way of a static set of interests. Disidentification and disinterest bring people together not to fulfill the reified version of some wish or desire (a risk Benjamin perceived, as I described in the second chapter), but to discover new ways of mixing and new configurations of collective life. For Ross, this is only possible on the basis of the renunciation of ends, 'the experience of equality, as it was lived… neither as a goal nor a future agenda but as something occurring in the present and verified as such'.[202] Ross describes a set of experiences and political practices that form 'less as an archive than as a laboratory that enables the exploration and critique of contemporary political discourse and practice.'[203] Like the joiner, Gabriel Gauny, their significance is less a model for imitation than a demonstration of the possibility of aesthetic experience and its disruptive implications.

Rancière's account of aesthetic experience does not begin and end with a reading of Kant as an exercise of scholarship. Rather, he defends Kant's exemplary and foundational account of aesthetic experience by connecting it with historical instances that demonstrate how aesthetic experience interrupts the daily lives of the least likely subjects. Aesthetic experience requires no qualification or expertise, like this 'astounding principle' of democracy that 'those who rule do so on the grounds that there is no reason why some persons should rule over others except for the fact that

[201] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 58.
[202] Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 11.
[203] Ibid. 131.

there is no reason.'[204] He uses this connection to counter consensual and incredulous readings of Kant's disinterest, as well as resist the ethical re-construction of the community by the closure of the aesthetic gap. This gap remains vital for Rancière, not to make aesthetic experience politically mute or toothless but precisely to give it a specific place that is not identical to political subjectivity. In this chapter I have focused on the disruptive moment of experience. But Rancière attends also to the subsequent effort to communicate experience via the scene of education, which in the next chapter I compare with Cavell's account of the scene of instruction. Both thinkers insist, like Benjamin, that shared experience – and for Rancière and Cavell, I argue, egalitarian experience – is not a pre-given or foundational ground, but rather something demonstrated and created in the act of communicating and translating. The capacity to suspend interests, and enlarge experience through its connection with others, remains important.

[204] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension', 10.

The Experience of Aesthetic Education: Scepticism, Equality and Politics in Jacques Rancière and Stanley Cavell

> *Speaking about human works is the way to know human art.*
> Joseph Jacotot in Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

> *I might say that I felt I had learned to articulate my ignorance as well as my knowledge, poor thing, and that I had accordingly uncovered for myself unnumbered paths to follow.*
> Stanley Cavell, 'Philosophy as the Education of Grownups'

This chapter argues for a connection between Jacques Rancière and Stanley Cavell as democratic thinkers by analysing two key texts that address the scene of education. Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (hereafter IS)[1] and Cavell's *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, specifically the second chapter 'The Argument of the Ordinary' (hereafter AO)[2] share a 'turn' on Cartesian scepticism[3] as well as other shared terms, such as 'stultification' for the effects of scepticism on the experience of equality, and the phrase 'at any moment' for the possibility of the eruption of shared intelligence between willing partners.[4] In this chapter, I argue that Rancière and Cavell share a way of presenting the case

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[1] Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Kristin Ross (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
[2] Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1990.
[3] My emphasis on this 'turn' differentiates my argument in this chapter from Devin Zane Shaw's in *Egalitarian Moments* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), which proposes that Rancière fits into a line of Cartesian egalitarianism. My use of this term follows Cavell's picture of Wittgenstein as proposing that 'our investigation has to be turned around' (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 43) as well as Emerson's 'forever turning aside to say…' (Ibid. 56), which lends itself to the 'aversive thinking' Cavell is discussing. More specifically, in 'The Argument of the Ordinary', Cavell returns to Wittgenstein's motif of having one's '"spade turned"' when we have reached the limit of our '"justifications"' or reasons (AO, 70). Thus the 'turn' signifies 'the space not party to the struggles of the sides… turning our investigation around as around a still point' (AO, 83).
[4] See for instance Aletta J. Norval, '"Writing a Name in the Sky": Rancière, Cavell and the Possibility of Egalitarian Inscription', *American Political Science Review*, 106:4, 2012, pp.810-826. See also Havercroft and Owen, 'Soul-Blindness, Police Orders and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell and Rancière', *Political Theory*, 44:6, 2016, pp.739-763. Unlike Norval, Havercroft and Owen describe Cavell's politics of the human as 'an ethical kind' (74). This implies a reading of Rancière's concept of political subjectivisation in which unrecognised people claim recognition in an already established category within a particular order. This reflects a use of Rancière that appropriates aspects of the connection between politics and aesthetics without recognising that it is not simply a matter of 'a new order of continuous aspect perception' (749) but a specifically egalitarian

for egalitarian experience in the context of education that does not rely on either an ethical ethos or a foundationalist defence of equality. I present an account of experience in the scene of education that is communicative and practical, as well as shared and open to new kinds of intelligence, expression and art. I extend my argument about the significance of aesthetic experience to the practical and communicative context of education. Benjamin and Rancière's conceptualise experience in modernity as characterised by the dissolution of collective experience defined by tradition and by determinate ways of making sense. My evaluation of Benjamin's concept of experience demonstrated the challenges it faced in formulating a plausible account of collective experience in the wake of the loss of tradition. Rancière more emphatically celebrates the new possibilities for experience that suspends hierarchical and determinate ways of making sense, as I argued in relation to Rancière's adoption of the Kantian definition of beauty as disinterested pleasure, without a concept. Both Benjamin and Rancière aspire to reformulate experience in terms of ideals of emancipation while retaining its claim on collective or social life. The scene of aesthetic education reveals in an exemplary way how the experience of another becomes part of a communicative exchange.

The scene of education pictures not only how, for instance, a child comes to 'acquire' the claim of experience or knowledge but also how such experience is connected to the experience of the teacher. In keeping with Rancière's egalitarian framework I elucidated in the previous chapter, the positions of the student (or child) and teacher are not fixed, an observation Stanley Cavell makes in his own way. However, verifying shared experience can mean obedience and conformity to an already existing community of sense, as the sceptical and pedagogical methods I outline in this chapter demand.[5] This is one concept of 'verification', in which one 'knows things by reason, proceeds by method… It is this intelligence that allows the master to transmit his knowledge by adapting it to the intellectual capacities of the student and allows him to verify that the student has satisfactorily understood what he learned.' (IS, 7) Or, following Cavell and Rancière's alternative, it can

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challenge to the conception of a community. In their brief discussion of Rancière's egalitarianism, they collapse it with Marx's conception of 'standing in an internal relation to the other as to my one or, in the first person plural, other to our one.' (749) See also Jean-Philippe Deranty, 'Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition', *Political Theory* 31:1, 2003, pp.136–156.

[5] These methods resemble accounts of Kantian experience that emphasise determinate over reflective judgment, and recent defences of aesthetic education that fall back on having standards for judgment such as Michael W. Clune in *A Defence of Judgment*. I discussed the attempt to defend of expertise from within aesthetic judgment in the previous chapter. See Christopher Janaway, 'Kant's Aesthetics and the "Empty Cognitive Stock"' in *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp.67-86.

involve a process of free play in translating a common object, and an experience of equality that bears on our understanding of both aesthetics and politics. Moreover, as Rancière suggests, this alternative contains ways of verifying experience 'every day, in all the circumstances where an individual must learn something without any means of having it explained to him.' (IS, 16) Verification of intelligence occurs not by the imposition of a method, but through a shared experience with a common object that is translated in speech, as Jacotot puts it to '"bring the examinee back to the material objects, to a *thing* he can verify with his senses."' (IS, 32) By incorporating both practical and aesthetic arguments about experience and education, this chapter provides a response to the claim that Rancière's notion of equality is socially weightless as well as to the contention that his concept of aesthetic experience contains no practical implications.[6]

Rancière's text appropriates the work of Joseph Jacotot, an itinerant post-revolutionary educator. Jacotot, who spoke no Flemish, discovered that he could teach French to students who only spoke Flemish after he was exiled to the Netherlands. This experience demonstrated a shared, original capacity to learn 'without a master explicator' (IS, 5).[7] For Rancière, Jacotot models a practice of egalitarian education in which the presupposition of the equality of intelligence between the teacher and his students incites intellectual emancipation. Rancière's stylistically unusual text mixes the archival writing of Jacotot into Rancière's own prose, as James Swenson notes, reducing the 'marks of differentiation

[6] See Lois McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, pp.28-66 and pp.132-167, Walter Benn Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem* (for an account of and response to Michaels criticism, see the third chapter) and Peter Hallward, 'Staging Equality: Rancière's Theatocracy and the Limits of Anarchic Equality' in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, pp.140-157, especially 152. As Hallward writes in 'Jacques Rancière and the Subversion of Mastery': 'Rancière affirms universal equality as his point of departure, but he says little about the concrete (if not 'objective') forms of empowerment required to lend this affirmation consequential force. He says little, for instance, about the social changes usually associated with the onset of the 'democratic age' in the early nineteenth century (urbanization, the development of a commercial public sphere, expansion of the press, consolidation of the nation state); he tends to say still less about the precise forms of political organization required to enable or sustain the consequences of democracy as he defines it.' (*Paragraph*, 28:1, 2005, 40) See also Alison Ross, 'The Aesthetic Fable: Cinema in Jacques Rancière's "Aesthetic Politics"', *SubStance*, 38:1 (118), 2009, 133-134.

[7] Rancière recounts how Jacotot began as an artilleryman in the Republic army (1792), before graduating to an instructor in the Bureau of Gunpowder and secretary to the Minister of War, after which he taught 'analysis, ideology, ancient languages, pure mathematics, transcendental mathematics, and law' in Dijon. In 1815 he became a deputy but was exiled to the Netherlands after the restoration of the monarchy. Although speaking no Flemish and his students speaking no French, in classes at the University of Louvain in 1818, Jacotot 'had an intellectual adventure.' (IS, 1) Rancière calls the original capacity 'the mother tongue' after the child's acquisition of speech without the aid of an instructor (5; see also 10) He also calls it '"universal teaching"' (*Enseignement universel*, after Jacotot's book of 1829) (IS, 16).

between his own discourse and that of the author he is discussing.'[8] Rancière's recuperation of Jacotot is not only aimed at philosophical justifications for hierarchy, and for the superior intelligence of the master (including both Althusser and Bourdieu), but also polemically against pedagogical reforms in France during the 1980s.[9] Cavell's chapter responds to Saul Kripke's reading of the 'scene of instruction' in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.[10] Cavell analyses Kripke's effort to reply to a sceptical teacher in the voice of Wittgenstein. Kripke's effort, for Cavell, falls into the paradox of scepticism (AO, 66-69), namely that the sceptic's process or method for coming to knowledge, for example, by following a rule, fails 'to find any regress-proof candidates for' knowledge.[11] As Cavell puts it, scepticism 'repudiates' the ordinary, without which we cannot understand how to apply criteria or follow a rule, and '[s]o the appeal to criteria against scepticism cannot overcome scepticism but merely begs the question.'[12] The sceptical paradox is heightened in the case of other minds, where any criteria or rule used to ascertain the existence of another's thoughts or experience is vulnerable to endless sceptical questions.[13] Scepticism, for Cavell, is not only the denial of particular kinds of ordinary knowledge, but also 'any view which takes the existence of the world to be a problem of knowledge… It is a perspective from which scepticism and (what Kant calls) dogmatism are made in one another's image…'[14] Rancière

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[8] James Swenson, 'Style indirect libre' in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 264.
[9] See Kristin Ross, 'Translator's Introduction' in Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, *vii-xxiii*.
[10] See Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 and Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachin Schulte (trans.), P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (ed.), Chichester, Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
[11] Jason Bridges, 'Meaning and Understanding' in *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, Hans-Johann Glock and John Hyman (ed.), Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 388. See also Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995, pp.39-72.
[12] Cavell, *This New and Yet Unapproachable America*, 51.
[13] A case of such a sceptical paradox is offered, and answered in the 'Symposium: Other Minds' (*Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 20, 1946, pp.122-197), exemplified by John Wisdom (pp.122-147) and answered by J.L. Austin (pp.148-187). Wisdom writes, 'The pure paradox that we *can* never really know the mind of another emphasises the differences between everything we do call or might be tempted to call one person's learning the correctness of a prediction about the mind of another and what we call a person's learning the correctness of a prediction about his own mind.' (136) A.J. Ayer also puts the paradox quite well: 'the trouble is that while we may not seriously doubt the truth of the statements that we make about other people's experiences, we are also inclined to interpret them in a way that does make it seem doubtful whether we can have any very good reasons for believing them.' (189-190) Austin responds more fully to Ayer in *Sense and Sensibilia*, G.J. Warnock (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
[14] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 46. For a nuanced definition of two varieties of scepticism, namely Cartesian and Kantian, influenced by Cavell's work, see James Conant, 'Two Varieties of Scepticism' in *Rethinking Epistemology*, Günter Abel and James Conant (ed.), Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012, pp.1-73. Conant suggests that the paradox of Cartesian scepticism is essentially that we cannot answer the questions that we pose about our knowledge of the world: 'The paradox lies in our inability to answer the following question: How can I penetrate the veil of sensory ideas and attain a view of what is really happening outside of my mind?' (8) On the other hand, 'The Kantian paradox lies in its coming to seem a mystery how what impinges on my senses could so much as *appear* to be revelatory of the world.' (15) For an alternative reading of Kant as concerned more to

identifies an ineffective mode of pedagogical instruction that undermines the ordinary ability to learn because it rests on the assumption that '[n]o one truly knows anything other than what he has understood. And for comprehension to take place, one has to be given an explication…' (IS, 4) Following Jacotot, Rancière argues that 'the logic of explication calls for the principle of a regression ad infinitum: there is no reason for the redoubling of reasons ever to stop.' (IS, 4) Cavell and Rancière thus share an analysis of the paradox of scepticism as the infinite regression of reasons that prevents knowledge ever being declared. Moreover, both Cavell and Rancière recognise that this infinite regression stops only with the authoritarian teacher (IS, 4; 71). In this way, Cavell's 'Argument of the Ordinary' and Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* lend themselves to comparison via a shared 'turn' on Cartesian scepticism as a pervasive principle in education, leading to the view that the teacher has knowledge the student is lacking and must impart it by providing a set methodology for the student to follow. Both thinkers suggest less a counter-argument than a 'turn' on the sceptical position. They both challenge the assumption that the teacher 'has' something the student is lacking. By re-framing the scene of education, Cavell and Rancière suggest ways of conceiving of rule following that echo aesthetic judgments, provide links to ideas about egalitarian and democratic political communities, and articulate ways of sharing experience through playful translation and communicative exchange.

Education and Politics: Rancière, Cavell and Benjamin

Comparisons between Rancière and Cavell are made primarily in the field of political theory, and to a lesser extent aesthetics.[15] There are also considerable bodies of work applying their respective ideas in educational theory, and reflections on their contribution in the field of education.[16] Aletta J. Norval's pairing of Rancière and Cavell is instructive for correcting

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refute solipsism than scepticism, see Longuenesse, *Kant on the Human Standpoint*, 288. This approach is closer to the spirit of this chapter, in its argument for ways in which we share our experience with one another, rather than for ways in which we know things. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the background of scepticism for this argument.

[15] For example, see Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen, 'Soul-Blindness, Police Orders and Black Lives Matter', *Political Theory*, 44:6, 2016, pp.739-763. On film, see Davide Panagia, 'Why film matters to political theory', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 12:1, 2013, pp.2-25.

[16] See for the ambivalence of integrating Cavell into pedagogical theory, Amanda Fulford, '"Daring to Say": Stanley Cavell and Designs of Literacy', *Educational Theory*, 60:4, pp.435-447. See also Naoko Saito and Paul Standish, 'Crossing Borders Within: Stanley Cavell and the Politics of Interpretation', *Educational Theory*, 60:4, 2010, pp.419-433, and Naoko Saito, 'Philosophy as Translation: Democracy and Education from Dewey to Cavell', *Educational Theory*, 57:3, 2007, pp.261-275. I return to translation at the end of the chapter. See for an account of 'Cavell as Educator', see Mark Grief, in *n+1*, 12, Fall 2011, republished in *Inheriting Stanley Cavell: Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, David LaRocca (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2020. And on Cavell's

criticisms of both thinkers on issues I take up in this chapter.[17] Norval uses Cavell to supplement Rancière's account of egalitarian rupture in *Dis-agreement*,[18] by comparing his account of emancipation to Cavell's account of (political) exemplars in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*. Norval highlights the way Rancière's text moves all 'too quickly' in presenting the interruption by those who have no part (portrayed in 'the tale told by Livy of the secession of the Roman plebians on Aventine Hill'), concluding precisely at the moment the patricians of the Roman Senate recognise 'there is nothing left to do but to talk to [the plebians].'[19] This leaves the assertion of equality 'in the sky', as it were, which Norval attempts to ground by adding to Rancière's work an account of exemplars from Cavell. This leads Norval to propose not just 'egalitarian inscriptions' but also an 'ethos appropriate to egalitarian inscription' in which both contest and disagreement as well as conversation and commitment play a role.[20] Norval also defends a democratic account of Cavell's politics, against criticism of his work as 'nonpolitical' or 'individualist'.[21] The balance struck by Norval is consistent with my argument below that both Rancière and Cavell's political egalitarianism involves an open conception of community, which, as Norval writes, 'starts from the riven character of every identity and moral order.'[22]

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experience of J.L. Austin in a scene of education, see *Little Did I Know*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, especially 326. On the integration of Rancière into education theory, see Friedrich, Jaastad and Popkewitz's contribution ('Democratic Education: An (im)possibility that yet remains to come', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42:5-6, 2010, pp.571-587), which adds Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome and Derrida's notion of justice to produce, as the editors gloss, 'the idea of democratic education as an (im)possible promise.' (516) By contrast, see Yves Citton ('"The Ignorant Schoolmaster": Knowledge and Authority' in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, Deranty and Ross (ed.), 2014) who states as one of the components of Rancière's principle of equality that the 'postponement of equality into a never-fully-achievable future constitutes the main trap of progressive politics' (32). See for a book-length interpretation of Rancière on education, Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta, *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation*, London: Continuum, 2010. And see Caroline Pelletier's review in *Studies in Philosophical Education*, 31, 2012, pp.613-619 and Oliver Davis, 'Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation', *French Studies*, 66: 3, 2012, pp. 426–427. Similarly, Caroline Pelletier uses Rancière's criticism of sociology to differentiate his notion of equality from that of other theorists. See 'Emancipation, equality and education: Rancière's critique of Bourdieu and the question of performativity', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 30:2, pp.137-150. For a summary of recent theory of education and their connection to emancipation see Jessica Gerrard, 'Class Analysis and the Emancipatory Potential of Education', *Educational Theory*, 63:2, 2013, pp.185-201.

[17] Aletta J. Norval, '"Writing a Name in the Sky": Rancière, Cavell and the Possibility of Egalitarian Inscription', *The American Political Sciences Review*, 106:4, November 2012, pp.810-826.

[18] Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Julie Rose (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

[19] Ibid. 23-26. I return to this scene further in this chapter. See also McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 'Rancière moves too swiftly from the presumption of equality to the presumption of agency.' (163)

[20] Norval, '"Writing a Name in the Sky"', 819-823.

[21] Ibid. 819. See George Shulman, 'Acknowledgement and Disavowal as Idiom for Theorizing Politics' *Theory and Event*, 14:1, 2011, and Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell: Scepticism, Subjectivity and the Ordinary*, London: Polity, 2002, 165.

[22] Ibid. 821. See also Michaele L. Ferguson, 'Sharing without Knowing: Collective Identity in Feminist and Democratic Theory', *Hypatia*, 22:4, Autumn 2007, pp.30-45.

In some ways, this bears similarity with approaches to Benjamin's conception of education that have recently received scholarly attention. Although I do not address Benjamin's concept of education in detail (I have discussed aspects of Benjamin's work on the child and education in the second chapter), there are features in it that are shared by Rancière and Cavell. For instance, Benjamin's anti-moralism and his related criticisms of bourgeois life shares the analysis of training in obedience to the adult world as stultifying.[23] As Eli Friedlander argues, it is precisely the formulaic and procedural education characteristic of modern institutions that is inimical to meaningful experiences, which, as I suggested in the second chapter, involve a kind of disjunction that exhibits the 'spirit of freedom.'[24] Friedlander articulates Benjamin's notion of fantasy not just as an aspect *of* experience, but as itself a manifestation of the 'limitlessness or flexibility *at the heart* of human experience', which, when absent becomes a weight or burden so that *mere* fantasies become 'manifestations of the wish to do away with the burden of experience.'[25] Friedlander identifies the role of colour in creating a 'space of active play' insofar as it is not just an item *in* experience but the transformation of experience: 'The child does not identify himself with colour but finds himself coloured.'[26] Both Friedlander and Esther Leslie recognise the possibilities for fantasy, boredom, distraction and play not just to disrupt formulaic or methodological education but to re-orient the child from the object to the world within the everyday.[27] Both register the sense that education involves space for experience, which might be prompted by imitation but cannot *be* merely imitation (as it cannot be merely training or obedience). Benjamin writes, 'Who, however, would wish to trust a martinet who declared

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[23] See Matthew Charles, 'Pedagogy as "Cryptic Politics": Benjamin, Nietzsche, and the End of Education' (pp.35-62) and Sami Khatib, 'Practice Makes Perfect: On Undoing Bourgeois Pedagogy' (pp.63-86) in *boundary 2*, 45:2, May 2018. See also Antonia Birnbaum, 'Beyond Autonomy: Walter Benjamin on the Life of Students', *boundary 2*, 45:2, May 2018, pp.157-169. Birnbaum notes Benjamin's critique of the instrumentalization of education, and the 'ridiculous' similarity between the 'good student' and the 'paid academic' (161), which portrays education as a progressive perfection of a fixed role. See for instance Ruth Barcan, 'Paying dearly for privilege: conceptions, experiences and temporalities of vocation in academic life', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 26:1, 2018, pp.105-121.

[24] Friedlander, 'Learning from the Colours of Fantasy', *boundary 2*, 45:2, May 2018, pp.111-137. In a phrase that echoes Benjamin's parable of the father who leaves his sons a field, with the promise of buried treasure that bears no treasure but rather entails the work of ploughing the fields (I discussed this parable in chapter two, and Friedlander comments on it in the cited paper), Jacotot writes, '"*Seek* the truth and you will not find it, knock at its door and it will not open to you, but that *search* will serve you in learning to do…"' (IS, 138)

[25] Ibid. 114 and 117.

[26] Ibid. 123. See also Esther Leslie, 'Playspaces of Anthropological Materialist Pedagogy: Film, Radio, Toys', *boundary 2*, 45:2, May 2018, pp.139-156.

[27] See Friedlander, 'Learning from the Colours', 126 (distraction, see note 26) and 136 (boredom), and Leslie, 'Playspaces', 155-156.

that the control of children by adults is the meaning of education?'[28] The connection between learning, imitation and experience is underscored by Benjamin's parable in 'Experience and Poverty'.[29] A father's buried treasure is discovered to bear fruit by the hard work of his sons, which problematises the

> role of example and imitation, or the appeal to the capacity of the imagination. Identification depends on using one's imagination to reproduce in oneself the form of that which one is to imitate. Thinking of what is crucial to learning from experience, we might feel dissatisfied with appealing merely to imitation, to "unimaginative," merely reproductive, actualizations of the imagination. Such mechanical imitation does not leave room for learning that involves *one's own* experience.[30]

The disjunction between the lesson and experience that provides a space for imitation to turn into learning is also present in the work of Rancière and Cavell. Friedlander frames Benjamin's discussion of imitation and play in a post-Kantian context,[31] which can also be used to frame Rancière and Cavell's discussion of rule-following.

As well as develop the connection between Cavell and Rancière on aesthetics and education, this chapter also draws parallels between their theorisation of democratic communities. The idea of a democratic *community* in Rancière is elusive, because his attention is more often directed towards moments of rupture and dissensus. However, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, I identify ways in which Rancière elucidates practical examples of democratic conversation, which overlap significantly with Cavell's critique of contractarian theories of justice. Neither proposes a settled democratic community, but Cavell's work is helpful in drawing some of the ways in which particular, provisional settlements might occur. In other words, Cavell attends equally to what happens *after* two people acknowledge each other as equal, intelligent

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[28] Benjamin in Harvey Mendelsohn's translation of Peter Szondi, 'Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin' *Critical Inquiry*, 3:4, 1978, 501-502. I find this idiomatic translation preferable to Edmund Jephcott's seemingly modernized one: 'But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education?' (in Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2016, 95) For Cavell's reflection on Benjamin and the figure of the child see 'Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities', *Critical Inquiry*, 25:2, 1999, pp.235-246.
[29] This parable receives an extended commentary in the second chapter of the thesis.
[30] Friedlander, 'Learning from the Colours', 115. I consider the concept of rule following below, as well as the notion of examples and acquiring a voice for one's own experience in the next chapter.
[31] Friedlander, 'Learning from the Colours', 122.

speaking beings. I focus on the connection between communication and experience in the conclusion to this chapter. Aesthetic experience involves non-determinate modes of judgment, which cannot demand agreement on the basis of concepts that everyone necessarily shares. An account of the communication of aesthetic judgment must then be open to variation and deviation from established norms or conventions; indeed, this is precisely what characterises aesthetics for Rancière. The scene of education exemplifies instances where such variation occurs, and whether the student's intelligence is recognised in such variations or not turns on whether there is an assumption of common, equal intelligence or whether the teacher takes up a sceptical stance. I take as my starting point Rancière and Cavell's analysis of scepticism and explanation in education as a stultifying method, before turning to the possibility of egalitarian education and its implications for aesthetic experience.

The Sceptical Pedagogue

> *Telling someone something he does not understand is pointless, even if you add that he will not be able to understand it. (That often happens with someone you love.)*
> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

Scepticism is one of Cavell's abiding topics. In his early work, Cavell contrasts Wittgenstein's philosophical approach with that of the 'classical epistemologists' from Descartes to Locke and Hume in which, as the latter writes '"skeptical doubt arises *naturally*". They all begin from what seem to be facts of such obviousness that no one could fail to recognise them… and considerations whose import anyone can grasp who can speak.'[32] Cavell points out the grammatical contradiction in the use of 'normal', 'natural', or 'ordinary' in the sceptic's denial of knowledge, since they employ ordinary words, and rely on ordinary meanings precisely in order to draw extraordinary conclusions. Cavell adduces that 'Wittgenstein is, then, denying that in the (apparent) conflict between philosophy and the common "beliefs" (assumptions?) of ordinary men, philosophy's position is superior.'[33] The philosopher occupies a position of false equality (and universality) with the ordinary person that is, in fact, inimical to actual equality. Cavell frequently cites Descartes as a representative thinker of both sceptical doubts and methods; Rancière, on the other hand,

[32] Cavell, 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 60.
[33] Ibid. 61.

rarely engages with scepticism or Descartes.[34] However, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he presents Jacotot's 'translation' of Descartes in a way that inverts 'the cause of error: the haste to *affirm* when the idea isn't clear and distinct.' (IS, 55)

Descartes, in his seminal *Meditations on First Philosophy*, argues that 'error is not a pure negation, but rather a privation or lack of some knowledge which somehow should be in me.'[35] He writes, in the style of apparently ordinary 'reflection' noted by Hume,

> when I look more closely at myself and inquire into the nature of my errors (for these are the only evidence of imperfection in me), I notice that they depend on two concurrent causes, namely the faculty of knowledge which is in me, and on the faculty of choice or freedom of the will.[36]

In the absence of 'reason' which compels the will, by virtue of which 'I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God', Descartes 'feels' an 'indifference' which is

> evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation… So what then is the source of my mistakes? It must be simply this: the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use of matters I do not understand.[37]

The source of error, Descartes proposes, is the result of the 'incorrect use of free will' because of a 'privation', which leads him to the conclusion that when making a judgment, I should 'restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further…'[38] Human intelligence alone, Descartes suggests, cannot fix the basic lack of

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[34] Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Julie Rose (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999: 'Descartes's *ego sum*, *ego existo* is the prototype of such indissoluble subjects of a series of operations implying the production of a new field of experience.' (35) It is on this basis that Devin Zane Shaw calls Rancière's reference to Descartes 'the prototype of political subjectivation', which, Shaw proposes further, 'is an appropriation of Jacotot's reading of Descartes.' (*Egalitarian Moments: From Descartes to Rancière*, New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 44)
[35] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, John Cottingham (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 38.
[36] Ibid. 39.
[37] Ibid. 40.
[38] Ibid. 41-43.

knowledge. Moreover, when I encounter obstacles to understanding, I should not proceed but retreat from the task of making sense (AO, 83).[39]

Devin Zane Shaw in *Egalitarian Moments* proposes that Rancière fits into a tradition of Cartesian egalitarianism. According to Shaw, 'Cartesian egalitarians share the supposition that there is an equality of intelligence and abilities shared by all human beings.'[40] Yet Shaw relies on reading both Descartes and Rancière against themselves. He quotes an ironic (and paradoxical) passage in *Discourse on the Method* in which Descartes suggests that

> "Good sense [*bon sens*] is the best distributed [*partagée*] thing in the world: for everyone thinks himself so well endowed with it that even those who are hardest to please in everything do not usually desire more of it than they possess… [T]he power of judging well… is naturally equal in all men, and consequently that the diversity of our opinions does not arise because some of us are more reasonable than others but solely because we direct our thoughts along different paths and do not attend to the same things."[41]

Descartes' egalitarianism consists of two features which are incompatible with Rancière's: the empty universality of the thinking *cogito* and the possibility that we can all be *directed* towards the same things. For Rancière the insistence on the correct method produces a 'coincidence of orbits… called stultification [*arbutuir*].' (IS, 59) And Cavell, noting the way Cartesian scepticism is inculcated in modern thought, writes, 'Then how do you know when philosophy has intervened? Simply as a result of… self-stultification' (AO, 97). Rancière and Cavell object to Descartes' misleading picture of the acquisition of knowledge. They share a parallel insistence on the way the Cartesian influence on philosophy continues to divert us from sharing experience.

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[39] Cavell writes, when Descartes 'perceives human dependence he sees a proof of God's radically other existence and draws the moral that we do not permit our will to exceed our human powers of judgment. When Pascal perceives human dependency he sees us as dependent on everything that happens to us, hence distracted from God, and draws the moral that we do not deny human groundlessness.' (AO, 83)
[40] Shaw, *Egalitarian Moments*, 27.
[41] Descartes in Shaw, *Egalitarian Moments*, 27. See also, George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such,* Nancy Henry (ed.), London: William Pickering, 1994: 'It is in the nature of foolish reasoning to seem good to the foolish reasoner… the more intimately I seem to discern your weaknesses, the stronger to me is the proof that I share them… And thus I carry in myself the key to other men's experience, it is only by observing others that I can so far correct my self-ignorance as to arrive at the certainty that I am liable to commit myself unawares and to manifest some incompetency which I know no more of than the blind man knows of his image in the glass.' (4-5)

Returning to the contention that Rancière and Jacotot present a version of Cartesian egalitarianism, Shaw writes that 'the figure of Descartes intermittently emerges in the discourse of Joseph Jacotot, who argues that the *cogito* is "one of the principles" of intellectual emancipation'.[42] Yet in the passage Shaw cites, Rancière is explicit that Jacotot's egalitarian emancipation 'is the Cartesian formula of equality read backwards.' (IS, 35) This 'turnaround', as Rancière calls it (IS, 54), is a motif that I employ here to evoke the unwillingness of both Rancière and Cavell to provide a straight counter-argument to the sceptical pedagogue (IS, 29; AO, 70). Instead, they offer different ways of proceeding, for instance in what Cavell describes as 'Emerson's therapy [of] turning around the picture of approaching the world…'[43] (AO, 96) The 'turnaround' of 'the Cartesian equality of the *cogito*' takes place via Jacotot's '*translation* of Descartes' famous analysis of the piece of wax' (IS, 54). Descartes proposes the piece of wax precisely as something 'which people commonly think they understand most distinctly of all', but which, put 'by the fire… the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound.'[44] He undermines our trust in our senses, just as for Emerson 'the empiricist's idea of "impressions," from which all experience is made and all ideas are derived, is precisely unable to account for our connection with things, our interest in them, reactions to them, what matters about them to us, what counts.' (AO, 96)

Having elaborated the emergence of Jacotot's style of '"universal teaching"', premised on the ability of everyone to learn, and so the presupposition of equality, Rancière describes kinds of experience that form the basis of learning. In particular, Jacotot presented his students with a shared object – namely Fénelon's *Télémaque*, a didactic novel published in 1699 (IS, 19-

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[42] Shaw, *Egalitarian Moments*, 43. See also James Swenson, '*Style indirect libre*' in *Jacques Rancière*, pp.258-272 on the style of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, and Kristin Ross's 'Translator's Introduction' in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, *xxii*.

[43] A further suggestive link between Rancière and Cavell via their sources in Jacotot and Emerson, is offered by their 'turns' on the famous formulation of the *cogito*, 'I think, therefore I am.' Jacotot writes, '"We turn his thought around and say: 'I am a man, therefore I think.'"' (IS, 36) Emerson, in his essay 'Self-Reliance' uses a similar turn in writing 'Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say "I think," "I am," but quotes some saint or sage.' See 'Self-Reliance' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Brooks Atkinson (ed.), New York: Modern Library, 2000, 142. See also for Cavell's commentary on this passage 'Being Odd, Getting Even (Descartes, Emerson, Poe)', *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994, pp.109-130.

[44] Descartes, *Meditations*, 20.

20)[45] – which serves to re-envisage the acquisition of knowledge as the activity of intelligence directed by a will, and retrieve the sensuous immediacy of learning. Thus, Jacotot translates Descartes' passage:

> "I want to touch and my arm reaches out, wanders along the surfaces of objects or penetrates into their interior… In the act of touching, I know only my will to touch. That will is me, my soul, it is my power, it is my faculty… I have ideas when I like; I order my intelligence to look for them, to feel… Man is a will served by an intelligence." (IS, 54-55)

In opposition to Descartes' attribution of error to the over-eagerness of the will, 'the haste to *affirm* when the idea isn't clear and distinct' (IS, 54), Jacotot celebrates the union of the will and the things it encounters. 'The divinity of the revolutionary and imperial era – the will – finds its rationality at the heart of that effort each puts into himself, that autodetermination of the mind as activity.' (IS, 54) Rancière and Cavell alike recognise the capacity of the will to be *distracted* (IS, 55; OA, 97) but they reject the idea that the solution to this is to confine teaching to a single path or method that constrains the will and intelligence ahead of time. The over-exuberant distraction of the intelligence is the laziness of the will. 'Meaning is the work of the will… the relentless work to bend the body to necessary habits, to compel the intelligence to new ideas, to new ways of expressing them: to redo on purpose what chance once produced, and to reverse the unhappy circumstances into occasions for success' (IS, 55-56). Such work is defeated in advance by what Cavell calls the 'skeptical onslaught', which

> is such that something happens to our criteria, which is to say, to our relation to and of the world and with one another. But what happens in the grip of skepticism… is something like finding ourselves forced to strip our criteria from ourselves, and not like finding ourselves incited to complicate and build on them at will. (AO, 88)

In order to appease the sceptic's anxiety about our lack of knowledge and incontinent will, Rancière notes that the Cartesian legacy is to insist on 'the principle that there is *one* point from which we must start, and one definite order that we must follow to acquire

[45] According to Leon Sachs, *Télémaque* had recently been made available as a bilingual edition. See '*The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: Intellectual Emancipation in Circular Form' in *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism*, Patrick M. Bray (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2017, pp.51-72.

knowledge'.[46] The method of doubt made famous by Descartes operates by first undermining the student's confidence in their intelligence by stripping them of ordinary criteria, and then imposing a single way of climbing a hierarchical ladder back to a position of knowledge determined in advance by the teacher.

A key example of this appears in Cavell's analysis of Kripke's anxiety about how we learn to follow a rule, and involves understanding the concept of a table. Kripke demonstrates the student's inability to follow the rule by asking,

> Can I answer a skeptic who supposes that by "table" I mean tabair, where a "tabair" is anything not found at the base of the Eiffel Tower, or a chair found there? Did I think explicitly of the Eiffel Tower when I first "grasped the concept of it" a table, gave myself directions for what I meant by "table"?[47]

This absurd example is given not only to demonstrate the slipperiness of concepts in the hands of the sceptic, but also to illustrate Wittgenstein's phrase 'Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do."' (*Investigations*, §217) For Kripke, this phrase introduces an authoritarian halt to the giving of reasons in a tone quite different from that of Wittgenstein's comment that 'Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned.'[48] (Ibid.) Kripke argues that 'the "assertability conditions" that license an individual to say that, on a given occasion, he ought to follow his rule this way rather than that, are, ultimately, that he *does* what he is inclined to do.'[49] Kripke says, 'We act *unhesitatingly but blindly*…'[50] Knowledge is fraught for Kripke, entertaining the sceptical possibility at every turn. Descartes' 'evil genie' (IS, 57) becomes in Kripke 'a sudden frenzy or a bout of LSD as

[46] Jacques Rancière, 'Un-what?', *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 49:4, 2016, 590.
[47] Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language,* 19.
[48] See also Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016: 'such recognition is not of the *limits* of reason – as the sceptic would have us believe – but of the *limited* idea of reason as it is given in the modern rationalist notions of foundations and certainty.' (97-98)
[49] Ibid 87-88.
[50] Ibid. 87. This is Kripke's translation of Wittgenstein's sequence of comments: 'I should say: *This is how is strikes me*. When I follow the rule, I do not choose. I follow the rule *blindly*.' (*Investigations*, §219)

explaining', or 'dramatising… the deviance' (AO, 75).[51] The nub seems to be that there is no difference between ordinary and deluded experience.[52]

But, Cavell interrupts such a bout of delusion by returning to the ordinary, and reminding us of the practicalities in the scene of education,

> then we may or may not accommodate ourselves to what shows up, and that would accordingly not for me count as skepticism. But if we are not allowed the drama of imagining that a drug will wear off or a frenzy pass, but rather that the world will remain forever sensuously indistinguishable from the way it now presents itself, that we all may be, and always were, using different concepts that will forever have a coincidence of manifestations, then if we put aside the question whether I really understand what I am to imagine, it seems no different from other skepticisms; and then the question arises as to why I must consider the skeptical possibility… (AO, 75)

Cavell re-interprets Wittgenstein's comments by focusing on what he is inclined to *say* rather than *do*. 'What I am *inclined* to say is precisely not something I necessarily go on to say… Might not the teacher in Wittgenstein's 'scene of instruction' have considerations against saying "This is what I do," and hence be expressing hesitation in saying it?' (AO, 71) Such hesitation – which occurs precisely at the moment when the student exhausts the reasons or justifications the teacher has for a particular procedure – is at odds with the portrait of the teacher in Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein, which can be characterised as an instance of what Rancière calls explanation.

> Now, what do I mean when I say that the teacher judges that, for certain cases, the pupil must give the "right" answer? I mean that the teacher judges that the child has given the same answer that he himself would give… he judges that the child is applying the procedure he himself is inclined to apply.[53]

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[51] See also Michel Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Bouchard (ed.), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977: 'We can see easily how LSD inverts the relationship of ill humour, stupidity, and thought: it no sooner eliminates the supremacy of categories than it *tears away the ground* of its indifference and disintegrates the gloomy dumbshow of stupidity…' (190, my emphasis)
[52] See for a counter-argument in terms of ordinary language, J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 20 and 44.
[53] Ibid. 90. Cavell asks, 'What gives us so much as the idea that human beings, things, can be right? (Cf. §283 [Wittgenstein has 'feel', where Cavell has 'be right'.]) If the matching of inclinations is all Wittgenstein's

The only way for the student to demonstrate intelligence is to precisely follow the steps pre-ordained by the teacher, a kind of slavish imitation. And the only way the sceptical teacher is willing to verify the student's intelligence is not even by assessing whether they have achieved the 'correct' outcome, but by judging that they have used the correct *procedure*.

> The perfected examination, the exemplary representation of the master's omniscience and of the student's inability to ever equal him, was… erected as the unbendable power of the inequality of intelligence over the path of whoever might wish to move through society at his own pace. (IS, 130)

Explanation ruins the possibility of equality between the teacher and student. Although there is an apparently impartial 'method', and an apparent set of common concepts, neither are available to simple common sense and intelligence. The teacher preserves their mastery by filling the space between the student and knowledge with an endless array of 'reasonings' that create 'distance… between learning and understanding. The explicator sets up and abolishes this distance – deploys it and reabsorbs it in the fullness of his speech.' (IS, 5) But it is precisely this interposition that takes the ground or step away from the student. Wittgenstein writes, 'the explanation [is] a kind of sham corbel [*Scheingesims*] that supports nothing.' (*Investigations*, §217; compare §118, 'What we are destroying is houses of cards [*Luftgebäude*].') Rancière analyses in the Socratic method, 'apparently so close to universal teaching', another form of 'stultification. The Socratic method of interrogation that pretends to lead the student to his own knowledge is in fact the method of a riding-school master' characterised by 'admiration' rather than equality.[54] (IS, 59) 'There is a Socrates sleeping in

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teaching leaves us with, then I feel like asking: What kind of solution is that to a skeptical problem? Kripke calls it a skeptical solution. Then I can express my perplexity this way: This solution seems to me more skeptical than the problem it is designed to solve.' (AO, 75)

[54] Rancière might be thinking of Plato's chariot analogy for the hierarchical relation of the faculties in *The Phaedrus*, 246a-257e (in *Complete Works*, Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff (trans.), John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (ed.), Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, pp.506-556), a dialogue which is acutely concerned with the transmission of language. Plato famously warns that 'When it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not.' (275e, 552) Plato likens the 'soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer' (246a, 524), and details the necessary hierarchy between the horses (or faculties) in order to maintain self-control. The analogy is also linked to 'looking after everything and putting all things in order.' (246e, 525) Rancière comments that 'Plato claims in the *Phaedrus*, that we must speak truth [*vrai*], there where we speak of truth [*vérité*]. It is here also that he has recourse to the most radical story [*conte*]: that of the plain of truth, of the divine charioteer, and of the fall which transforms some into men of silver, and others into gymnasts, artisans or poets. In other words, taking things the other way around, at the moment when he most

every explicator.' (IS, 29) Any kind of instruction in which the teacher determines in advance both the steps the student must take and also the criteria that define their success is bound to reproduce a relation of inequality.[55]

Rule Following and Aesthetic Judgment

> *And is there not also the case where we play, and make up the rules as we go along? And even where we alter them – as we go along?*
> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

For both Cavell and Rancière, the turning around on sceptical questions involves a renewed confidence in our own ability to learn for ourselves, an openness to new variations on rules, and a presupposition of equality between student and teacher. In speaking of 'turning', Cavell evokes 'Emerson's therapy [of] a turning around of the picture of approaching the world, so that the world may be allowed to approach us… what it means is that we must stop denying something.' (AO, 96) The 'turn' on the sceptic is a return to the ordinary or the presupposition of equality for Rancière, rather than a foundation or justification for what the teacher does. Both Cavell and Rancière contrast the stultification that results from scepticism and explanation with a conception of rule following suggested in both Wittgenstein and Kant, namely self-determination. Rancière calls this 'autodetermination' in opposition to Descartes' taming of the will (IS, 54), and Cavell shows how Wittgenstein's cases of knowing how to go on (with a rule, say)

> do not express my confidence in taking my next step. They describe cases in which I suddenly catch on to steps someone *else* is taking. Before my exclamation of knowing how, I was not taking pertinent steps at all. I am not testing my confidence

implacably states the organised distribution of conditions, he has recourse to what most radically denies it, the power of the story and that of the common language which abolishes the hierarchy of discourse and the hierarchies that this underwrites.' (Rancière, 'Thinking between disciplines: an aesthetics of knowledge', *Parrhesia*, 1, 2006, 10; see also *Mute Speech*, 93-97) The correspondence between the hierarchy of the faculties and the hierarchy of classes in the city is confirmed in *The Republic* (434d-444e; and 580d-581a). Plato asserts, 'we agreed that a state was just when its three natural constituents were each doing their job' (435b, in Plato, *The Republic*, Desmond Lee (trans.), London: Penguin, 2007, 142).

[55] See also Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book* in *Major Works: Selected Philosophical Writings*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2009: 'When Socrates asks the question, "what is knowledge?" he does not even regard it as a *preliminary* answer to enumerate cases of knowledge.' (109) Wittgenstein notes Plato's *Theaetetus*, 146d-147c.

> in following rules but *my agility in determining them*, given that they are being followed. (AO, 73; see *Investigations*, §151, §179)

The scene of education as characterised by Rancière and Cavell involves not only a degree of autonomy afforded to the student, but the capacity to change positions so that the teacher may be 'instructed' (IS, 29). For Cavell, 'The anxiety in teaching, in serious communication, is that I myself require education.'[56]

The kind of aesthetic education described by Cavell and Rancière recalls Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment, insofar as it demands a universality of a 'special kind, since the predicate of beauty is not connected with the concept of the object considered in its entire logical sphere, and yet extends it over the whole sphere of *those who judge*.'[57] Moreover, like Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Rancière and Cavell use the framework of Kantian aesthetic judgment to conceive of new political and social lives.[58] This education is at once the demand of a new humanity and the recognition of the resources available for it in our material lives in their transformation through art.[59] Aesthetic judgment for Kant does not involve a pre-determined path of interest but rather the 'free play of the faculties' in which 'no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition.'[60] Although judgment cannot have objective validity, it is nevertheless guided by an 'indeterminate norm of common sense' that we presuppose in all people on the basis of the communicability of judgment.[61] This universality is the result of the 'free play of the faculties of cognition with a representation through which an object is given… because cognition, as a determination of the object with which given representations (in whatever subject it may be) should agree, is

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[56] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 125. The epigraph to *The Claim of Reason* is highly pertinent, from Emerson's address at Cambridge, 1838: 'Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul.' See also the opening line of Nietzsche's *The Use and Abuses of History*, which quotes Goethe: '"I hate everything that merely instructs me without increasing or directly quickening my activity."' (Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, Adrian Collins (trans.), Indianapolis and New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1957, 3)
[57] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5:215, §8, 100.
[58] See Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 27 and Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy', *New Left Review*, 14 March-April 2002, 133-137.
[59] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*: 'It is, I surmise, because a moral judgment of a state of affairs (not [yet] issuing in a judgment as to the action imperative in the face of this state) has a perceptual dimension and assesses pleasure and pain, and because it is informed by sensibilities in various stages of perceptiveness or impressionability, that moral judgment is some- times held to have an aesthetic dimension. Perfectionists, judging the world and themselves in it, may seem to dwell in this dimension or realm.' (*xxvi*)
[60] Kant, *CJ*, §9, 5:217, 102.
[61] Ibid. §21-22, 5:238-239, 122-124.

the only kind of representation that is valid for everyone.'[62] Kant writes, 'the universal communicability of a feeling *presupposes* a common sense.'[63] When Kant refers to the universal validity of aesthetic judgment, he is, according to Cavell 'responding to a sense of necessity we feel in them, together with a sense that necessity is, partly a matter of the *ways* a judgment is supported, the ways in which conviction in it is produced' (or 'with the conviction that accompanies them', as Kant writes).[64] Disinterested aesthetic judgment is an example of free cognition, and exhibits the activity of the mind. Moreover, I defend the claim below that the model of aesthetic judgment and its expression lends itself to an articulation of alternative modes of rule following to those demanded by the sceptical pedagogue.

For instance, following Cavell, Eli Friedlander recognises the intimacy of a judgment with its expression in terms applicable to the relationship between the student and teacher. He writes, 'certain concepts will stifle judging by eventuating in a judgment, imposing a preconception, as though judging beauty is determining properties of an object. [Instead] what is demanded are words that evolve by being attuned to the singularity of beauty, showing it to be pregnant with meaning.'[65] Kant's description of judgment exemplifies the free communication of shared experience (even pleasure) without resorting to hierarchical authority between particular kinds of taste or particular faculties (as I argued in the last chapter) and without recourse to a method of applying concepts. The validity of our claim to be able to determine rules, like the validity of our aesthetic judgments, is subjective but not arbitrary. (AO, 73) This explains why genuine disagreements might arise in how to follow a rule, without different possibilities becoming incommensurable. Nevertheless, recognising the subjective validity of unorthodox kinds of rule following requires sensitivity precisely to the ways in which someone else might experience an object.[66] Both Rancière and Cavell wish to suggest an alternative conception of education than one defined by fixed standards.[67] By identifying the persistent possibility that the teacher and the student will exchange places – that their

[62] Ibid. §9, 5:217, 103.
[63] Ibid. §21, 5:239, 123.
[64] Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 93 and Kant, *CJ*, §21, 5:238, 122.
[65] Eli Friedlander, 'On Examples, Representatives, Measures, Standards and the Ideal' in *Reading Cavell*, Alice Crary and Sanford Sheih (ed.), London: Routledge, 2006, 208. See also Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015.
[66] This is how Cavell presents the case of aesthetic disagreement in 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', 86-87.
[67] For a recent account of judgment and aesthetic education that insists on the necessity of 'standards', see Michael W. Clune, 'Judgment and Equality', *Critical Inquiry*, 45, 2019, pp.910-934.

positions are interchangeable – Rancière and Cavell indicate a plausible connection between Kantian aesthetic judgment and equality in the scene of education. In particular, there are exemplary parallels between Kant and Wittgenstein on the topic of following rules that provide context for Rancière and Cavell's treatment of the way students and teachers share experience in education.[68]

Before addressing the interchangeability of the student and the teacher and their equality, I will show how debates about rule following in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment illustrate the novelty of Rancière and Cavell's concept of aesthetics education. In *The Normativity of Nature*, which focuses on cognition in its examination of Kant's aesthetics, Hannah Ginsborg connects Kantian aesthetic judgment with Wittgenstein's account of rule following. To illustrate Kant's notion of normativity in rule following, characterised by the 'lawfulness without law' of aesthetic judgment, Ginsborg turns to Wittgenstein's account of rule following in the *Investigations*.[69] In order justify the validity of the kind of non-conceptual grasp on a rule involved in aesthetic judgment, she argues that such judgments are analogous to 'an overlooked element of the *shared prelinguistic propensities* which Wittgenstein and other philosophers regard as essential to [the] grasp of meaning.'[70] There is the 'possibility of irresolvable disagreement' but Ginsborg locates a ground of pre-cognitive agreement, which is immune from such disagreement, 'that… does not rest on the subject's recognition of meaning or grasp of a rule or concept' that means 'we are entitled, so to speak, to our primitive claims to the appropriateness of our responses…'[71] Ginsborg proposes that Kant's argument is that

> we are entitled to judgements of beauty simply in virtue of our default entitlement to take our responses to objects – more specifically, those responses which Kant would identify as due to the imagination rather than to the senses – to be appropriate to those objects and, therefore, universally valid.[72]

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[68] See for an associated parallel between Kant and Wittgenstein on the conceptual grammar of aesthetic judgments, Avner Baz, 'The Sound of Bedrock: Lines of Grammar between Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 24:3, 2015, 615 and Eli Friedlander, 'Meaning Schematics in Cavell's Kantian Reading of Wittgenstein', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 65:256, 2011, pp.183-199, especially 186-191.
[69] See also Rebecca Kukla, 'Introduction: Placing the Aesthetic in Kant's Critical Epistemology', in *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy*, Kukla (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 10.
[70] Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature*, 128.
[71] Ibid. 128-129.
[72] Ibid. 129.

Like Kripke, Ginsborg risks posing a sceptical solution to the problem of scepticism, replacing the attempt to explain one 'entitlement' with another, and so, as Cavell points out, 'begs the question.'[73] Kripke replaces the sceptical problem of how we know that the student is following rules correctly with the problem of whether we are in a community already or not. However, as Kojin Karatani highlights, rules are 'constructed not from the standpoint of those who already speak [a language], but from the standpoint of "foreigners" who wish to learn them… Parents do not teach their children the rules of language, they simply talk to them…'[74] Ginsborg cannot simply refer back to a prior or 'primitive' entitlement, just as when Kripke 'insisted on the precedence of community', he failed to appreciate the significance of the 'teaching position… where a common language game (community) can no longer function as a premise.'[75] This was precisely Jacotot's dilemma, as I noted at the start of the chapter.

Taking up a different aspect of the argument, Friedlander argues that Ginsborg's account fails to recognise that 'it is the isolation of the problem of rule following from the range of ordinary practices – expressed in language or whose character we recognise in language games – that creates the semblance of a sceptical threat.'[76] Ginsborg abstracts from the kind of response that is elicited by a gesture, namely that it is '"calling for" us to look in a certain direction', proposing instead to 'consider the response as being to the shape of the hand in isolation.'[77] This is particularly important given that Ginsborg uses 'an analogy with ordinary or natural language' to justify her account of the 'imaginative appropriateness'.[78] Elsewhere, Friedlander notes that Kripke translates Wittgenstein's idea of a 'form of life' as 'a false requirement to ground language on something external to it.'[79] The abstraction from the

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[73] Cavell, *This New and Yet Unapproachable America*, 51.
[74] Kojin Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, Sabu Kohso (trans.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995, 133-134.
[75] Ibid. 138. Espen Hammer offers a similar view, arguing that 'Rather than overcoming privacy, Kripke's social conventionalism makes it unexceptional' (*Stanley Cavell: Scepticism, Subjectivity and the Ordinary,* London: Polity, 2002, 28). However, he suggests, 'the agreement he invokes is one between strangers, conventionally united yet indifferent to each other – hence a false view of agreement, a view that denies, rather than affirms, our finitude as participants in a human form of life.' (28) In order to see Karatani and Hammer's view as compatible, we need to see how the kind of community invoked by Kripke, like the kind of community invoked by liberal contractarians like Rawls, is insubstantial and anaemic. See Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, pp.101-126 for Cavell's discussion of Rawls. See also Linda Zerilli, 'The Skepticism of Willful Liberalism' in *Skepticism, Individuality, and Freedom: The Reluctant Liberalism of Richard Flatham*, Bonnie Honig and David R. Mapel (ed.), Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2002, pp.33-55.
[76] Friedlander, 'Between Communicability and Common Sense', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 56:4, 2016, 403.
[77] Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature*, 127.
[78] Ibid. 402.
[79] Friedlander, Meaning Schematics', 189, note 11.

ordinary practices of following a rule leads Ginsborg to attribute 'the primitive claim on everyone's agreement' to our 'responses to an object which involve a primitive claim to their own appropriateness.'[80] Friedlander argues that for Wittgenstein (and Rancière holds a similar position), common sense is not separable from our use of language. It is not 'a pre-linguistic natural response', but rather a 'broad field of linguistic practices whose interweaving constitutes the naturalness of a human form of life.'[81] Ginsborg has not fully incorporated Wittgenstein's emphasis on language and use.[82] Wittgenstein proposes that 'Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end – but the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language-game.'[83] Kant does state that 'This indeterminate norm of a common sense is really presupposed by us: our presumption in making judgments of taste proves that.'[84] But it is less presupposed in Wittgenstein, than part of the form of life in which aesthetic judgments arise.[85] Aesthetic judgments are moreover a special form of judgment because, Friedlander writes, they 'exhibit how a range of meanings can be felt as belonging together, or as systematically interrelated without having any rule to account for that connectedness.'[86] Without the guardrails of conceptual determination or a single-track method, it becomes possible to draw connections and move between different experiences (translate, as I describe below). This emphasises that the scene of education can take any object and proceed in any direction if the interlocutors are open, summarised in Jacotot's formula 'Everything is in everything.' (IS, 41) I discuss further the interchangeability of objects implied by this formula below, but it is also pertinent to Kantian aesthetic judgment, if, following Friedlander, we conceive 'common sense along the lines of

[80] Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature*, 130.
[81] Friedlander, 'Between Communicability and Common Sense', 403.
[82] See for an account of Wittgenstein's significance in education theory, Tracey Bowell, 'Wittgenstein on Teaching and Learning the Rules: Taking Him at His Word' in *A Companion to Wittgenstein on Education: Pedagogical Investigations*, Michael A. Peters and Jeffrey Stickney (ed.), Singapore: Springer, 207, pp.643-657.
[83] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, in Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso, 2005, 70.
[84] Kant, *CJ*, §22, 5:239-240, 124.
[85] See Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.41-82 (and especially 61-65) for an account of Kantian common sense and its connection to Wittgenstein. Zerilli contrasts Wittgenstein's approach with Kant and Hume's arguing 'We do not need to insinuate an order of rules beneath what we say or leave the ordinary grammatical register of aesthetic quarrelling to seek an a priori principle to claim normativity for our judgment. We can remain at the level of the description and redescription of aesthetic phenomena. Whether we can reach agreement will be a question not of some hidden standard or a priori principle but of whether we are able to connect with the interests, desires, or purposes of the person whom we try to persuade. Only then will the explanation be satisfying and therefore convincing. An explanation of this kind, then, does not compel agreement by means of proof – or better, *it transforms what can count as proof*.' (75)
[86] Friedlander, 'Between Communicability and Common Sense', 404. See also *Expressions of Judgment*, 39-45.

a natural connectedness of the space of our meaningful use of concepts… our sense of systematicity.'[87]

Humility and Obedience

The principle of interchangeability between the student and teacher can lead to a conception of the teacher as modest or humble. By calling the schoolmaster 'ignorant', Rancière invites the suggestion that they enter the encounter without bringing mastery over the material. Cavell notes that Wittgenstein's style in countering the sceptic is 'oscillating between vanity and humility.' (AO, 83) For Cavell, this is due to Wittgenstein's entertainment of the voice of the sceptic, and Pascalian conception of the human as 'between grandeur and debasement… the irreconcilability in Wittgenstein between our dissatisfaction with the ordinary and our satisfaction with it…' (AO, 83) Rancière also entertains the voice of the sociologist, conceding the persistence of the idea that 'intelligence is unequal is evident to everyone' (IS, 46), which can lead to a tacit justification of inequality disguised as an emancipating concession that we are limited creatures.[88] Chantal Mouffe, for example, proposes a version of Wittgenstein's rule following in which 'I can always be in doubt about the way I should interpret the rule and follow it.'[89] This sounds like another sceptical 'solution'; I *can* always be in doubt, but is there any reason I *should* be in doubt? Mouffe wants to enshrine epistemological scepticism in order to endorse a Schmittian 'solipsistic decisionism' similar to that of Kripke, which asserts the authority of a rule on pragmatic grounds (pragmatic, that is, in Mouffe's case for a democratic ethos).[90] I discuss the differences in the notion of political identity between Mouffe, Cavell and Rancière further below. Here, it is worth emphasising that while Mouffe reads Wittgenstein as a relativist whose views on following rules can be marshalled to oppose 'the establishment of a rational consensus on universal

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[87] Friedlander, 'Between Communicability and Common Sense', 403-404.
[88] See for instance, Lindsey McGoey, *The Unknowers: How Strategic Ignorance Rules the World*, London: Zed, 2019, pp.306-328, especially on ignorance in economics and politics and Renata Salecl, *The Passion for Ignorance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020, who takes a psychoanalytic approach that emphasises the limitations of human self-knowledge. Bourdieu writes, 'Taste (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an *inevitable difference*.' (*Distinction*, 56, my emphasis)
[89] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 71.
[90] McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 74, and see pp.67-97 for a critical account of Mouffe's democratic political theory. Mouffe writes that 'bringing a conversation to a close is always a personal choice, a *decision*' (*The Democratic Paradox*, 75, and see pp.36-59 for Mouffe's discussion of Carl Schmitt. See also Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, 119). McNay draws attention to differences between Mouffe's and Cavell's views, as I discuss further below. See 76. I also discuss Cavell and Schmitt further in the next chapter in reference to Espen Hammer's discussion in 'Cavell and Political Romanticism', in *The Claim to Community*, Norris (ed.), 172-180.

principles.'[91] In presenting Wittgenstein as an anti-rationalist, Mouffe conflates all forms of rationality with the kind of universalistic consensus-seeking she opposes. This view is contested by Alice Crary in the sphere of ethics and epistemology, who argues that Wittgenstein is categorised as a relativist only on the questionable view that the kinds of persuasion, conversion and judgments that shape a form of life are defined as non-rational.[92] Moreover, in defending the ability to criticise forms of life, Crary emphasises the 'priority of judgment' in language acquisition (which disputes the idea that 'we originally learn how to judge by appealing to the guidance of prior logical categories or rules), so that 'learning to judge is ultimately a matter of nothing more than cottoning on to, or developing a sense for, what different judgments have in common.'[93] Crary recognises that the suitability of judgments, and our ability to make sense of them, is in part a matter of our 'experience', which includes both rational and affective endowments.[94] Crary's notion of a form of life, in contrast to Mouffe's, suggests that 'persuasive modes of discourse may serve as a point of rational contact between people' *and* may impose responsibilities not just of obedience to the form of life, but to 'critically reflect'.[95] In a similar argument, Linda Zerilli proposes that the relativism imputed to Wittgenstein's concept of a form of life, and his discussions of persuasion and conversion, are based on a misunderstanding of the rationality at play in judging different forms of life.[96] Important to the context of aesthetic education is Zerilli's point that rational persuasion itself is premised on 'figurative or aesthetic "ground"', and, pertinent to the interchangeability of positions I am proposing here, Zerilli suggests that Wittgenstein intended some of his remarks about the unintelligibility 'other cultures' as a point about the failure of our own 'critical self-reflection.'[97] In the broader discussion of 'forms of life' in critical theory, Rahel Jaeggi also contests Mouffe's evacuation of the ground of normativity, arguing in parallel to Crary that forms of life are defined by a normative background, and extending the critique a social and political argument that forms of life are neither 'as self-contained' nor as insulated from validity claims as Mouffe takes

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[91] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 73.
[92] Alice Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007, 108-109 and 109ff. I cannot discuss at length Crary's opposition between the 'narrow conception of objectivity' and the 'wider conception' she favours, nor their equivalents for rationality. Crary's interpretation of Wittgenstein is influenced by Cavell, and offers a useful counterpoint to Mouffe and others.
[93] Ibid. 115.
[94] Ibid. 116-119.
[95] Ibid. 119-120.
[96] Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.208-238.
[97] Ibid. 229 and 237. Part of the issue, Zerilli suggests, is that anthropologists like Frazer and Evans-Pritchard failed to understand other cultures because they removed their concepts from the systematic context in which they made sense (221), as Ginsborg did to ordinary language practices.

them to be.[98] Jaeggi proposes that 'one can belong to several forms of life'.[99] What I will discuss later in the context of political identities is true in the context of epistemological humility. What Mouffe's relativistic reading of Wittgenstein achieves is not the equality between forms of life, but their ossification into a contest between fixed identities within an 'established community.'[100]

The 'universal teaching' of Jacotot involved the public exercise of intelligence: 'to learn to speak on any subject, off the cuff, with a beginning, a development, and an ending. Learning to improvise was first of all *learning to overcome oneself…*' (IS, 42) Echoing the demand upon judgment I have described above (and in the fourth chapter), Rancière writes that people are prevented from taking up their own voice by the 'refusal to submit oneself to [others'] judgment.' (IS, 42) Similarly, Kant describes 'the common sense, of whose judgment I here offer my judgment of taste as an example and on account of which I ascribe *exemplary* validity to it…'[101] Not only do Kant and Rancière highlight the ineluctably social dimension to judgment, their concepts of judgment involve a demand on everyone, whether they are a student, teacher, artist or audience. Wittgenstein in one voice writes, 'Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. One is trained to do so; and one reacts to an order in a particular way. But what if one person reacts to the order and training *thus*, and another *otherwise*? Who is right, then?' (*Investigations*, §206) Wittgenstein emphasises that any regularity can be the starting point for understanding, but there is a difference, he suggests between 'teaching which is not meant to apply to anything but the examples given [and] that which "*points beyond*" them.' (*Investigations*, §208) Recalling the authoritarian manner of Kripke's response to the student (AO, 71),[102] Wittgenstein seems to accede to the pragmatic claim that when 'my reasons… give out… then I shall act, without reasons.' (Ibid. §211) But in the next moment, such swift acting is portrayed as compliance with 'someone of whom I am afraid' who, when they order me, 'I act quickly, with perfect assurance, and the lack of reasons does not trouble me.' (Ibid. §212)

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[98] Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, Ciaran Cronin (trans.), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018, 28-29.
[99] Ibid. 52.
[100] McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 139.
[101] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5:239, §22, 123.
[102] See also Arendt, 'The Crisis in Education' in *Between Past and Future*, London: Penguin, 1977, 177: 'instead of joining one's equals in the effort of persuasion and running the risk of failure, there is dictatorial intervention, based on the absolute superiority of the adult, and the attempt to produce the new as a *fait accompli*, that is, as though the new already existed.' (176-77)

Cavell parses the difference in terms of the way the rule might, or might not compel someone to follow it.[103] In the second instance, in which Wittgenstein writes 'I follow the rule *blindly*' (§219). Kripke takes this up in his phrase 'We act unhesitatingly but blindly', which he uses in the context of explaining the withheld remark in §217. Cavell calls the sense evoked by Wittgenstein in §219 'mythological' (*Investigations*, §221). In this instance, in blindly following a rule,

> I reluctantly or gladly give over responsibility for my actions… I fail to see that [a prophecy] can be taken another way… Blindness expresses the rule's power to subject ourselves to it. The counter idea of my spade's being turned [employed by Wittgenstein in §217] is a "symbolical expression" of the rule's impotence as my impotence in subjecting anyone else to it. (AO, 71)

In the first reading, I submit to a rule I cannot further explain and expect the other person to abide by my submission. In the second, differentiated by a sensitivity to Wittgenstein's tone,[104] we reach an impasse that demonstrates that I am unable to force anyone to submit as I do. Wittgenstein's unvoiced inclination shows that we are to realize both the limits of justification for following a particular rule, and our impotence in forcing anyone else to follow it as we do. Wittgenstein's process of answering the 'second' (or *n*th voice) is to constantly ask whether *I* know what (or who) I am meant to be teaching: 'And when I do this [give examples], I do not communicate less to him than I know myself… Have I *got* more

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[103] See Sandra Laugier, 'Wittgenstein and Cavell: Anthropology, Scepticism and Politics' in *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy*, Andrew Norris (ed.), 2006: 'Following a rule is part of our life in language, and is inseparable from our other practices. What is at issue here is not a contrast between an isolated individual and a community but between a rule and the multiplicity of rules within which it is set and entangled. To the overly perceptual and static imagery of the background, we can prefer then that of the texture or whirl of life. Our practices are thus not exhausted by the idea of a rule. On the contrary, one thing that Wittgenstein is aiming to show – if we follow Cavell's reading – is that one hasn't said particularly much about a practice (such as, for instance, language) when one has simply said that it is ground by rules.' (36)

[104] I mean 'tone' here quite specifically, following Sianne Ngai's discussion of tone in *Ugly Feelings,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005 (pp.38-88). Like Wittgenstein and Cavell, for Ngai, the recognition of 'tone' in a text '*itself prompts distancing*… The creation of distance in turn produces fresh affect and ensures that aesthetic engagement will be maintained – in a feedback loop made possible by *a momentary disconnection in the circuit*.' (85) Ngai's conception of tone is then explicitly related to Kant's concept of disinterest, redefined so that 'it is *a feeling itself* that does the work of distancing' (86) rather than distance from feeling itself. In the context of the scene of education, I argue that the *tone* of Wittgenstein's remarks blocks identification with the teacher, and so throws us back onto the question of who, in this or that scene, has mastery over the rules. This returns us to the function that disinterest has for Rancière's egalitarianism, in which the dis-identifying moment of disinterest interrupts the hierarchical order in which I am presumed to identify with or belong to either the rulers or the ruled. Both Ngai and Rancière propose that disinterest dis-connects experience from function.

than I give in the explanation?... Every explanation which I can give myself I give to him too.' (Ibid. §208-210) Wittgenstein's later portrayals of rule following involve a kind of 'receptivity' in which 'I can't expect [someone] to follow the line in the same way I do… Children could then calculate, each in their own way – as long as they listened to their inner voice and followed it. Calculating in this way would resemble a sort of composing.' (Ibid. §232-233) Cavell suggests a kind of reciprocal receptivity, so that the '*confidence*' we have in following rules could be placed either in the teacher or the child. 'The idea of trust registered in the concept of confidence comes from the idea of waiting, say patience.' (AO, 75) But the confidence should not be solely invested in the child, as if the teacher could simply abdicate responsibility for the rules.[105]

It is the field of aesthetics that gives a model for judgment, and a way of proceeding by directing our attention at any object at all. In the hands of Jacotot, Fénélon's *Télémaque* 'was apparently the book that could do anything.' (IS, 19-20) Yet the book was simply the occasion for the act of translation through which each student 'must be able to show, in the book, the materiality of everything he says.' (IS, 20) It is not *the* book as such, but the existence of a common object that counts for the activity of learning; '*Télémaque* or another one.' (IS, 20) Rancière highlights that any object would do, '*Télémaque* or any other' (IS, 2), since what is required is 'one must learn something and relate it to everything else… As you have understood all things up until now: by comparing two facts.'[106] (IS, 20-22) Aesthetic education, as it appears in Rancière and Cavell's texts, involves shared attention to a common object and accounting for our experience to each other in a manner that is demanding, not in the sense of adherence to determinate rules, but in a manner that demonstrates the quality of our attention. It also tests our ability to recount our experience to each other. Like Kantian notions of disinterest and its connection to the universal voice (the topics of the fourth and sixth chapters respectively), the demonstration of our intelligence does not require conformity to an objective standard but rather fully subjective responses that can exemplify the quality of perceptual attention we demand.

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[105] Arendt, 'The Crisis in Education' in *Between Past and Future*, 180-183.

[106] See also Charles Bernstein, 'A Blow Is Like an Instrument', *Daedalus*, 126:4, Fall 1997: 'And for use you don't need a preset list of ideas of Great Works; almost any will do it enactment, not prescription, is the aim.' (178) Cavell writes in 'Leopards in Connecticut' that 'The beauty of a curriculum is that it can work (i.e., something can be learned in it) in the relative absence of teaching. We know well enough its kinds of ugliness. The ugliness from which we run the greatest danger is the university's tendency to enshrine its subjects, to submit or resubmit, the objects of its study to a kind of cult – ruled from what Nietzsche dismally described as "The Chairs of Virtue" – something that is as hard to arise from as any cults in which those objects were created.' (*The Georgia Review*, 30:2, 1976, 238)

Moreover, these facts are sensuous facts 'recounted'.[107] Jacotot's 'rule' is to return to the object and account for our response to it:

> you must *tell* me everything you see there… Tell me the form of each letter… You know how to see, how to speak, you know how to show, you can remember. What more is needed? An absolute attention for seeing and seeing again, saying and repeating… *What do you think about it?*... Show me what makes you say what you say. (IS, 23)

This activity, of which aesthetic judgment is the exemplary instance, involves communicating our experience to each other, and saying in each instance (exhaustively, to some extent) what appears to us and why it matters. This process is constantly on the 'abyss of ignorance', Rancière writes, since anyone who can learn 'can forget.' (IS, 21) Nevertheless, the capacity for judging, describing and *learning* has been verified and can continue. Cavell writes of the practices of teaching, learning and communicating our experience,

> That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, sense of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life". Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this.[108]

In aesthetics, the contingency of these routes of interest and practices of expression is heightened and so expanded.[109] Similarly, in the scene of education conceived on an

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[107] Ross, 'Translator's Introduction' in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, *xxii*. Katharina Clausius objects that *Télémaque* was symbolically significant because 'As one of countless versions of the great Homeric epic, *Télémaque* itself participates in a long history of translation, retranslation, and adaptation. Moreover, as a didactic text intended for the future king of France (the Duke of Burgundy, Louis XIV's grandson), Fénelon's novel carries symbolic value; in Jacotot's countertranslation, the epic text meant to educate a monarch becomes a tool for democratic, egalitarian emancipation.' ('Translation ~ Politics', *Philosophy Today*, 61:1, 2017, 263, note 14)

[108] Cavell, 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', 52.

[109] See Stanley Cavell, 'Philosophy as the Education of Grownups' in *Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grown-ups*, Naoko Saito and Paul Standish (ed.), New York: Fordham University Press, 2012: 'Every step we take across the web of speech makes the entire web tremble, as if to remind us that it requires the entirety to sustain us.' (24)

egalitarian presupposition, the student may begin to find new routes, new interests and develop new ways of following rules. What matters – for the persistence of the concepts, interests and crucially encounter – is that the variations can become recognisable and acquire intelligibility *as* variations on a rule or practice.

The Democratic and Aesthetic Community

I now turn to an elaboration of the kind of community that follows from the shared egalitarian presupposition of Rancière and Cavell. This section responds to critics of Rancière who claim that his conception of politics and equality is weightless, 'inconsequential' or simply a 'provocation'.[110] It also responds to critics of Cavell's work as lacking a political dimension beyond individualism, and proponents of a liberal view of Cavell's work.[111] Moreover, I differentiate Rancière and Cavell's work from other democratic theorists who propose an 'ethos' appropriate to egalitarian communities.[112] The work of the aesthetic interruption in Rancière, and the complexity of belonging in Cavell make the relation between the community and the individual anything but settled. This heightens the stakes in the ability for us to make *claims* with our experience on each other.[113] The scene of education highlights the *problem* of this claim, and indicates ways in which to conceive an egalitarian community that is persistently open (as the practice of following rules proves to be). As in education, so too in political contestation or conversation, we cannot know ahead of time what the result will be, nor the meaning of the terms in dispute.

By contrast, ethical models of democracy seek to show how 'a strong adhesion to democratic values and institutions can be established.'[114] Although she purports to draw on Wittgenstein and Cavell, Chantal Mouffe's account of democratic communities involves 'a question of *identification* with democratic values' and a 'democratic ethos in order to function properly

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[110] See McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 140. See also Hallward, 'Staging Equality', Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, Jason Barker (trans.), London: Verso, 2005 and Slavoj Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London: Verso, 1999.
[111] See Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 69-74. See for a complication of the terms of the debate between liberal and communitarian readings of Cavell, Sandra Laugier, 'Wittgenstein and Cavell' in *The Claim to Community*, 30-35.
[112] See Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 69.
[113] As I argued in the first chapter, the problem of this claim is heightened in the wake of the loss of tradition. It is a uniquely *modern* dilemma that, as Laugier writes, 'Belonging to a community is as obscure and threatened as is my own personal identity: I do not know to what tradition I belong.' ('Wittgenstein and Cavell', 33)
[114] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 69.

and maintain themselves.'[115] Although there are parallels with Cavell to what Andrew Norris calls the 'resistance to a politics of unity and identity, he is much more wary than [Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau] of moving from this to a celebration of (violent) conflict and antagonism.'[116] Laclau and Mouffe represent these conflicts partly in terms of the limits of sense in Wittgenstein, writing that 'Antagonism, far from being an objective relation, is a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are *shown* – in a sense which Wittgenstein used to say that what cannot be *said* can be *shown*.'[117] Antagonism, they argue, 'is the "experience" of the limit of the social.'[118] This position is defended against the background of a conception of forms of life as hermetic 'totalities' whose rules are determined not rationally but by relations of power.[119] Critics have pointed out that this conception of democratic politics, in its repudiation of any normative foundation, replaces the contest over the validity of claims with a contest between reified identities, regarded as 'self-contained and ineluctable units.'[120] The intelligibility of particular claims on this model is premised on 'a question of *identification* with democratic values', through which 'all participants [in democratic processes] will recognise the positions of the others in the contest as legitimate ones.'[121] Mouffe's emphasis on the '*decision*' to end a conversation without reference to the 'mere application of procedures and justified' appears contrary to the spirit of Cavell's objection to Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein. In contrast to the view that we have responsibilities within and between forms of life, Mouffe is concerned primarily to define the *limits* of a form of life, which McNay calls the 'negative moment of exclusion'.[122] In the same way that Kripke

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[115] Ibid. 69-70. Eseful accounts of a variety of views on Wittgenstein and politics, including an evaluation of Mouffe, is given in Thomas Wallgren, 'Wittgenstein's Modernist Political Philosophy' in *Understanding Wittgenstein, Understanding Modernism*, Anat Matar (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2017, pp.75-91 and Alice Crary, 'Wittgenstein's philosophy in relation to political thought' in *The New Wittgenstein*, Alice Crary and Rupert Read (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 2000, pp.118-146.

[116] Andrew Norris, 'Introduction: Stanley Cavell and the Claim to Community' in *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy*, Andrew Norris (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, 321, note 14. For a critical account of the Schmittian antagonism that grounds Laclau and Mouffe's account of political contest, see Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, George Collins (trans.), London: Verso, 2005, pp.83-137. Derrida's deconstruction of the 'friend-enemy' dualism is reminiscent of Karatani's criticism of Kripke I discussed above: 'An identifiable enemy – that is, one who is *reliable* to the point of treachery, and thereby familiar.' (Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 83) On Mouffe's reading of Cavell on the topic of ethical responsibility, see also McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 76 and *The Democratic Paradox*, 74-77.

[117] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 2014, 112. Andrew Norris highlights issues with Laclau's reading of Wittgenstein in 'Against Antagonism: On Ernesto Laclau's Political Thought', *Constellations*, 9:4, 2002, 572, note 51 and note 55.

[118] Ibid. 112.

[119] Ibid. 94

[120] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 28.

[121] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 70 and 74.

[122] McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 92.

covered the lack of final justifications with the definition of a community, Mouffe's effort to incorporate non-rational disagreement entails drawing the boundaries of the community and so, according to Karatani, excluding the moment of genuine teaching.[123] Mouffe's conception of the ethos of democracy fixes identities and presents disagreement as a contest between them. In contrast, Cavell's conception of democracy presents the identities themselves, as well as the forms of life and rules internal to them, as essentially open.

The difference between Mouffe and Rancière's conceptions of democracy also relate to Mouffe's fixed conception of identity and contestation. According to McNay,

> Mouffe's idea of the political diverges from Rancière's in so far as she substantialises it by allocating it a specific end (the acquisition of power or hegemony) and an immanent rationality (the conversion of antagonism into agonism). In Rancière's view, such regulated dissensus would amount to the false conflation of the litigious structure of political conflict with empirical disagreement. The political cannot be reduced to the mere divergence of opinion amongst social actors who, beneath the appearance of agonism, are all members of the same established community.[124]

Similarly, ethical models of aesthetics that Rancière criticises propose to transform society on the model of an artwork by creating 'situations' in which the aesthetic object is in fact bypassed on the way to ethical relations that repair 'the cracks in the social bond.'[125] Both of these ethical views subordinate experience and the disruptive potential of the egalitarian moment for a social order in which proper relations are guaranteed by established practices. For Rancière, there is no social order 'proper' to democracy, and similarly Cavell's work suggests 'a conception of subjectivity that starts from the riven character of identity and the

[123] Karatani, *Architecture as Metaphor*, 138.
[124] McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 139. See also Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism and the Politics of Radical Democracy*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001: 'the concept of the adversary reduces the signification of alterity to a dialectical opposite – to the negative against which the subjective or collective identity is constituted. Since the notion of the adversary obliterates the singularity of the Other and turns alterity into a type delineated from the common ground through the opposition to "our" subjective or collective identity, it perpetuates the notion of the Other as the imaginary site of our alienation and, as the psychoanalytic theory of the imaginary teaches us, cannot help but perpetuate hatred and ambivalence.' (74)
[125] Lewis, 'Jacques Rancière's Aesthetic Regime and Democratic Education', 60.

moral order.'[126] Moreover, Rancière's conception of the political eruption premised not on the foundation of a new identity but on a universalising egalitarian moment of disidentification is matched to some extent by Cavell's commitment to an Emersonian conception of aversion that subverts the pressure of conformity, embodied in the sceptic's conception of rule following.[127] Rancière and Cavell share an emphasis on the individual's claim to experience, and the demand it places on others. However, rather than a literalist conception of experience in which experience (or affect) is *all* that matters,[128] Cavell and Rancière have a conception of experience that contests 'the form of moralism that fixates on the presence of ideals in one's culture and promotes them to distract one from the presence of otherwise intolerable injustice.'[129] For Rancière this involves pitting 'Inegalitarian passion' against 'the infinite task equality demands,…in the face of what a reasonable being owes to himself.'[130] (IS, 80) For Cavell, 'the self is always attained, as well as *to be* attained', which is embodied by 'the problem in Emerson's concept of self-reliance' insofar as each self is inhabited by a 'transformative nextness' that responds to 'both the urgency of the need for transformative social change and the resistance to internal change'.[131] Rancière calls this resistance laziness, which involves 'despair in what has become of the democratic aspiration… [Emerson's] aversion provides for the democratic aspiration the only internal measure of its truth to itself.'[132] Any kind of social arrangement grounded in the order of institutions and naturalised by means of explanation is bound to 'be irrational' (IS, 98).[133] But this aversion is not merely individual, since, as I have noted, the scene of education involves shared experience and the public use of reason. Cavell adds, 'Since his aversion is a *continual turning away* from society, it is thereby a continual turning *toward* it.'[134] To some extent, Cavell and Rancière's conceptions of democratic communities do accord with Mouffe's

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[126] Norval, '"Writing a Name in the Sky"', 821.
[127] See Laugier, 'Wittgenstein and Cavell' in *The Claim to Community*, 35-37.
[128] See for example, Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect*, 323.
[129] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 13.
[130] See also Rancière's comments on Walt Whitman and the transcendentalist aesthetics of Emerson in *Aisthesis*: 'Putting oneself at the centre of all things is to affirm this universal intellectual capacity, which most people renounce practising.' (69)
[131] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 13-16.
[132] Ibid. 59.
[133] For example, Wendy Steiner notes the conservative attack on education by Allan Bloom, which paradoxically argues that 'a democratic education produces democratic citizens but that learning in university about one's own culture amounts to an undemocratic closure of ideas', which involves 'an unsettling mix of frankness and mystification. Suddenly, "knowing thyself" is denying democracy.' She quotes Bloom: '"you do not go to college to discover for yourself what is good but to be confirmed in your origins."' See *The Scandal of Pleasure*, 137.
[134] Ibid. 59.

agonism, however they both resist the institutionalisation of democratic values, or the establishment of a community on a stable identity or set of social relations.

It is worth clarifying the quality of continuing conversation in Rancière and Cavell's notion of a democratic community. Although they are committed to open, disruptive and aversive notions of identity and community, it would be a mistake to confuse this with aspects of 'progressive' education. The 'progressives wished to narrow, through instruction, the gap between classes' (IS, 17), however, having found the 'road to maturity', the progressive teacher makes sure that education is 'an indefinite process of coming closer. Never will the student catch up with the master, nor the people with its enlightened elite; but the hope of getting there makes them advance along the good road, the one with perfected explications.'[135] (IS, 120) For Rancière in particular, the claim of progressive education persistently reproduces inequality between the student and teacher.[136] This is readily identifiable in his critique of sociology, which provides the 'endlessly renewable pleasure of lucidity, the *frisson* of demystification'.[137] For Rancière, instead of teaching from a basis of equal intelligence, sociology explains what everyone already knows. And, as a consequence, rather than incite emancipation, it re-introduces the distance between such ordinary knowledge and scientific materialism.[138] Sociology, for Rancière, proves to have a disavowed ethics based on the hierarchy between science and (mere) representation, and the difference between those who have knowledge and those who do not. For Rancière, sociology combines the 'orphaned fervour of denouncing the system with the disenchanted certitude of its perpetuity.'[139] Just as explanation presents knowledge via a correct method to the student and yet endlessly puts the position of the master out of reach, so sociology is locked in a hierarchical order of knowledge.[140] Sociology's endlessness can be likened to the cancellation or veto of experience by relational or literalist aesthetics. They do so by reducing or negating the distance that separates the student's experience from the teacher's, which is precisely what leads to the radical openness in practices of rule following and democratic communities. Relational and literalist conceptions of aesthetics and education advocate consensus, and so

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[135] See Kristin Ross, 'Translator's Introduction' in Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, *xii-xv* for an account of the historical background to Rancière's polemic against 'progressive' education (and its opponents). See also Pelletier, 'Emancipation, equality and education', 144.
[136] See for instance, Gert Biesta, "A New 'Logic' of Emancipation: The Methodology of Jacques Rancière," *Educational Theory* 60, no. 1 (2010): pp.39-59.
[137] Ross, 'Translator's Introduction' in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, *xii*.
[138] See Pelletier, 'Education, emancipation and equality', 142.
[139] Rancière in Pelletier, 'Education, emancipation and equality', 140.
[140] See also Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, Emiliano Battista (trans.), London: Continuum, 2011, 83.

treat the difference of individual experience as something to be overcome or as incommensurable.[141]

Yet both Rancière and Cavell are committed to an open process of education, conversation or democratic eruption that appears to go on, as Rancière writes, 'to infinity. But that infinity is no longer the master's secret; it is the student's journey. The book is finished.' (IS, 23) This recalls the distinction between the 'endlessness' of a literalist object, as Michael Fried puts it, and the lack of finality in aesthetic judgment.[142] Yet the contrast is demarcated by Fried's assertion that the aesthetic object appears 'instantaneously', that is, fully present or perceptible just as the book is 'finished' and yet the topic of a potentially 'infinite journey'.[143] Similarly, Cavell writes, 'to say why I write is in a sense what I explain *all day*, or show, in every word I write, so that it may clarify itself *at any moment*.' (AO, 98, my emphasis) Although he postulates an endless array of examples of rule following and explaining, Wittgenstein also illuminates a singular moment, '"Now I can do it!"… "Now I can go on."' (*Investigations*, §151) Rancière argues that 'any individual can always, *at any moment*, be emancipated and emancipate someone else, announce to others the *practice* and add to the numbers of people who know themselves as such and who know longer play the comedy of inferior superiors.' (IS, 98, my emphasis) Some have attributed to Rancière and Cavell's conception of intellectual emancipation the ability to bring a conversation to a close, as though this was the measure of authority or equality.[144] But Cavell and Rancière conceptualise a scene of education that is constitutively open to intrusion or deviation. Indeed, this may be characterised as the *role* of aesthetic education in the constant reformation of democratic communities.

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[141] See for a discussion, Lewis, 'Jacques Rancière's Aesthetic Regime and Democratic Education', 59-61.
[142] See Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Art and Objecthood*.
[143] Moreover, this responds to Benjamin's criticism of aestheticism as producing an endless anxiety. Ross writes, 'In their new freedom from tradition the characters are prey to an anxiety-ridden existence because the things around them come to bear demonically potent meaning; the proliferating array of potential meanings that dominates their lives is a trap from which, without faith in a transcendent power, there is no means of escape.' (*Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image*, 7)
[144] See Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 75 and Daniel Loick, 'If You're a Critical Theorist, How Come You Work for a University?', *Critical Horizons*, 19:3 2018: 'Rancière… offers us a reading of Jacotot in which the possibility of learning and teaching beyond official educational institutions is stressed, but also in which the possibility of refusing to learn and teach is given in case one just does not want to learn anything.' (237)

Political Identity and the Child

> *Every childhood achieves something great and irreplaceable for humanity.*
> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project, N2a, 1*

This 'at any moment' precisely demarcates the point when the student declares their ability to go on with the sequence, and so claims a voice for their own experience and a place in the community of equal members of an ongoing conversation. The student's entry also de-stabilises the very terms of that community and conversation, having proven themselves capable of following the rule *precisely* by varying it.[145] What this 'claim to know' *does* is not '*claim* to be right' but rather it 'preempts room for claiming, for justifying.' (AO, 74) The possibility of conversation or justification is now open to, even in the case of disagreement or failure. Cavell continues that, as in the case of the subjective validity of aesthetic judgment, the ground is '*me* – the fact that I can respond to an indefinite range of responses of the other, and that the other, for my spade not to be stopped, must respond to me, in which case my justification may be furthered by keeping still.'[146] (AO, 77) Keeping still does not indicate that the scene breaks off, but rather suggests the quality of patience. For Cavell,

> If I let my confidence or authority be challenged, and I wait, it cannot be that I conceive myself to be wrong about how I add or, in general, talk. And I can perhaps then come to an astonishing insight – that my authority in these matters of grounding is based on nothing substantive in me, nothing in particular about me – and I might say: there is no fact about me that constitutes a justification of what I say and do over against what the other, say the child, says and does. (AO, 76)

Similar to the way in which for Rancière, the moment of egalitarian rupture reveals that there is no reason why some rule others, political power in Cavell is de-naturalised even as its grip is acknowledged. Rancière also writes, 'Inegalitarian society tries in vain to understand itself,

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[145] This suggests the model of political identity characterised by dissensus and disidentification (see Beth Hinderliter et al, 'Introduction: Communities of Sense' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Beth Hinderliter et al. (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 2). See also Pelletier on acts of mimetic identification and disidentification in Rancière and Judith Butler, 'Emancipation, equality and education', 145-146.

[146] This recalls Cavell's comment in his essay on Beckett, 'Ending the Waiting Game' in *Must We Mean What We Say?* in which he quotes Pascal: '"All the evil in the world comes from our inability to sit quietly in a room." To keep still.' (161)

to give itself a natural foundation. It's precisely because there is no natural reason for domination that convention commands and commands absolutely.' (IS, 87-88) Indeed, it is in particular the act of 'teaching' that shows 'how deeply I am joined to society and also to put society at a distance from me, so that it appears as an artefact.'[147] Cavell presents the political claim of the philosophical 'examination of myself by an attack upon my assumptions' as that in which

> the terms of this self-examination are the terms which reveal me as a member of a polis; it is education not because I learn new information but because I learn that the finding and forming of my knowledge of myself requires the finding and forming of that membership (the depth of my own and the extent of those joined with me).[148]

Political dispute not only stages acts of disidentification and the 'denial of an identity given by another', Rancière argues, it also is 'the staging of a common place… a polemical common place for the handling of a wrong and the demonstration of equality.'[149] Political subjectivisation also means 'the production of a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience.'[150] This new field of experience transforms the terms upon which experience is recognised and shared. It can appear in 'nonsense sentences' and yet must still be 'verified, and demonstrated in each case' as an instance of the equality of intelligence.[151] It is precisely because the plebians speak '*like* patricians' that the act of speech entails a challenge to the hierarchy.[152] The disruption of consensus or contractarian conceptions of democratic community might, then, just as much take the form of transformative identification as disidentification.[153]

The incursion of children into society is both drastic and ordinary, portrayed by Arendt as a struggle between generations, which education mitigates by protecting 'the child against the

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[147] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 25.
[148] Ibid. 25.
[149] Rancière, 'Politics, Identification and Subjectivisation', 62.
[150] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 35.
[151] Rancière, 'Politics, Identification and Subjectivisation', 60.
[152] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 25.
[153] See on Cavell and political communities, Duck-Joo Kwak, 'Teaching to Unlearn Community in Order to Make a Claim to Community', *Educational Theory*, 60:4, 2010, pp.405-417. The relationship between mimesis and identity attracted significant scholarship in the 1990s, with scholars following such thinkers as Deleuze and Lacan in positing an internally differentiated concept of repetition or identification.

world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new.'[154] Similarly, Pelletier portrays the scene of education as 'a kind of confrontation between the teacher's and the student's will.'[155] These portrayals perhaps too readily take for granted the status of parties arranged against each other. For Cavell, it is the sceptic who relies on

> a picture of how the "isolated" individual comes to be "instructed" (and accepted or rejected) by the "community", in terms of "inclinations" expressed by someone (presumably regarding himself or herself as representing the community) who "judges" whether the "same" inclinations are expressed by the other seeking (as it were) the community's recognition or acknowledgement. (AO, 69)

The child's acquisition of language can be imagined 'as an inheritance but also as one that has, as it were, to be stolen, anyway in which the capacity and perhaps motivation to take it is altogether greater than the capacity and perhaps motivation to give it.' (AO, 99) This disparity defines sceptical pedagogy, but also characterises the antagonistic relationship between established or institutional structures of community and the act of politics as an eruption of equality. Education, like politics, instigates a 'crisis of consent', in which there is an 'anxiety over whether the teacher and child go on together' (AO, 76). Like Rancière's insistent rejection of institutional modes of recognition or procedures of equality (IS, 98), Cavell notes the discrepancy between 'society's power and its impotence – power to exclude, impotence to include.' (AO, 76) The acquisition of language demonstrates the necessary equality between the student and teacher, since, 'to "learn" language we have already to "have" it.'[156] Echoing the aesthetic possibility of starting with any object at all and the disparity between members in the scene of education, Cavell reflects on his own childhood acquisition of language, writing,

> The concept of stealing was prompted, I think, both by wanting to mark the absence of linearity in the order of words acquired, and by wanting to emphasise the asymmetry of the work done on each side of the inheritance, the elders exaggerating their individual contributions of sounds, as if to relieve the anxiety in the fact that they mostly repeat themselves and wait, and talk to the air. This condition is the

[154] Arendt, 'The Crisis in Education' in *Between Past and Future*, 192.
[155] Pelletier, 'Emancipation, equality and education', 143.
[156] Cavell, 'Philosophy as the Education of Grownups' in *Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grown-ups*, 22.

> basis and parable of the possibility and necessity in the education of humans, of making language mine, of finding my voice, hence the standing threat of not recognising it, or of it not being acknowledged. Call this the question of plagiarism in human identity.[157]

In remarkably similar terms, Rancière describes how in the scene of the plebians on the Aventine Hill,

> what is staged is the power of a political *break-and-enter* on the part of those who insist on *being acknowledged* as actors in a situation where they're not actors… The kind of breaking and entering in play here is a practical refutation of the hierarchical opposition between argued speech and the noisy voice. But this taking the floor and speaking is itself based on the fact that speech is available, in the form of the "errant letter"; seizing on words that are not addressed to you is already a form of burglary.[158]

Rancière and Cavell, then, both attend to the position of the child and figures of exclusion who are not so much *included* in political communities as challenge and rupture their very definition. Moreover, this process involves de-naturalising the justification for such inclusion and exclusion, and undoing 'the consensual relation between the whole and the fragment, the general and the particular.'[159] Just as they challenged the obedience to rule following demanded by the sceptic's method of explanation, so they challenge the terms of political community and access to speech in particular. This also transforms the field of experience, and specifically how we count or acknowledge experience.

Translation, Communication and Going On Together

In the final section of this chapter, I argue that the kind of egalitarian education and aesthetic experience described by Cavell and Rancière is verified and demonstrated by acts of communicative translation. Translation takes place when the student provides an account of

[157] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 37.
[158] Jacques Rancière, Laurent Jeanpierre and Dork Zabunyan, *The Method of Equality*, Julie Rose (trans.), Cambridge: Polity, 2016, 72, my emphasis.
[159] Rancière, 'Un-what?', 599.

their experience of a common object to the teacher. The relation of teaching between 'two ignorant people confronting a book they don't know how to read 'involves 'the effort one beings every minute to translating and counter-translating thoughts into words and words into thoughts.' (IS, 63) Each of these translations refers back to the common object, in a verifiable way, as well as produces a demonstration of the intelligence (even genius) of the student. The activity of communicating our thoughts is a translation for Rancière, and it produces effects that verify equality. (IS, 69-70) This gives substance to my claim that what is important in both Rancière and Cavell's conceptions of education as a moment of equality is that the student and teacher can go on together, sharing not identity or a fixed notion of community but experience. In Cavell, the act of communicating is figured by the analogy of walking. This follows the idea of rule *following*, and being able to '"give correct responses in new cases."' (AO, 73) What verifies whether I have learned to follow a rule is

> cases in which I suddenly catch on to the steps someone *else* is taking. Before my exclamation of knowing how, I was not taking pertinent steps at all. I am not testing my confidence in following rules but my agility in determining them, given that they are being followed. (AO, 73)

The student's intelligence is rendered visible not by their assiduous obedience to someone else's steps but by their ability to determine the rules for themselves. The analogy of taking steps is to that of exchanging words as expressing the intention to go on together. Just as I can test our practices of counting by using different increments, I can test our practice of walking by, say, skipping, or dancing, or 'qualking', as Cavell parodies Kripke's bogus conceptual traps of 'tabair' or 'quaddition' (AO, 85). In each case, the assumption of the sceptic is that I do not know how to walk. But if we grant, as Cavell and Rancière insist that we do, 'equal authority over words' (AO, 73) then you might be inclined to wait.[160] Cavell writes that 'concentrating on taking steps [or following rules], does not take up the possibility of walking in a different direction and call this, say different routes that we take in common. This implies the concept of a goal or end, which is a further matter.' (AO, 85) The end is

[160] See also Lewis, 'Jacques Rancière, the Aesthetic Regime and Democratic Education', 67, for a discussion of the significance of walking in and out of step. Cavell also cites Hobbes' reply to Descartes, which questions the superfluity of walking to the demonstration of intelligence (AO, 87), which Descartes rejects (see *Meditations*, 70). Lawrence Sterne parodies: 'if it is true that people can walk about and do their business without brains, - then certes the soul does not inhabit there. Q.E.D.' (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy,* Graham Petrie (ed.), London: Penguin, 1986, 162)

precisely a *further* matter for Rancière and Cavell, who are not working to prove – like Kripke's attempt to reply to the sceptic – but to test, experiment or play. It is only in the absence of a determinate end or method that the student can genuinely evince autonomy and intelligence. This is pictured in what Cavell calls 'different routes we take in common' and Rancière calls 'the path of the dissimilar' that verifies what we have in common:

> All men hold in common the ability to feel pleasure and pain. But this resemblance is for each only a probability to be verified. And it can be verified only by the long path of the dissimilar. I must verify the reason for my thought, the humanity of my feelings, but I can do it only by making them venture forth into the forest of signs that by themselves don't want to say anything, don't correspond with that thought or that feeling. (IS, 67)

The absence of a necessary connection between experience and any particular utterance or way I may express that experience leads me to translate.

Our experience is not exhausted by each utterance, or, as Friedlander puts it in terms of Kantian aesthetic judgment, 'it is the very gap between the idea and any attempt to give it presence (which, of necessity, will be lacking) that requires further exemplifications… The language of the judgment produces a demand when it is higher or when it shows how one can be resting on one's own ground to freely open meaning in the object.'[161] In acts of criticism based on the Kantian notion of aesthetic judgment, I take my 'judgment to be based on a higher, non-vulgar ordinary or common understanding, [and] would claim to be representative of the yet to be realised universal voice.'[162] Friedlander notes that 'Feeling can signal a concentration of a broad space of meaning, which is yet to be made explicit.'[163] It is this broad space traversed in communication, which the demand for obedience or identical orbits stultifies and the non-hierarchical play of the faculties renders free. The intelligence of students is verified by their 'saying charming things and making graceful, freshly imaginative connections.' (IS, 42) What counts, for Rancière, is an imperative that 'presides over the act of speaking and writing, that is the intention to communicate, of recognising the other as an intellectual subject capable of understanding what another intellectual subject wants to say to

[161] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 26
[162] Friedlander, 'Between Communicability and Common Sense', 404.
[163] Ibid. 404.

him.' (IS, 136) This imperative similarly is at play in the account of common sense in Kant, where acts of communication presuppose and demonstrate the claim for the universal validity of judgments. In contrast to the sceptic, for whom the question of proceeding together is one of correctness to a method, for Cavell and Rancière it is far more a question of the will to communicate and the intention to share experience rather than subordinate another to our will.

The concept of translation responds to a specifically aesthetic situation in which people share the 'minimal link of a *thing in common*' (IS, 2) to which they apply their intelligence and judgment. Such a thing in common invites speakers to share 'routes of interest', as Cavell put it. Countering both the empiricist and the epistemologist, this aesthetic mode of judgment allows us to communicate across an 'uncloseable distance' in ways that might 'account for our connection with things, our interest in them, reactions to them, what matters about them to us, what counts.' (AO, 96) Such counting and accounting that registers and renews interest in the world in common is not, Rancière specifies, 'changing columns… but rather the capacity to say what one thinks in the words of others.' (IS, 10) This attention to what is shared between us but identical to neither of us occupies Cavell throughout his thought (I address this topic in the next chapter). He writes, 'But consider that there are no *other* words to say than the words everyone is saying.'[164] The words themselves are common, which enables the different directions of thought to share what Friedlander called 'a broad space of meaning'. As Wittgenstein writes, 'What is true and false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree... It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgments that is required for communication by means of language.' (*Investigations*, §241-242) Like Kant, Wittgenstein and Cavell locate a space of primary 'agreement' (which is different from conformity, or consensus) in our shared capacity for experience.[165] Cavell writes that 'we may laugh and cry at the same things, or not; some experience may throw us out of, or into, agreement here, but the idea of *achieving* agreement… seems out of place.' (AO, 94) Cavell and Wittgenstein place greater emphasis than Rancière on what is ordinarily shared as a site of possible variation.

[164] Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of Moral Life*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004, 8.
[165] See also Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*.

Rancière's work can at times seem to place too great an emphasis on the rupture of the common space of meaning.[166] However, once the displacement of meaning and speech has occurred, we can also 'find out if there is anything "between" the parties' in two senses: that there is a distance between them, and that they share a common object or stage.[167] Just as Wittgenstein suggested that a student's mastery of a rule might turn their activity less into following and more into 'composition' (*Investigations*, §233), Jacotot also emphasises the 'artful' dimension of communication:

> "immediately my intelligence artfully employs any signs whatsoever; it combines them, it composes them, analyses them; and an expression, an image, a material fact, emerges that will henceforth be for me a portrait of a thought, that is to say, of an immaterial fact." (IS, 62)

Although the fact is then established, '"he must always rectify by adding or taking away from what he just said… in this flux and reflux, a kind of perpetual improvisation."' (IS, 64) As I argued above, the intelligibility of both communication and the community of intellectual equals is not determined in advance, but not therefore as ephemeral as critics suggest. Rancière is far from those theorists of democracy who claim that the 'demos' is an unrepresentable community to come; rather it is always and everywhere temporary, provisional and contingent, and open to intrusion. Cavell portrays educational institutions as inimical to such a task, in its 'commitment to the idea of a curriculum'.[168] Nevertheless the ballast of a curriculum creates 'some mutually comprehensible and valuable goal; the goal will be subject to redefinition…' but its redefinition is, as it were, immanent to the modes of 'rational discourse' made available by the curriculum.[169] However none of this can guarantee

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[166] See for instance Alison Ross, 'The Aesthetic Fable': 'Displacement occurs in the story staged in [Rosselini's] *Europa* 51, but rather than leading to new forms of communication, it leads to incomprehension. Meaning, we might say on the evidence of this film, needs to be socially authorized in order to be liveable… Specifically, it fails the test he sets in *Dis-agreement* that in order to be effective speech needs a scene able to dramatize its emancipatory content. Despite the fact that there is a representation of the nascent processes of meaning-formation in the film, shown in Irene's discovery of different worlds and the ways these shape in her a new spiritual comportment, these remain at the level of individual experience. Further, these processes also have the effect of isolating her both from her previous milieu and from the world she longs to be part of, but to which she has to remain a stranger. Her incarceration is a concretization, in some sense, of the fact that she cannot share the view of the world of those with whom she wants to fraternize.' (133-134)
[167] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 26.
[168] Cavell, 'Leopards in Connecticut', 237. See also Cavell and James Conant, 'An Interview with Stanley Cavell' in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (ed.), Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989, pp.21-72, especially 54-55.
[169] Ibid. 237.

that teaching or learning will take place. Cavell proposes 'the realisation that the best course of study is to be discovered only in practice, which means only *in the experience* of the particular people, and particular places, it is to occupy… Given teachers with something to love and something to say and a talent for communicating both, you can afford for a moment to forget about curriculum.'[170] This reflects the idea of trust in both teacher and student. It indicates that what is decisive for the success of the scene of education is not obedience or conformity but the ability to communicate an experience, and verify the equality of intelligence. Rancière argues that 'our problem isn't proving that all intelligence is equal. It's seeing what can be done under that supposition.' (IS, 46) Cavell presents a way of proceeding on this supposition by contrast with the sceptic's 'threat to discontinue his or her instruction', embodied in Kripke's rendition of Wittgenstein

> "This is simply what I do"… as if to say: "I am right; do it my way or leave my sight." [By contrast, t]he teacher's expression of inclination in what is to be said shows readiness – (unconditional) willingness – to continue presenting himself as an example, as the representative of the community into which the child is being, let me say, invited and initiated. (AO, 72)

The burden of representing our experience rests on both sides, teacher and student. Both undertake the 'poetic labour of translation [that] is at the heart of all learning.' (IS, 10) Certain kinds of learning experiences, especially those outlined in this chapter, share key features with aesthetic experience, and communicating these experiences can become a kind of artistic activity.[171] This is because the terms of communication cannot be set in advance, and the experience itself is not determined in advance. Similarly, aesthetic experiences challenge and stretch our capacity to communicate; they demand non-formulaic responses. Cavell proposes that the 'task of the modern artist is to show that we do not know *a priori* what will count for us as an instance of… art', but this requires that we acknowledge 'the existence of objects which, prior to any new effort, we do count as such instances as a matter of course; and apart from there being conditions which our criteria take to defined such objects.'[172] The modern definition of art, as I argued in the third chapter, is constitutively

[170] Ibid. 239.
[171] See also Rancière, 'Art, Life, Finality', 599 on the ambivalent relation between aesthetic experience and artistic activity.
[172] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 123.

open and subject to revision. It relies on the movement between established conceptions of art and eruptions of nonsense, inclusions of aspects of non-art, borrowing from life. Although he denies that there can be a 'class of the emancipated' (IS, 98), Rancière writes that a

> society of the emancipated would be a society of artists… They would know that the perfection someone directs towards his own art is no more than the particular application of the power common to all reasonable beings, the one each person feels when he withdraws into that privacy of consciousness where lying makes no sense. (IS, 71)

The verification and acknowledgement of equal intelligence is portrayed by Rancière and Cavell in terms of recognising new variations and deviations of experience beyond traditional authority.

Rancière and Cavell's turn on scepticism and pedagogical explanation leads, then, to both a non-institutional, practical conception of democratic communities, as well as relating to non-determinate modes of rule following. These are premised on a space of shared meaning and practices that, through speaking and communicating, involve common experience. While responding to various criticisms of Rancière and Cavell, I have argued that there are significant connections between these thinkers. The scene of education provides a way of making practical and recognisable their respective conceptualisation of democratic communities that contests the accusations of social weightlessness to Rancière's account of radical egalitarianism, and adds political depth to Cavell's work. I have argued that an egalitarian conception of the scene of education enables us to think about democratic communities in an open-ended way, as well as providing a thick account of shared experience. In the next chapter, I extend this egalitarian conception of experience further into acts of communication and expression. As Cavell writes, Emerson conceives 'authorship as the office of all users of language, a thing as commonly distributed as genius, [and so] the plainest justification for seeing the enactment or acknowledgement of one's [experience] as the authoring of it…'[173]

[173] Cavell, 'Being Odd, Getting Even' in *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 114.

This chapter has developed some of the key points advanced in this thesis. I have challenged the idea that experience can be standardised, through alignment to categories like interest, or reduced to determinate or prescribed structures like tradition. I have also contested the idea that the link between equality or shared experience necessarily involves canalising experience into a single pathway using a method, or doctrinaire kind of rule following procedure. These arguments have aimed to show that experience can be shared without being narrowed to a single appropriate way of making sense, or assimilated to an existing community or set of identities. I have illustrated shared experience in the relationship between a teacher and student in aesthetic education, identifying how an open conception of rule following, community and communication via translation makes sharing experience possible. This relationship exemplifies how an experience one claims for oneself can also be held in common. I have made these arguments by examining the connection between Rancière and Cavell's writing on the topic of education and politics, and connected both to debates about Kantian aesthetic judgment. In the next chapter, I further explore how aesthetic experience appears in Cavell's work specifically through his concept of the voice. This topic continues my examination of precisely how experience is shared, and so how individual aesthetic experiences are connected to those of others. Cavell's work, as I have already noted in this chapter, returns to the scene of the acquisition of language and the arrogation of a voice.[174] I identify a rich conception of the expression of aesthetic judgment in Cavell building on the notion of shared experience and communication I have developed in this chapter. In the following chapter, I propose an account of expressions of aesthetic judgment that shows how they sustain an open and continuous conception of community like the account of aesthetic education I have given in this chapter.

[174] See for instance, Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 114 and Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 16.

The Voice of Experience: Language and Modernity in the Work of Stanley Cavell

> *Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense…*
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Self-Reliance'

The opening chapter of this thesis examined the atrophy of communicable experience in modernity, presenting Benjamin's lament for the loss of experience defined as *Erfahrung*.[1] In light of this problem, I have sought to use the post-Kantian tradition of aesthetics to present different ways in which new possibilities for experience are opened in modernity. Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell each suggest different forms of experience that are made available after traditional forms of authority became unable to determine or order the relation between sense and meaning. For example, as I argued in chapters three and four, the sensible presence of the *Torso* became separated from its determination by historical context and antiquarian knowledge in Rancière's aesthetic regime, and Gabriel Gauny appropriated the gaze of the aesthete in his place of work. Experience is emancipated from determination by interest or concepts. However, the absence of final authority over the meaning of experience and the lack of shared standards of judgment or modes of communication risks rendering these new possibilities for experience mute, fleeting and isolated. In particular, one of the issues raised by Rancière's egalitarian aesthetics is its over-emphasis on disruptive rather than sustained experience, leaving the most meaningful experiences of emancipation from the hierarchical social order seeming ephemeral or fleeting.[2] By contrast, Cavell's writing on the connection between language and experience emphasises communicative commitment and conviction. This chapter examines the nature of this communicative commitment in Cavell as a means for understanding the role of expression in sharing individual aesthetic experience with others.

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[1] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, 83-84. See also Agamben, *Man Without Content*, 110 and Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 31-32.

[2] Peter Hallward, 'Staging Equality: Rancière's Theatrocracy and the Limits of Anarchic Equality' in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed)., Durham, N.C., 2009, 156. Hallward writes, 'Although Rancière offers a brilliant account of the *enthusiasm* that accompanies and often inspires a political sequence, he neglects many of the more intractable problems of organising and sustaining such a sequence.'

I demonstrate in this chapter that, throughout his work, Cavell articulates the connection between aesthetic experience and the voice. This connection is established both in his commentary on the Kantian concept of a universal voice, as well as his reflections on the conviction that can be mustered by such a voice in modernity.[3] In this chapter, I argue that Cavell's work offers a way of giving a substantive account of the Kantian concept of a universal voice that responds to the need for communicable experience. The place of such experience in modernity is the problem that this thesis addresses. The call for a voice of experience responds to the problem of transmissibility raised by Benjamin, which I addressed in the first two chapters, and to criticisms of Rancière's aesthetics and politics that I addressed in the previous chapter. Throughout the thesis, I have been developing an account of experience that is collective and communicable as well as open and orienting in the world. Cavell's writing on the voice throughout his work investigates the way in which we communicate our experience, admitting that it is fraught but insisting that meaning is available in ordinary modern life. For Cavell, the voice mediates between individual and collective experience through aesthetic expressions, and more broadly in political communities.

In this chapter, I draw parallels between Cavell, Benjamin and Rancière's conceptions of modernity. I outline the specific background of his work, rooted in the ordinary language philosophy of J.L. Austin and later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. These sources shape Cavell's attention to language as the medium for the expression of our experience. It is the subtlety and complexity of Cavell's conception of ordinary language and experience that motivates my turn to his work for this final chapter. I argue that Cavell is able to respond to what is dissatisfying in Rancière's account of modern experience, insofar as Rancière places significant emphasis on the dispersal of meaning rather than the way claiming experience is also an expression of commitment or responsibility.[4] Whereas for Rancière, the moment of

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[3] See Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 94-96 and see also pp.115-237 for various reflections on modernity, conviction (its opposite, fraudulence) and aesthetics.

[4] This is less true of his historical work. The tension between his aesthetics and historical writing is perhaps illustrative of the dilemma: the radical dispersal Rancière articulates in *Mute Speech* to some extent invalidates the heightened significance given to such figures as Gabriel Gauny in *Proletarian Nights*. See chapter four for a discussion of the joiner Gauny. See also Bruno Bosteels, 'Rancière's Leftism, Or, Politics and Its Discontents', in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (ed.), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 169-170. Espen Dahl compares Cavell and Derrida on the topic of the voice and responsibility in 'On morality of speech: Cavell's critique of Derrida', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 48, 2011, pp.81-101. Derrida's (and by comparison Rancière's) deconstruction aims at the 'metaphysical voice', whereas it is the 'ordinary' voice that interests Cavell, and which he finds in the work of Austin and Wittgenstein (98).

emancipation and equality disconnects people from their assigned place, Cavell attends to the ways we wish to give ourselves a place in society with others, and calls on us to account for our responsibility for ours words, even as they exceed us. In this chapter, I show how Cavell's use of ordinary language philosophy and the post-Kantian aesthetic tradition leads to a conception of aesthetic criticism and the 'passionate utterance' in which we orient ourselves within relationships of commitment that are not determinate. Expressions of aesthetic experience make a claim on others to respond without necessarily requiring their agreement. This avoids the problem of consensus or conformity that, for Rancière, can vitiate the emancipatory potential of aesthetics. By responding to and extending Kant's concept of the universal voice, Cavell shows the way in which our expressions are part of fulfilled experience, and moreover, suggests ways in which interest and sociality may re-enter the field of aesthetics.

From Potencies to History and Politics

> *Philosophers use a language that is already deformed by shoes that are too tight.*
> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

> *For every foot its proper shoe.*
> Montaigne, 'On experience'

This chapter engages with the growing body of scholarly work on Cavell that focuses on the concept of the voice.[5] The concept of the voice features in some secondary work on Cavell, especially the writing of Sandra Laugier, who argues that the voice exemplifies the connection between subjectivity and common expression.[6] Laugier writes, that 'the possibility of *having* an experience is inseparable from the question of expression…'[7]

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[5] See in particular the collections *Inheriting Stanley Cavell: Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, David LaRocca (ed.), London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020, *Contending with Stanley Cavell*, Russel B. Goodman (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy*, Andrew Norris (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, *Reading Cavell,* Alice Crary and Sanford Sheih (ed.), London: Routledge, 2006 and *Stanley Cavell*, Richard Eldridge (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. The major single author books on Cavell's works are Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 and Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell: Scepticism, Subjectivity and the Ordinary*, London: Polity, 2002.
[6] See for instance, Sandra Laugier, 'Voice as Form of Life and Life Form', *Nordic Philosophical Review*, 4, 2015, pp.63-81. Stephen Mulhall takes up the question of the female voice in particular at the end of his *Stanley Cavell*, pp.323-332.
[7] Laugier, 'Popular Cultures, Ordinary Criticism: A Philosophy of Minor Genres', *MLN*, 127:5, 2012, 1000.

Similarly, Eli Friedlander, Andrea Kern and Linda Zerilli draw on Cavell's concept of the universal voice in emphasising the connection between Kant and Wittgenstein's conception of common sense and aesthetic judgment.[8] Drawing on these accounts, which respond as much to Cavell's methods and style as to specific works, I elaborate a fuller conception of experience and its connection to the universal voice in both political (following Zerilli) and aesthetic (following Friedlander) contexts. I extend the idea of the voice to expressions not only of judgment but of the breadth of human experience.[9]

Moreover, this thesis draws novel connections between Cavell, Rancière and Benjamin, and shows how their work can be interpreted as reflecting on the connection between individual and common experience by locating it within the tradition of post-Kantian aesthetics.[10] Their respective oeuvres are rarely compared, but in this thesis I have encompassed a wide range of their work that identifies their shared concern with the communicability and transmission of experience. Cavell has been compared with a number of significant figures in the European tradition of philosophy, which frequently connect Cavell to the post-Kantian tradition of aesthetics.[11] This engagement with aesthetics extends naturally into the field of literary studies, where Cavell's work has attracted significant and ongoing interest.[12] This is significant for the topic of the voice, as Stephen Mulhall highlights, since Cavell's own *writing* can be seen to bear the marks of literary modernism, such as fragmentation and an

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[8] See Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, and Andrea Kern, 'Aesthetic Self-Consciousness and *Sensus Communis*: On the Significance of Ordinary Language in Kant's Analytic of the Beautiful', *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 39:2, 2019, pp.451-471 and Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*.

[9] See Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015 for an account of the way in which Cavell's aesthetics allows for movement between different fields of experience.

[10] See Bernstein, 'Aesthetics, Modernism, Literature', in *Stanley Cavell*, Eldridge (ed.). See also for the connection between Cavell's aesthetics and art criticism, in particular of Michael Fried: Diarmuid Costello, 'The Very Idea of a Specific Medium', *Critical Inquiry*; Stephen Muhall, 'Crimes and Deeds of Glory: Michael Fried's Modernism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 41:1, 2001, pp.1-23 and Stephen Melville, *Seams: Art as a Philosophical Context*, Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 1996, pp.147-186.

[11] See Hammer, *Stanley Cavell*. See Gerald L. Bruns, 'Cavell's Shakespeare', *Critical Inquiry*. Bruns argues that Cavell's work should be compared not with that of Derrida but Levinas. Cavell himself engages in detail with the persistent comparison with Derrida in *Philosophical Passages*, as well as (grumpily) *In Quest of the Ordinary*. Cavell's work also engages with psychoanalysis, see Stanley Cavell 'Freud and Philosophy: A Fragment', *Critical Inquiry*, 13:2, Winter, 1987, pp. 386-393 and Chiara Alfano, 'Towards an Ordinary Language Psychoanalysis: On Skepticism and Infancy', *New Literary History*, 49, 2018, pp.23-45. See also for discussions of Cavell's work in connection with both psychoanalysis and deconstruction, Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *The Rhetoric of Failure: Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1996, pp.25-70.

[12] See *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Scepticism*, Richard Eldridge and Bernard Rhie (ed.), New York: Continuum, 2011, David Rudrum, *Stanley Cavell and the Claim of Literature*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013 and Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin and Cavell*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017.

elliptical style.[13] This style is intended, Mulhall proposes, to show the ways in which philosophical writing should be 'fundamentally attuned to the human voice' (a quality Cavell attributes to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*), a connection that is a 'function of the prevailing forms of human community'.[14] Mulhall, and others such as Kern, mark the connection Cavell makes between a particular style of writing philosophy, specifically one attuned to the human voice, and the aspiration to show that our experience shares something in common with others, an aspiration philosophical claims share with aesthetic judgments.[15]

Like Rancière's, Cavell's inheritance of post-Kantian aesthetics draws on heterodox sources, including Romanticism and American Transcendentalism.[16] These intellectual movements developed the promise of aesthetics in modernity and their heterodox status in contemporary philosophy reflects the fate of the Romantic project of the unity of art and life.[17] In the first half of the thesis, culminating in Rancière's development of the aesthetic regime, this Romantic project is conceived as responding to the historical condition of modernity. The terms of Benjamin's analysis of the concept of experience are in part shared by Cavell. Modernity for Cavell, as I elaborate below, is both an historical condition and a way of characterising the atrophying and impoverishing effects of scepticism on our conception of common experience.[18] This concept is also affected by the loss of tradition as an orienting force for common life, as I noted in the first two chapters, as well as the invention of new artistic media like film,[19] and the revolutionary assertion of a new democratic age, idealised

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[13] Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, pp.11-23. See also J.M. Bernstein, 'Aesthetics, Modernism, Literature: Cavell's Transformations of Philosophy' in *Stanley Cavell*, Richard Eldridge (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 109.
[14] Ibid. 10.
[15] Kern, 'Aesthetic Self-Consciousness and *Sensus Communis*', 468 and see Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', 94.
[16] Apropos of my comments above about philosophical and literary style, Jan Mieskowski notes that there is a strong connection between democratic politics and the voice in Romantic writings, especially Hölderlin and Schlegel. See *Labors of Imagination*, pp.75-110.
[17] See for instance, William Desmond, 'A Second *Primavera*: Cavell, German Philosophy and Romanticism' in *Stanley Cavell*, Richard Eldridge (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.143-171 and Anthony J. Cascardi, 'Cavell and Kant: The Work of Criticism and the Work of Art' in *Stanley Cavell and Literary Criticism: Consequences of Scepticism*, Richard Eldridge and Bernard Rhie (ed.), London: Continuum, 2011, pp.47-61. And see for instance Rancière's third 'scene' in *Aisthesis* for an engagement with American Transcendentalism, and *Mute Speech* for writing on Romanticism.
[18] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 223-224. See Arata Hamawaki, 'Cavell, Skepticism and the Idea of Philosophical Criticism' in *Varieties of Skepticism: Essays after Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell*, James Conant and Andrea Kern (ed.), Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014, pp.389-427. A useful comparison is made between Cavell's analysis of scepticism and Arendt's analysis of modern loneliness in Martin Shuster, 'Language and Loneliness: Arendt, Cavell, and Modernity', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 20:4, 2012, pp.473-497.
[19] One key effect of film that Cavell notes on experience follows from Benjamin's observation that film audiences, as it were, immediately judge (see Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 228). Cavell describes offering a course

(or falteringly embodied) as America.[20] This latter characteristic, argues James Conant, tests the ability of American philosophy to answer in its own voice the inheritance and legacy of European philosophy.[21] Cavell's development of a counter-history of American philosophy is emblematic of the relationship between this voice, a conception of ideal political community, and its history of partial realisation.[22] American philosophy and culture becomes a metonym for the broader question of arrogating the voice.[23] Cavell develops this counter-tradition in contrast to the way in which philosophical claims are made in mainstream analytic philosophy. Cavell charges the decisive influence of scepticism on this tradition with having alienated the voice from experience, leaving language in a state of calling back to the world. Moreover, scepticism can be understood as contributing to the reduction of experience to knowledge (what Bernstein calls the 'modern reductive naturalism', which, along with the 'collapse of traditional authority' and the 'determined society' that are their consequences, 'hounds' the claim of experience)[24], in the same way that I argued political economy had reduced experience to 'interest' in the fourth chapter.[25] Cora Diamond evokes the pathos of this condition in reflecting on the difficulty of giving each other reasons and recognising the suffering (and pleasures) of others.[26] The alienation of experience and the problem of communicability returns the thesis to the topic I introduced in the first chapter, and seeks to respond to the deracination of experience as a problem that is addressed both on an individual and collective level. Cavell's concept of the voice shows how the individual's experience and

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on aesthetics and movies in which 'the absence of an established canon of criticism would mean that we would be forced back upon a faithfulness to nothing but our experience and a wish to communicate it.' (Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979, *xx*) In the process, attempts to begin with descriptions of the movies under discussion were consistently marked by what Cavell called 'descriptive inaccuracies', which Cavell suggests result from the conflation of the viewer's judgment of a scene and the film itself: 'It *feels* as if he is [being blackmailed, when in fact it's someone else]… but that's the movie' (*xxi*).

[20] See Simon Critchley, *Very Little… Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, pp.118-138.

[21] See James Conant, 'Cavell and the Concept of America' in *Contending with Stanley Cavell*, Russel B. Goodman (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp.55-81. See also Judith Shklar, 'Can We Be American Scholars?' in *Liberal Modernism and Democratic Individuality: George Kateb and the Practices of Politics*, Dana R. Villa and Austin Sarat (ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp.64-77.

[22] The key works of Cavell on this topic include *The Senses of Walden*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981 and *This New and Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.

[23] Cavell's key text on this topic is *In Quest of the Ordinary*, in particular the chapters in which Cavell compares Emerson to Descartes (pp.105-129) and Kant (pp.27-49).

[24] Bernstein, 'Aesthetics, Literature, Modernism', 123. Bernstein is implicitly comparing Cavell and Adorno here. I discuss this connection further below.

[25] I discuss this reduction further below, questioning the analysis of the alienation of modern experience as a bifurcation between, say, feeling and intellect, or knowing and experience.

[26] Cora Diamond, 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 1:2, 2003, pp.1-26.

voice is both already connected to the collective dimension of language, and calls out to be recognised within that collective dimension as part of a community.

The voice both expresses individual desires, knowledge and experience, but it is fundamentally communicative and so seeks to put us in community with others. Cavell's 'concept of *voice*' is best conceptualised in terms of its historical, literary and political contexts, which give substance to the aesthetic background.[27] However, recent accounts of Cavell's work such as Adam Gonya's *Stanley Cavell and the Potencies of the Voice* narrow these contexts to the specific philosophical lineages of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.[28] Gonya's Schopenhauer-inspired notion of 'potencies' isolates the voice from Cavell's deepest commitments and stages the scene of acquisition through the abstracted figures of the 'Jungle', 'Skeptical' and 'Common Man.' Gonya is concerned primarily with the 'mysterious origin' of the voice and the sources of its 'potencies' in the bifurcated concepts of 'intellect' and 'feeling'. In trying to account for the ordinariness of words occurring to us, with which Gonya begins his account, he simplifies Cavell's concept of the voice and introduces concepts from Schopenhauer which do not play a significant role in Cavell's thought. Words do not 'occur' to us as if from some reservoir of interior or psychological potencies for which we must account (except in unusual circumstances, for which we will also need an account), rather they are uttered 'against a background of shared judgments' in which subjectivity and objectivity are 'achieve[d] in language.'[29] Gonya mystifies the fact that humans find words at all, as though it was always through '*making an effort*' that experience 'finds its way into language.'[30] As I note below, Cavell conceives of speaking as unable to *help* making our experience available. Similarly, Cavell notes that for Wittgenstein, 'it is not clear how one might go about becoming surprised by such a fact.'[31] Gonya's pseudo-psychological framework emphasises the individual dimension of the voice over its collective and communicative aspects, which the post-Kantian aesthetic context can illuminate far better.

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[27] See Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary*, 225 and Bernstein, 'Aesthetics, Modernism, Literature', 115.
[28] Adam Gonya, *Stanley Cavell and the Potencies of the Voice*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019.
[29] Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary*, 225. Cavell writes, 'there is a background of pervasive and systematic agreements among us, which we had not realised, or had not known we realise.' *The Claim of Reason*, 29.
[30] Gonya, *Potencies*, 21.
[31] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 15. Gonya's approach bears some similarity with that of Kripke's recounting of the sceptical argument (see the previous chapter), insofar as it entertains a metaphysical (or 'mythological' as Wittgenstein writes [*Philosophical Investigations*, §221]) conception of the voice.

'Potencies' fails to explain the significance of the voice in a way that the combination of aesthetics, politics and historical context I have used throughout this thesis can make up for. J.M. Bernstein shows how Cavell's work responds to the fragmentation of tradition and absence of clear criteria for what matters.[32] It is precisely due to the loss of tradition with which I started the thesis that the 'image of the philosopher as the voice of traditional wisdom' is no longer tenable.'[33] The status of philosophy, and specifically the philosophical voice, exemplifies the dilemma of aesthetic modernism and democratic speech. Cavell's major works, like *The Claim of Reason*, 'provide the terms in which readers can understand its work (and so its manner or method), the terms in which it will criticise itself and other philosophies, and the terms in which it might be related to its personal and historical context…'[34] This requires, Bernstein proposes, 'a philosophy that models itself upon the claiming of works of art… we have discovered that the task of making sense of our standing in the world is somehow wholly up to us. Modernism is the moment in which we no longer have clear criteria' for meaning.[35] Since Kant defines aesthetic beauty as separate from conceptual determination and so objective validity, Bernstein argues that the universal voice evinces

> the peculiar gap between support and agreement that makes the demand for agreement, the claim that one is speaking for everyone and so with a universal voice both plausible, even unavoidable, and presumptuous, an inflation of one's own responding...[36]

The problem of the voice is both aesthetic and political insofar as the loss of tradition threatens collective experience, robs us of determinate 'standards' of taste which we can use

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[32] Bernstein, 'Aesthetics and Modernism', 116-117. For Bernstein, these conditions matter insofar as Cavell's task is to show that they are not merely a loss, just as for Nietzsche, the importance of 'the possibility of a recovery of sorts from the trauma of modernity, the possibility of a new mythic sense of time, is that it is supposed to function as the kind of consolation and reorientation without which the advent of modernity *would* appear as *mere* loss, trauma and destruction.' See Robert Pippin, *Modernism as Philosophical Problem*, 154.
[33] Ibid. 116.
[34] Stephen Mulhall, 'On Refusing to Begin' in *Contending with Stanley Cavell*, Russel B. Goodman (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 23. See also Cavell, 'Interview with James Conant', in which he says that the difference or mark of a philosophical form is not 'a rhetorical form, any more than there is an emotional form, in which I expect conviction to happen. But the sense that nothing other than this prose just here, as it's passing before our eyes, can carry conviction, is one of the thoughts that drives the shape of what I do.' (59) See also Cavell, *This New and Yet Unapproachable America* on Emerson's 'Experience' essay, which 'announces and provides the conditions under which an Emersonian essay can be experienced…' (103)
[35] Bernstein, 'Aesthetics and Modernism', 116.
[36] Ibid. 115.

to measure experience, and forces us to account for our belonging in a community in a way that the obligatory bonds of tradition never did.[37] While in a traditional society 'there is no space for dissent, disagreement, collapse', in modernity, each individual is called upon to announce not only their membership in a community, but their very existence.[38] After Descartes, Cavell writes, 'whether I do or do not exist as a human being… is a matter demanding proof.'[39] Cavell signals the demand for self-declaration in referring to 'the question of the "age of consent" or the "age of reason"', inviting both the sense of 'age' as in epoch, or 'age' as in the transition from childhood to adulthood:

> To speak for oneself politically is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind. Who these others are, for whom you speak and by whom you are spoken for, is not known a priori, though it is in practice generally treated as given.[40]

The stakes of the voice in this passage, and the particular way in which Cavell imagines political participation in connection with a concept like the universal voice, will be analysed in the following sections. Cavell insists that the act of self-declaration has a wider significance: Emerson's 'dominating claims for his writing: that it proves his human existence [and] that what he has proven on his behalf, others are capable of proving on theirs.'[41] However, Cavell also argues that in order to take up the 'life-giving power of words', we must accept a 'readiness to subject your desire to words, to become intelligible,

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[37] See Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire': 'inner concerns do not have their issueless private character by nature. They do so only when he is increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience.' (*Illuminations*, 160)
[38] Bernstein, 'Aesthetics and Modernism', 116.
[39] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 113.
[40] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 26. He continues: 'To speak for yourself then means risking the rebuff – on some occasion, perhaps once for all – of those for whom you claimed to be speaking; and it means risking having to rebuff – on some occasion, perhaps once for all – those who claimed to be speaking for you. There are directions other than the political in which you will have to find your own voice – in religion, in friendship, in parenthood, in love, in art – and to find your own work; and the political is likely to be heartbreaking or dangerous. So are the others. But in the political, the impotence of your voice shows up quickest; it is of importance to others to stifle it; and it is easiest to hope there, since others are in any case included in it, that it will not be missed if it is stifled, i.e., that you will not miss it. But once you recognize a community as yours, then it does speak for you until you say it doesn't, i.e., until you show that you do. A fortunate community is one in which the issue is least costly to raise; and only necessary to raise on brief, widely spaced, and agreed upon occasions; and, when raised, offers a state of affairs you can speak for, i.e., allows you to reaffirm the polis.' (27)
[41] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 114.

with no assurance that you will be taken up.'[42] I interrogate the claim that our subjective expressions of experience make on others, focusing on the historical loss of certainty. I examine the ways in which desire and interest must show themselves in our expressions even if in aesthetic experience they are bracketed. I focus on the way in which the voice represents the quilting point between individual and collective experience, the way it makes both political and aesthetic demands on us, and the way ordinary, common materials in the language can be transformed.[43] I propose an account of the voice in which the act of claiming heightens both the subjective and collective dimensions of experience, linking us at our most personal to the experience of others.

The Language of Experience: Scepticism and Modernity

> *Speech is often barren; but silence also does not necessarily brood over a full nest.*
> George Eliot, *Felix Holt, The Radical*

Cavell's two most significant sources are Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin.[44] The starting point for his work is their response to the demand placed on philosophy by scepticism, which in the early twentieth century reached the pinnacle of declaring that value judgments were meaningless, or nonsense.[45] Crucially, for my argument, scepticism erodes the space within which other's experience is connected to mine in an immediate or obvious way. Cartesian scepticism is part of the inheritance of philosophical modernity insofar as it proposes that shared experience cannot be taken for granted. In rendering explicit the fantasy of 'seamless'

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[42] Ibid. 114.

[43] Sandra Laugier, 'Emerson, Skepticism and Politics' in *The Other Emerson*, Branka Aarsic and Cary Wolfe (ed.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, describes Cavell's work as addressing 'the acceptance of speech, of the autobiographical, and the act of (dis)possessing by the self of one's speech as the only way, paradoxically, of accessing representativeness.' (204)

[44] See Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, pp.1-72 For an account of Cavell's inheritance of Austin, see Mulhall, 'Suffering a Sea-Change', in *Reading Cavell*. And see also Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, pp.1-26. For a discussion of Cavell and Wittgenstein, see Charles Bernstein, 'Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein', *boundary 2*, 9:2, Winter 1981, pp.295-306. Andrew Norris notes that Cavell's writing on the voice is informed by both, however suggests that 'in *The Claim of Reason* Cavell indicates that though Austin puts the question of the voice back into (philosophical) play for him, it is Wittgenstein who puts that voice into *conversation*… the notion of the human voice is only revealed in its true significance for Cavell in conversation with another… [I]t is only in such a context that one can sensible makes *claims* and ask for and give *acknowledgment* – two of Cavell's pivotal concepts. (This is not, of course, to foreclose the question of whether and to what extent I at any juncture might stand as other to myself).' 'Introduction' in *The Claim to Community*, 322, note 19. See also Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell*, 2002, 8-9.

[45] Stanley Cavell, 'Foreword' in Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, Catherine Porter (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, *xviii*.

understanding of others as part of the inheritance of scepticism, Cavell reasserts 'the idea that the problem of other minds is a problem of human history (the problem of modern human history; the modern problem of human history)'.[46] Cavell reconstructs the historical invention of a particular conception of human experience that substituted '"privacy for rationality as the mark of the mental."'[47] Cavell points to Protestantism as a 'convulsion of sensibility' in the 'achievement of privacy' that contributes to the 'process of humanisation' as a modern undertaking.[48] Central to Cavell's work is the recognition that scepticism powerfully sets the terms of our understanding of how our individual experience relates to others, and, moreover, that in the picture constructed by Descartes of our mind, 'its overcoming will take the form of violating… privacy.'[49] One idea of this overcoming, which Cavell finds expressed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (§220), is that of the 'injured universal's' avenging of a crime, evoking a guilty privacy I will return to below and have discussed in the first chapter.[50] Cavell wishes to explain why full transparency of our experience comes to seem a violation, and that 'consent' to community of shared experience might consist of conformity 'produced by… suffering'.[51] We must recognise, as Eldridge insists, that although

> our practical and cognitive lives *are* intertwined – it is no accident that one of Cavell's central terms, *acknowledgment*, is a transcription of Hegel's *Anerkennung* – but neither full satisfaction in shared social practices nor full and self-standing absolute knowing of 'the' way things are, free of practical commitment and risk, is possible. In both social and cognitive practice, there are always resistances and remainders, both socially and within oneself. These resistances and remainders will call for and enable departures from what is already done, either cognitively or socially.[52]

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[46] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 468-471. Richard Eldridge notes a comparison here between Cavell and Hegel's approach to the 'histories of human cognitive and social practices, taking it for granted that these practices are deeply interrelated' ('Introduction: Between Acknowledgment and Avoidance', in *Stanley Cavell*, Richard Eldridge (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 8).
[47] Ibid. 470.
[48] Ibid. 470.
[49] Ibid. 470.
[50] Ibid. 475. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, H.B. Nisbet (trans.), Allen W. Wood (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 252.
[51] Ibid. 476.
[52] Richard Eldridge, 'Introduction: Between Acknowledgment and Avoidance' in *Stanley Cavell*, Richard Eldridge (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 9.

It is these departures I have sought to describe in developing an account of aesthetic experience, and in this chapter, I seek to put such experiences in the context of their practical commitments. But I argue that we must keep in mind the way in which the fantasy of transparency, which as Cavell shows is sutured into our modern conception of experience, distorts what we expect from shared experience. Like Benjamin, Cavell does not propose that overcoming the sceptical problem of other minds requires a reconciliation, but rather an acknowledgment of our separateness and so the requirement that we communicate and find ourselves and each other in our acts of communication, which Cavell calls the 'truth of scepticism.'[53]

The significance of scepticism in Cavell's work, I suggest, is comparable to the emphasis in Rancière's conceptualisation of aesthetics on a gap between sensuous perception and meaning. However, scepticism's gap, unlike the aesthetic one, is produced by doubting how I *know* the other's existence. It is a gap which paradoxically cannot adequately be filled by knowledge; it states a demand that cannot be fulfilled, at least not by appealing to our ordinary criteria.[54] Wittgenstein suggests that the sceptic's insistence that we cannot know someone else's 'sensation' [*Empfingdung*], dramatized in the case of knowing another's pain, 'tricks us here' because 'this word "describe" [*beschreiben*]' forces us to identify or respond to it 'by means of criteria'.[55] The failure to ask the right question is evident in Kripke's provision of a 'sceptical solution' to the 'sceptical problem' of sharing experience, which I analysed in detail in the previous chapter. Similarly, Kant highlights in the *Critique of Judgment* the poverty of 'sensation' for communicable experience:

> sensation… can be represented as completely communicable in the same way [as cognition] only if one assumes that everyone has a sense that is the same as our own – but this absolutely cannot be presupposed in the case of sensory sensation.[56]

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[53] See Sanford Sheih, 'The Truth of Skepticism' in *Reading Cavell*, Alice Crary and Sanford Sheih (ed.), London: Routledge, 2006, pp.131-165 and see Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell*, pp.108-142 for an account of Cavell's approach to scepticism and the problem of other minds. However, it should be noted that Sheih nor Mulhall contextualise scepticism in historical terms, and it is rare to find reconstructions of Cavell's debate with epistemology that do so.
[54] See J.L. Austin, 'Other Minds', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 20, 1946, pp.148-187 and *Philosophical Papers*, Urmson and Warnock (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, pp.44-84. Part Four of *The Claim of Reason* is primarily concerned with the implications of scepticism for the knowledge of other minds. I demonstrated in the previous chapter how Cavell and Rancière's 'turn' on Descartes finessed the problem of a lack of knowledge into a matter of aesthetic (rather than epistemological) education.
[55] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §290.
[56] Kant, *CJ*, §39, 5:291, 171. See also Eli Friedlander, 'On Examples' in *Reading Cavell*, 209-210.

Common sense applies to a broad concept of communicable experience, which contrasts with the isolated status of appeals to sensation.[57] The sceptic's picture of sensation denies the possibility of a shared sense. Sensation can be judged only in terms of mere preference, whereas the pleasure in the beautiful demands taking account of a stronger feeling and more binding shared sense. Wittgenstein compares the incommunicability of sensation to us each having 'a box with something in it which we call a "beetle." No one can ever look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.'[58] Ironically, what the sceptic must concede they have in common with everyone is the loss or denial of knowledge, just as Zerilli argues that accounts of political subjectivity defined by shared *sensation* (especially of trauma or pain) do not have experience in common but 'the uncommunicable experience of its loss.'[59] This characterises hypertrophic responses to modernity in 'the anxiety of necessary inexpressiveness,' which this thesis seeks to temper.[60] I suggest that Cavell's unique approach to the problem of scepticism allows us to refocus discussions of shared experience away from the loss or impossibility of communicating. Cavell's work is driven not simply by the refutation or repudiation of

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[57] Jonathan Lear argues for the connection between Kant and Wittgenstein's conceptions of shared experience as a transcendental condition for experience in 'The Disappearing "We"'.

[58] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, §293. Of course, the joke is that in such a form of life or in a such a language game, 'beetle' does not mean a kind of creature, but roughly 'the thing each of us has in our box', just as in the sceptic's language game, 'sensation' does not mean an experience like mine but 'a thing each of us has or something one undergoes, alone, inside our bodies' See Michael Clune, *The Defence of Judgment*, who in defending the possibility of an impersonal experience of subjectivity, argues 'metaphors of escaping the self, or breaking out of the box of the self, are misleading…' (126).

[59] Zerilli, 'Judging Politically', *Political Theory*, 46:4, 638. Zerilli is replying to Davide Panagia's contribution to the same symposium, see pp.622-630 and see also Panagia's interpretation of Kant and Rancière as theorists of sensation in *The Political Life of Sentiment*. By contrast, see Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.239-260. Cf. Paola Marrati, 'Political Emotions: Stanley Cavell on Democracy', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 2011, 65:256 (2), pp.167-182.

[60] Mulhall describes the frenzied attempt to deny that any of my expressions might express my*self*, or, as it were my 'soul': 'I see any expression of myself as a distortion, a theatricalization of myself. Such theatricalization is of course possible, and it would result in responses from the other which would be directed to the wrong thing—to the part I played, the character I enacted, rather than to me myself. But there is another, more passive approach to self- expression: rather than making yourself known, trying to direct the other's responses (thus converting her and her responses into another character in your production), allow yourself to be known—wait to be known.' (*Stanley Cavell*, 140) Cavell writes that 'if the problem of the other is a problem of the victory of knowledge, then it is equally a problem of this victory over myself, determining the nature of my self-consciousness. Then two things happen: I try avoiding further knowledge for myself by taking the problem of other minds solely from the passive side; and I thus find a new possibility for disappointment with knowledge, that my self-consciousness comes between my consciousness and my expression of it, so that my expressions are embarrassed, are no longer *natural.* But if my expressions are no longer natural they are no longer the foundation of certainty about my (inner) life, no longer criterial. And if no longer natural then they are artificial, merely conventional. I theatricalize myself. The problem of the other now, the problem in being known, is not that the other does not see me as human, but rather that the other (only) sees me, and always as a human something or other.' (*The Claim of Reason*, 477)

scepticism,[61] but also by the recognition of its truth: 'we cannot literally or directly have the experience of others.'[62] Scepticism names a specifically modern condition of separation, and specifically the experience of that separation as suffering it. Scepticism is linked to the modern 'process of secularisation' which must contend with 'the trace or scar of the departure of God', the loneliness of which produces the question

> And couldn't the other suffer the fate of God? It strikes me that it is out of the terror of this possibility that Luther promoted the individual human voice in religious life… And it may explain why the process of humanisation can become a monstrous undertaking, placing infinite demands upon finite resources. It is an image of what living our scepticism comes to.[63]

The experience of loneliness and the terror of irreparable disconnection from others is an historical condition for Cavell, transformed by scepticism into a metaphysical and epistemological question or mood. But is not fatal to communicable experience that we cannot 'literally or directly' have the same experience. Indeed, it is the condition of the communicability of experience at all that we do not have identical experiences, else we would have nothing (interesting) to say. The loss of tradition and the possibility of an indeterminate relation between matter and meaning, which I have argued in the third chapter is the defining condition of aesthetic experience after Kant, means that we *must* communicate our experience if we are to be in community with others. The loss of experience is less the atrophy of some psychological aptitude than the historical change in the source of authority. We can re-frame the 'epistemological problem of society' not as one of discovering 'new facts about it' but deciding and discovering 'my position with respect to these facts – how I know with whom I am in community', for example.[64] Such a discovery is, by virtue of the non-determinate relation of experience to the social order, revisable and the source of what Rancière calls 'dissensus'.[65]

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[61] Cavell questions the use of the word 'repudiation' in the opening of 'Knowing and Acknowledging' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 238. It is 'vague enough' (both sufficiently and too vague), but also suggests 'the latest in the long history of altering relations which philosophy, as it alters, will draw between itself and common sense or everyday belief or the experience of the ordinary man.' (238) See also Sheih, 'The Truth of Skepticism' in *Reading Cavell*, 132-134.
[62] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 118.
[63] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 470.
[64] Ibid. 25.
[65] See Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Steven Corcoran (trans. and ed.) London: Bloomsbury, 2015. Cavell is particularly attentive to the problem of entry and inclusion into a society that

The opposite of 'dissensus' in Rancière's terms is consensus, while for Cavell, borrowing from Emerson, it is conformity. Conformity is not only a moral and political condition, but also one in which our experience is impoverished by its cloying over-proximity and obedience to others – in Kantian terms, its heteronomy ('as if most men's words as a whole cried out for redemption').[66] The voice of experience in conformity is 'another man's saying; unluckily that other withdraws himself in the same way, and quotes me.'[67] Cavell argues that we can hear this conformity in Polonius, who quotes advice '"to thine own self be true"' (a maxim of Socrates and Kant alike),[68] as 'a man lost to experience, spoiled by his voice, or nonvoice…'[69] Shakespeare, it should be noted, is a constant reference to Cavell in part because, he writes, 'My intuition is that the advent of scepticism as manifested in Descartes' *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare… The issue is no longer [as it was in Montaigne's scepticism] how to conduct oneself best in an uncertain world; the issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world. Our scepticism is a function of our now illimitable desire.'[70] The boundary between ancient and modern scepticism is, for Cavell, visible in Shakespeare.[71] Scepticism, for Norris, is 'a process of self-alienation', and names 'a mode of denying our life' in way that both invites contrast with the 'devotion' of ancient Pyrrhonian scepticism to 'the stunned tranquillity of *ataraxia*'.[72] However, Cavell interprets *Hamlet* not just as turning the maxim 'to thine own self be true' between two poles: voiceless insincerity ('redemptive words reduced to serving a server') and 'the sound of a good heart making a momentary, flickering way back.'[73] *Hamlet* also

> studies… a response to being asked to assume the burden of another's existence, as if that were the burden, or price, of assuming one's own… The emphasis in the question "to be or not" seems not on whether to die but on whether to be born, on

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ignores one's experience in the case of women in, for example, Hollywood melodramas. See *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996. See also the previous chapter for a discussion of the figure of the child and political communities.

[66] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 114.

[67] Emerson, 'Experience' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Brooks Atkinson (ed.), New York: The Modern Library, 2000, 308.

[68] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 37.

[69] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 18.

[70] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 3. See also Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 494.

[71] Andrew Norris, *Becoming Who We Are: Politics and Practical Philosophy in the Work of Stanley Cavell*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 51. See also Hammer, *Stanley Cavell*, 77.

[72] Ibid. 51.

[73] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 18.

> whether to affirm or deny the fact of natality, as a way of enacting, or not, one's existence.[74]

Scepticism posits the choice between accepting birth, which is 'to participate in a world of revenge… of shifting and substitution', or 'refuse to partake in it [which] is to poison everyone who touches you, as if taking your own revenge.'[75] In other words, the task of assuming responsibility for our own existence, something only possible in 'the appearance of the cogito at its historical moment', is also a task of inheriting and responding to the demands of our existence *with others*.[76]

Conformity and Alienation

Shakespeare captures a particular response to scepticism in which the 'fantasy of necessary inexpressiveness' (not being able to tell you my experience, say of pain) 'relieve[s] me of the responsibility for making myself known to others – as though if I were expressive that would mean *continuously betraying my experiences, incessantly giving myself away*…'[77] Stephen Greenblatt provides further historical context in the emergence of the written word as the authoritative source of evidence of our lives, which, by taking its distance from the fragile human voice acquires a 'kind of absoluteness, integrity and finality' like the soliloquies in *Hamlet* that 'claim not access to the inner life but existence as the inner life.'[78] The religious tradition of eloquent silence becomes a mark of inwardness (and so existence as such), 'since the Protestant emphasis on *inward* grace tends to obscure the implication of the body and hence to render public behaviour incomprehensible or irrelevant.'[79] The intensification of inward experience hypertrophies the incommunicability of experience, as Benjamin noted in describing the 'issueless private character' of 'inner concerns' not as 'natural' but as products of our increasing inability to 'assimilate the data of the world around [us] by way of experience.'[80] Polonius' voicelessness presages the empty possessiveness of modern experience I described in the first chapter. It suggests a guilty concealment of our intention,

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[74] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 128.
[75] Ibid. 128.
[76] Ibid. 128.
[77] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 351, my emphasis.
[78] Greenblatt, 'The Word of God in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 86.
[79] Ibid. 78.
[80] Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, 160.

so that we distrust them most when they coincide best with our innermost selves.[81] Cavell writes, bitterly, that the

> obvious moral interpretation of the image of figuring from the innermost to the outermost is that of moral perfectionism at its most objectionable, the desire to impose the maximisation of one's most private conception of the good on all others… [O]ur conformity exhibits merely the fear of others' opinions, which Emerson puts as a fear of others' eyes, which claps us in a jail of shame… [82]

The shared experience of conformity is similar to that defined by political economy, against which I argued Kant's conception of disinterest can be defined. Indeed, Cavell defines Emerson's project of moral perfectionism precisely in terms of disinterest, 'an independence Emerson calls neutrality (free of interests and of inclinations)' that is recalled to each of us by the voice of a child,[83] '"unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence…"'[84] It is the debased common sense of self-interest, bound not by 'benevolence' but the expectation that others will act in 'regard to their own interest.'[85] The expression of judgment under such a conception of interest is intended not to share experience but to persuade or convince another to obey their own self-interest (and gratify ours). Adam Smith writes, '"We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities."'[86] Sociality is reduced to the level of venal interest, or something that occurs when our true intentions are unintentionally revealed by a treacherous coincidence of words

[81] Cavell notes that Austin calls the retreat to the '"inward and spiritual"' dimension a sort of 'moral chiselling' (*Cities of Words*, 143), which makes a good counter-image to the metaphysicians' mystification of depth.
[82] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 46-47.
[83] See Emerson, 'Self-Reliance' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Brooks Atkinson (ed.), New York: The Modern Library, 2000: 'The nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to do and say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of human nature. A boy is in the parlour what the pit is in the playhouse… He cumbers himself never about consequences, about interests; he gives independent, genuine verdict. You must court him; he does not court you. But the man is as it were clapped into jail by his consciousness… There is no Lethe for this. Ah, that he could pass again into his neutrality!' (133-134) This passage recalls both Benjamin's 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre' in the ability of adults to respond to the child (see 205: 'When grownups act for children, the result is archness.').
[84] Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 140.
[85] Adam Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner and W.B. Todd (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, Book 1, Chapter 2, 27-27.
[86] Smith in Elettra Stimilli, *Debt and Guilt: A Political Philosophy*, Stefani Porcelli (trans.), London: Bloomsbury, 2019, 25.

and meaning; in such circumstances, we would distrust rather than trust the power of language to mean what we say.[87]

In response to the possibility of exposing such guilty conscience, 'Men seem to have learned… the art of perpetual retreating and reference…'[88] Lives lived in conformity are 'as afraid to insist on their own desires as they are unable to determine their duties by discounting those desires. Instead they quote, they imitate, *they go along*.'[89] Cavell remarks that Emerson's own 'devious or duplicitous… formulations' are demanded 'out of his sense of truly satisfying words as ones that have been reclaimed from their counterfeit currency.'[90] Like Rancière, Cavell links the renunciation of interest less to the passivity of the will than the neutralisation of the distinction between an active and a passive will:

> Instead of making the will free by making it effective, Emerson recommends learning patience… This may sound perfectly empty, as if it says: the way to make the will effective… is just not to do anything… What I take Emerson, rather, to be saying, is that we have to reverse our lives, reconsider the magnitude of our claims upon the world, and its (consequent) claims upon us.[91]

Conformity is a way of avoiding both our claim on the world and its claim on us. Although Cavell and Rancière share the idea of the neutralisation of the will in emphatic experience, Cavell also suggests that this state demands some response from us, not necessarily in efficacious action but rather in expression. For Emerson and Cavell, conformity is a particular way of responding to the pressure to account for our experience, namely one that wallows in the 'human vulnerability, or folly, or condition, or, as Nietzsche also puts it, this

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[87] See Andrew Norris, 'Community and Voice' in *Becoming Who We Are*, 101-106. for a comparison between Cavell's approach to politics and the post-war liberal tradition. Norris implies that conformity is just as likely under conditions of 'privacy' and the elevation of individual liberty above shared commitments.
[88] Emerson, 'Experience', 308. 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go.' (*Hamlet*, III, 3, 96-97) Compare, 'O, my office is rank. It smells to heaven.' (III, 3, 37)
[89] Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 140.
[90] Ibid. 139. See also Montaigne, 'On experience', 'Our controversies are verbal ones… The question is about words: it is paid in the same coin.' (*Selected Essays*, 370)
[91] Ibid. 141. See Rancière on Emerson's 'materialism' in 'The American Scholar' in *Aisthesis*: '…if the new poet can and must take up the materialities of modern America, it is in order to denounce true materialism, which is embodied by the English empiricist and sensualist tradition. This tradition begins by enclosing material things within the limits of utility and abstractions of ownership, before opposing this vulgar world to the select world of spiritual pleasures. Materialism is the dualism that separates the material form the spiritual by separating particular things from the life of the whole. The task of the American poet is to restore the vulgar materialities of the world of work and everyday life to the life of the mind and the whole.' (57)

"absence of breeding", namely talking too much, about what cannot interest you.'[92] Along similar lines, Benjamin described the atrophy of experience (*Erfahrung*) into a debased version (*Erlebnis*) about which we merely chatter (*Geschwätz*).[93] We can add to the description in Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller' that we are not only 'poorer in communicable experience', but also poorer in the very conviction we have in our experience: 'we hate ourselves, as it were impersonally (bored with ourselves might be enough to say).'[94]

Benjamin, in texts like 'The Destructive Character', evinces disdain for the culture as an accumulation of materials with which we might, Cavell writes, 'stupify' [sic] ourselves.[95] Cavell suggests, further, that this 'consignment' to 'nonsensicality' which may come as much from a 'lack of interest' as from 'your own commitment to boredom', means that it 'does not appear unthinkable that the bulk of an entire culture… the culture of thinking aloud about itself, hence believing itself to be talking philosophy, should become ungovernably inane.'[96]

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[92] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 117. Gadamer draws on Nietzsche to make a similar point, '[Experience] is not wholly exhausted by its being the ultimate datum and basis of all knowledge. There is something else quite different… its inner relation to life.' (*Truth and Method*, 58) See also *The Claim of Reason*: 'what can comprehensibly be said is what is found to be worth saying… what can be communicated, say a fact, depends upon agreement in valuing, rather than the other way around.' (94) Cavell argues that such questions are answered only by studies in what I would call two (competing) discourses of value, economy and aesthetics, related by Cavell through speech: 'the aesthetics of speech and the economics of speech. In the former case we follow the fact that understanding what someone says is a function of understanding the intention expressed in his or her saying it, and then the fact that one's intention is a function of what one wants, to a perspective from which responding to what another says is to be seen as demanding a response to (the other's) desire. When in earlier writing of mine I broach the topic of the modern, *I am broaching the topic of art as one in which the connection between expression and desire is purified. In the modern neither the producer nor the consumer has anything to go on (history, convention, genre, form, medium, physiognomy, composition ...) that secures the value or the significance of an object apart from one's wanting the thing to be as it is. The consequent exercise of criticism is not to determine whether the thing is good that way but why you want it that way* – or rather, the problem is to show that these questions are always together.' (94-95, my emphasis) The modern appears for Cavell the condition of both a loss (nothing to go on) and a gain ('why you want it that way') that now weighs on the artist and beholder alike.

[93] See Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW II*, pp.731-736. See Nietzsche on '*Geschwätz*', Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 209. See also Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* in *The Beckett Trilogy*, London: Picador, 1983: 'the madness of having to speak and not being able to, except of things that don't concern me, that don't count, that I don't believe, that they have crammed me full of to prevent me from saying who I am…' (297)

[94] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, 84 and Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 16.

[95] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 95. Sandra Laugier points out that Cavell's disdain is not a highbrow disdain for mass culture, nor is he necessarily 'concerned with reversing artistic hierarchies or inverting the relation between theory and practice' but rather 'with the self-transformation required by our encounters with new experiences.' (Laugier, 'Popular Cultures, Ordinary Criticism', 997)

[96] Ibid. 95. Mulhall recalls Wittgenstein's reflection in the *Philosophical Investigations* of philosophy as a practice of destruction, to which he replies that he is 'only "clearing up the ground of language" [*Philosophical Investigations*, §118] on which structures of air [*Luftgebäude*], philosophical houses of cards, once stood. So is a modernist philosophical text engaged in destruction or reconstruction, or both, or neither? Is destroying structures of air true destruction? Is clearing up the ground of language on which they stood a form of construction or of reconstruction, or a preparation for (re)construction? What are the materials for such a project, and what does it aim to build?' (*Inheritance and Originality*, 16) Mulhall invites a sense of urgency in the question of how to respond under the pressure of such a thought (that 'an entire culture… should become

Marx imagines the philosopher's role 'as the *measuring-rod* of the estranged world' and suggests that 'the *mystical* feeling which drives philosophy forward… is *boredom* – the longing for content.'[97] Similarly, Benjamin remarks that 'Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience.'[98] Benjamin, Cavell and Marx's identification of boredom as an affect of modernity demonstrates the indifference that comes from our alienation from the world induced by scepticism and idealist abstraction alike, yet, like impersonality, it also suggests a distance from what fails to interest us or satisfy us that opens the possibility of something different.[99] Like Benjamin, Cavell's conception of the ordinary is a space within which both 'common action' and 'sceptical alienation' are possible.[100] For Rancière too, the ordinary is a space of transformation within which the 'sentences of great love and immense boredom [which] resembled those of ordinary stupidity' can contain 'singular snags' in 'the common language that goes straight ahead and has already spoken for them.'[101] For Rancière as for Cavell, the ordinary is just as much what we are missing when we take for granted what is common. But Cavell, Rancière and Benjamin all recognise that the materials for transformation and fulfilment are, as it were, lying around, already in the world of things and language. As Hammer notes, 'access to the ordinary tends to be difficult and even painful, and… the recovery of the ordinary requires an act of self-transformation.'[102]

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ungovernably inane'), continuing that this 'means a new dispensation of culture, one which dispenses with the present illusion of human cultivation in the name of a possibility of genuinely creative thought, of a form of life in which thinkers (which means language-users, which means all human beings) can discover genuine satisfaction, in which the fragments of past communities of meaningful thought and value can be used in the reconstruction of new but personally authorised conventions.' (16) As though this would be enough: 'what a hopeful idea!' (Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary*, 219) On boredom and the 'interesting', see Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 133-34. For Ngai, the possibility of oscillating between interest and boredom approximates the way in which disinterest obstructs determinate conceptualisation. However, 'aesthetic' interest, unlike disinterested aesthetic experience, 'toggles – it itself a toggling – between aesthetic and nonaesthetic judgments, the wavering between the boring and the interesting seems internal to the interesting… The interesting is a distinctively modern response to novelty and change – or, more precisely, to novelty as it necessarily arises against a background of boredom, to change against a background of sameness.' (135-136) Ngai extends this analysis to argue that 'interest' is a ubiquitous aesthetic affect that allows the experience of the ordinary to take on a meaningful dimension.

[97] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 110 and 123.

[98] Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', *SW III*, 149.

[99] See also Rancière, 'Deleuze, Bartleby, and the Literary Formula' in *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, Charlotte Mandell (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, pp.146-164 for Rancière's critique of Deleuze's 'indifferentism.' For commentary see Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, pp.21-44. It is notable that the epigraph to the first part of *The Claim of Reason* is from Feuerbach: 'This philosophy does not rest on an Understanding *per se*, on an absolute, nameless understanding, belonging one knows not to whom, but on the understanding of man; – though not, I grant, on that of man enervated by speculation and dogma; – and it speaks the language of men, not an empty, unknown tongue.' (1)

[100] Norris, *Becoming Who We Are*, 53. See Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 98.

[101] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 126.

[102] Hammer, *Stanley Cavell*, 12.

In terms remarkably similar to Benjamin, Emerson articulates the poverty and disenchantment of experience:

> Ghostlike we glide through nature, and should not know our place again… Every ship is a romantic object, except that we sail in. Embark, and the romance quits our vessel and hangs on every other sail on the horizon…[103] What opium is instilled into all disaster! It shows formidable as we approach it, but there is at last no rough rasping friction, but the most slippery sliding surfaces; we fall soft on a thought… There are moods in which we court suffering,[104] in the hope that here at least we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit… Grief… does not touch me; something I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me and leaves no scar… I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature.[105]

Laugier suggests that in the opening of his essay 'Experience', Emerson 'associates this loss [of or distance from the world] with the failure of speech, which by definition renders it inadequate, or unhappy. It is this inadequacy, infelicity in language that… Emerson calls the conformity of his contemporaries…'[106] Fulfilling experience for Emerson means neither conformity, within which individual experience is lost, nor an isolated figure of heightened emotion. But the essay recognises that the pressure on modern experience makes it seem 'that you can endure loss but not suffer it; you can gain wisdom but not experience the gain because at any given moment you are oblivious to what you are experiencing.'[107] Sharon Cameron argues that Emerson uses the experience of loss to characterise experience by

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[103] See chapter three, for a discussion of the image of the 'distant sail' in Winckelmann's lamentation for the ideal of beauty. Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 351.
[104] Cf. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: '… it is human *efficaciousness* and human *suffering*, for suffering, apprehended humanly, is an enjoyment of the self in man.' (87)
[105] Emerson, 'Experience', 307-309. In offering a definition of experience in *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin also refers to grief, recalling Proust's description of the '"experience [of] the death of a near relative…" The "forgotten" grief persists and gains ground; compare the death of the grandmother in Proust. "To experience means to master an impression that was so strong we could not grasp it at once." This definition of experience in Freud's sense is something very different from what is meant by those who speak of having "had an experience."' (403, K8, 2) See also Wittgenstein in Cavell, *This New and Yet Unapproachable America*: '"Grief" describes a pattern (*Muster*) which recurs with different variations, in the weave of our life. If a man's bodily expression of sorrow and of joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we should not have the characteristic formation of the pattern of sorrow or of the pattern of joy.' (47) See Wittgenstein, 'Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment', *Philosophical Investigations*, i, 2, 183.
[106] Sandra Laugier, 'The Ordinary, Romanticism, and Democracy', *MLN*, 130:5, 2015, 1043.
[107] Sharon Cameron, *Impersonality: Seven Essays*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007, 62.

feelings of dissociation and depthlessness.[108] Yet Cameron proposes that Emerson's response to the personal experience of loss is not a displacement onto a generalised imperviousness to grief, but a recuperation 'in a delegatory and impersonal way' that 'suggests feeling so extensive that it overwhelms the bounds of the personal… [But] even as grief is externalised as rain, the man also owns up to its source in himself.'[109]

Cavell's approach to scepticism insists on recovering the desiring aspects of knowledge, the knowingness of desire and the pressure these put on our expressions of experience.[110] The expression of subjective aesthetic experience changes the meaning of knowledge and desire such that they are no longer opposed to aesthetic experience. My argument develops Rancière's position which includes both an element of opposition between aesthetic experience and everyday life, as well as the dynamic interchange between them. In Cavell's aesthetics as well as his politics, he seeks to reconcile the developments of modernity with the possibility of fulfilling experience in ordinary milieus. This can be illustrated by Cavell's concept of the social contract (which could be likened to the '*sensus communis*' of Kantian aesthetic experience) *not* as 'a matter of prudential reasoning' through which individuals form communities but as the name for 'a mode of self-examination, a way of gauging the extent and nature of our commitments to one another and our polity.'[111] Cavell's concept of voice complicates the relationship between individual and collective experience.[112] Aesthetic experience in Cavell's surmise internalises this relationship and offers a space for its expression. Expressions of aesthetic experience exemplify the possibility of combining cognitive, reflective and evaluative judgment and so enable us to interrogate what would count as fulfilment.

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[108] Ibid. 58.
[109] Ibid. 69
[110] Siegfried Kracauer also associates Weber's conception of the individual and scepticism, writing 'his inability to believe becomes an unwillingness to believe.' ('Those Who Wait' in *The Mass Ornament*, 135) This formulation recalls the connection between the will to communicate and intellectual emancipation in the previous chapter.
[111] Norris, *Becoming Who We Are*, 98.
[112] See also Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations and States*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970 for an account of how voice may express a relation of commitment by an individual to a community, as opposed to the alternatives of exit (isolation or exile) and loyalty (obedience). Hirschman contextualises his project in terms of 'the irreplaceability and perfectibility of the democratic political process' in contrast to the 'power of the market mechanism' that others of the era, such as Milton Friedman, had espoused. See *Essays in Trespassing: Economics to Politics and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 212 and see pp.236-245 for further reflections on the interplay of exit and voice.

Conformity reflects the standardisation of human interests which had aimed to solve the problem of the loss of traditional standards by positing all experience in terms of a single reductive measure. Eva Illouz argues that standardisation responds to the intensified subjectivisation of experience in modernity with a 'standardised language' which produces an alienating distance between language and experience.[113] In contrast, aesthetics both attends to individual objects and experience, and seeks to articulate experience in non-formulaic terms. Rancière and Cavell's notion of aesthetics in particular accepts (even embraces) that there is a distance between sense and meaning, however does not concede that this makes experience incommunicable (as the hypertrophic or limit experience suggest). Rather, aesthetics posits that through attention with a specific object that we share through communicative and expressive acts, a substantive collective experience can be achieved, as I illustrated in the concept of translation in the previous chapter. Cavell writes that 'the demand to be see, call it the demand of experience to be satisfied, however thwarted or deferred, will not be settled apart from the *responsiveness to the claims of individual objects upon experience*.'[114] Expressions of aesthetic experience offer a glimpse at processes of meaning making more generally, especially ones that are resistant to standardisation, hierarchy and forms of traditional authority that determine meaning ahead of time. Moreover, the 'fundamental exposure to public disputation and even potential ridicule' in the communication of Kantian aesthetic judgment exemplifies the act of expressing experience in general, since it draws on the widest and deepest range of subjective responses available to us.[115]

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[113] Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007, 111-112.

[114] Cavell, 'The World as Things' in *Contemporary Collecting*, 110. The peculiarity and significance of aesthetic experience can be demonstrated by the inseparability of the *expression* of the experience from the object. As Wittgenstein illustrates, 'A man may sing a song with expression and without expression. Then why not leave out the song – could you have the expression then?' (*Conversations*, 29 (Section IV, No.2)) See also Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice' in *Image, Music, Text*, pp.179-189 on the distinctions of expressivity in different voices.

[115] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 119. See 117-120 and 146-147 on the relationship between aesthetic judgment and evidence or justification, as well as a discussion of the link between the post-war prevalence of information ('standardisation and individuation') and the 'forensic dimension of the interesting, the aesthetic judgment whose radically plank nature most conspicuously raises the issue of how we justify or supply evidence for aesthetic judgments in general.' (146-147) On information and modernity, see John Guillroy, 'The Memo and Modernity', *Critical Inquiry*, 31, Autumn 2004, pp.108-132. Guillroy explicitly distinguishes 'information' from 'knowledge' by drawing attention to how we speak about it: 'Information begins beyond the ordinary language sense of fact, which might refer to nothing more, for example, than my saying that it is now raining outside; but it also falls short of constituting knowledge, if by that term we mean a practice that organizes masses of information or data (for example, rainfall amounts) into complex structures of intelligibility and uses these structures to discover new relations and new facts.' (110)

Ordinary Language and Aesthetic Judgments: The Passionate Utterance and Criticism

> *… nothing other than this prose just here, as it's passing before our eyes, can carry conviction, is one of the thoughts that drives the shape of what I do.*
> Stanley Cavell, 'Interview with James Conant'

Cavell, in his inheritance of ordinary language philosophy, tasks himself with 'recognising language as everywhere revealing desire' in his coining, after Austin, of the 'passionate utterance'. The passionate utterance describes a speech act the recognition of which involves 'a systematic recognition of speech as confrontation, as demanding, as owed'.[116] I propose that the 'passionate utterance', for Cavell, is closely linked to his conception of the universal voice. This makes the expression of aesthetic judgment the site of connection between Cavell's 'passionate utterance' and Kant's 'universal voice.' Yet such a demand for speech can seem like an entrapment or verdict, since the goal of calling our words back to the world also involves 'conviction' that seems to arrest the free play of the faculties in the act of aesthetic judgment.[117] But Cavell asks what 'conviction, whether by proof or evidence or authority, [would] consist in', proposing that we cannot know ahead of time or by a set of conventions.[118] The expression of conviction stretches and deepens our claim to speak in a universal voice. Expressions of aesthetic experience demand that the voice bears the evidence of experience (conviction) without relying on convention, exemplifying the act of sharing genuine experience.[119] The techniques of ordinary language philosophy are meant to appeal 'to widely shared, or easily imaginable, circumstances', and so recall the ordinary connection between words and the world.[120] Such a connection in modernity is described by thinkers such as Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard 'not merely [by] their own alienation from their societies, but of self-alienation as characteristic of the lives common to their time; which is perhaps the same as seeing their time as alienated from its past'.[121] Cavell's procedures of

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[116] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow*, 187. See on Cavell's inheritance of Austin, Mulhall, 'Suffering a Sea-Change' in *Reading Cavell*.
[117] See Gilles Deleuze, 'To Have Done with Judgment' in *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp.126–35.
[118] Cavell, 'Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 71. See also 'Ending the Waiting Game' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 161.
[119] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 119.
[120] Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 271.
[121] Cavell, 'Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 173.

investigation also follow Wittgenstein in being concerned with 'forms of words whose meaning cannot be elicited in this way – words we sometimes have it at heart to say but whose meaning is not secured by appealing to the way they are ordinarily (commonly) used, because there is no ordinary use of them.'[122] Cavell writes that

> Experience as lost or missed… is for each writer [Nietzsche and Dewey, in this instance] a fundamental criticism of his present culture. The fact or fantasy of experience passing me by is also explicitly a way in which I have wished to word my interest in Austin and in the later Wittgenstein, especially I think when their procedures present themselves as returning us to the ordinary, a place we have never been… To know how to tell such things, it seems, is just to know how to speak.[123]

Kant's concept of criticism, according to Cavell, responds to this demand. It aims to 'record the presence of pleasure without a concept' but should be capacious enough to supply concepts 'after the fact of pleasure, articulate the ground of this experience in particular objects. The work of criticism is to reveal its object as having yet to achieve its due effect.'[124] It is neither arresting (knowledge) nor standardising (interest), just as Rancière insists that aesthetic experience consists in a double negation: neither desire nor knowledge. Rather, criticism responds to a particular object by showing how interest in it is not exhausted by the conventional routes of desire and knowledge. The voice is significant for Cavell since it calls attention to both the specificity of the speaker and their situation or circumstance, and calls to others to respond. Voicing criticism is an invitation to judgment, both of the object and the aesthetic evaluation contained in the criticism. It puts our capacity to share experience at stake in a heightened way, since aesthetic judgments can reveal our feeling at its most personal. The possibility of successful criticism or expression of judgment is that our most personal feeling will prove accessible and communicable to others. The 'passionate utterance' is a provocation that tests the extent to which what we say is in the universal voice.

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[122] Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 271.
[123] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 9-10. See also Laugier, 'Popular Cultures, Ordinary Criticism': cinema for Godard '"started out in black and white in order to mourn life." The paradox of the idea of a *return* to the ordinary is that one returns to something one never had.' (1001) Rancière says as much in *Aisthesis* about the flatness of cinema (see 193-197 for a discussion of the relationship between cinema's surface, the relationship between cinema as an art form and its relationship to 'prosaic life' (194) and Rancière's reading of character).
[124] Ibid. 11.

It offers itself for collective experience, as an instance and example of it that can be taken up or refused.

Cavell develops the 'passionate utterance' as an extension of his recalling the richness and complexity of ordinary language. For Cavell, a passionate utterance can be heard as

> calling back to the world, or as expressing its inexpressible abandonment; and singing as (dis)embodied within the doubleness of the human expressed as ecstasy – being beside oneself, perhaps in joy, perhaps in grief – a doubleness taken in the sense of singing out of a world in which a world is intervening, one to which perhaps we belong in abandoning ourselves.[125]

The operatic voice for Cavell represents human speech at the edge of intelligibility, testing its limits. The 'doubleness' of the voice presents or embodies in an immediate way the quality of 'transformative nextness' through which Cavell characterises moral perfectionism, and recalls the outward routes through which experience (*Erfahung*) acquires depth.[126] Whereas the 'performative utterance' conceived by Austin is 'an offer of participation in the order of law' – a sort of obedience to convention, provisional acceptance of a consensus – the 'passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorder of desire.'[127] By taking the example of the operatic voice, and asking that we 'take these inhumanly developed vocal aerialists for persons of exemplary passion', Cavell is self-consciously courting the 'absurd.'[128] However, like Adorno, Cavell embraces this proximity as a sign of art on the edge of its 'self-enclosure.'[129] The very autonomy of artistic practices and their separation from the ordinary modes of evaluation and utility makes art objects seem wilfully superfluous. For Cavell, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century achievements in opera represent less 'an idea of the universal encounter of the arts but as one of opera's progressive discovery of its particular powers and conditions as an individual art…'[130] But the transition

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[125] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 151.
[126] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 9.
[127] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 19.
[128] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 158.
[129] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*: 'Ridiculousness is the residue of the mimetic in art, the price of its self-enclosure.' (164)
[130] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 157. He continues: '… thus receiving inspiration and decisively returning inspiration to homologous issues of identity in the other arts; and if this may be understood as an intuition that the medium of opera is known only so far as its definitive instances make it known.' See on the issue of medium specificity in Cavell, Diarmuid Costello, 'On the Very Idea of "Specific Medium"', and see on the topic of

from Wagner to Debussy, whose opera *Pélleas et Mélisande* was subject to parody by 'Proust, no less', might be 'just a late expression of a certain form of theatre's always existing on the edge of the ridiculous… But opera itself, distinctly… courts the ridiculous'.[131] Such courting is taken by Cavell to be 'exposing judgment as such' by flirting with the 'threat of fraudulence' insofar as 'Anyone is apt at some time to regard the whole contract of agreeing to take singing for speaking' as ridiculous.[132] The condition of art's autonomy in modernity exposed itself to the charge of redundancy, which is why, as I argued in the third chapter, it must renew itself by drawing on and contaminating itself with ordinary life. It recalls life not in a literal way but by demanding response and being, itself, a response resonant with human intention, desire and interest in the world.

Art in modernity, for Adorno, maintains 'that element of the ridiculous and clownish that even the most significant works bear and that, unconcealed, is inextricable from their significance.'[133] However, while Adorno embraces the implications this bears for social and political critique, Cavell seems to want to deny it. Adorno writes,

> [A work's] ridiculousness is… also part of a condemnation of empirical rationality; it accuses the rationality of social praxis of having become an end in itself and as such the irrational and mad reversal of means into ends… The ridiculous, as a barbaric residuum of something alien to form, misfires in art if art fails to reflect and shape it.[134]

For Adorno, art's courting ridiculousness bears testimony to the separation of aesthetic experience from everyday domination.[135] Adorno's position that art must respond to this

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Rancière's rejection of medium specificity and an effort to reconcile it with that of Michael Fried (and by extension Cavell) see Knox Peden, 'Grace and Equality, Fried and Rancière (with Kant)' in *Michael Fried and Philosophy*.

[131] Ibid. 158.

[132] Ibid. 158. This 'contract' is related, I think, to the possibility of pleasure, and the extent to which we are willing to concede some continuity between an art's highest and lowest instances. For Cavell, this is the condition for being able to 'like the highest instances' of film: 'You don't even know what the highest instances are instances of unless you know the typical as well.' Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 6.

[133] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 164.

[134] Ibid. 164.

[135] For a brief comparison of Adorno and Cavell, see Espen Hammer, *Adorno's Modernism: Art, Experience and Catastrophe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. In particular on aesthetic autonomy and medium specificity see 77-78, note 13. For the contrast between Adorno and Cavell on the attribution of the work to the artist, Hammer writes that 'while an artist may not have had every meaningful feature of a work of art in mind at the time of creating the work, it is, as Stanley Cavell points out, always possible to ask in retrospect whether the artist is able to acknowledge given features of the work as her own. *The question then is*

condition is similar to Cavell's insofar as conviction is borne by the work's ability to reflect on its (absurd or ridiculous, which is to say instrumentally or empirically irrational) primordial convention, and that it should do so through nothing more than material shaped into form.[136] Indeed, Cavell defines the existence of the arts in modernity in terms of a 'new difficulty which comes to light in the modernist situation [namely] that of maintaining one's belief in one's own enterprise, for the past and the present become problematic together.'[137] In contrast to Adorno, then, Cavell understands one of the tasks of modern art to be testimony to the survival of significant intentional action ('belief in one's own enterprise') against the charge of ridiculousness and the overwhelming force of social domination or convention.[138] The relationship of present work to history is at stake, even if that history is, for Cavell, defined primarily in terms of a particular medium of the arts, whereas for Adorno and for

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not about what went on in the mind of the artist during the execution of the work but, rather, the extent to which the artist is able and ready to take responsibility for it; and while in some cases such acknowledgment may take the form of rediscovering feelings and ideas that originally went into producing it, in others it may simply consist in seeing whether the artist can presently identify with the feature… Even when the artist is incapable of taking responsibility for elements of her work, *the critic must proceed as if someone takes responsibility for them, i.e., underwrites and stands behind them*; otherwise they will seem entirely arbitrary. Adorno never really considers these points. *When asked whose voice it is we hear in a work of art, his response is that it is the voice of history itself, in particular that of suffering as mediated by the individual artist and expressed in the work.*' (124, my emphasis) Hammer suggests that 'Cavell's work may be accused of lack of historical specificity' in contrast to Adorno's view that 'the revolt against illusion [*Schein*] taking place in high modernism [is] a response to the loss of cognitive purchase that stems from the differentiation of art into an autonomous sphere that, under modern conditions, encourages the degeneration of art into play and entertainment.' (Hammer, 'Cavell and Political Romanticism', in *The Claim to Community*, 183)

[136] See Cavell, 'A Matter of Meaning It' in *Must We Mean What We Say?* and Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* on the primordial convention, as well as 'Art and Objecthood', where Fried notes the '*minimal conditions for something's being seen as a painting*; and that the crucial question is not what these minimal and, so to speak, timeless conditions are, but rather what, at a given moment, is capable of compelling conviction…' (*Art and Objecthood*, 169, note 6)

[137] Cavell, 'Foreword', *Must We Mean What We Say?*, *xxii*. This distinguishes 'modernizers' and 'modernists', the former who 'do not have history as a problem' (ibid.). This recalls Benjamin's critique of historicism. Cf. Stephen Melville, 'Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory' in *Seams*: 'one of the essential facts of the modern, now newly visible, is that from within it the relation between the practice of an enterprise and its past always already become problematic: modernism has always already invaded the history and tradition from which it would distinguish itself, and so it capable of finding itself wherever it looks within that history.' (175) Norris briefly compares Strauss and Cavell, see 'Introduction' in *The Claim to Community*, 320, note 5. A slightly more substantial comment is made by Robert Pippin in 'The Unavailability of the Ordinary: Strauss on the Philosophical Fate of Modernity', *Political Theory*, 31:3, 2003, pp.335-358, where Pippin notes the connection between Strauss' 'appeal to a more original, less distorted experience of the human things as such, as human' and 'in the later Wittgenstein, Austin and Cavell' (344; and see 352). Pippin notes of the two thinkers that 'there is something different in simply living out the ordinary, and feeling some need to call it to mind. That is already something extraordinary.' (358, note 43) One way of defining the shared anti-historicist claim of Strauss and Cavell is, as Pippin writes, arguing that the ordinary 'ought to be available everywhere and every when' (356, note 21). Cf. Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969, 12, note 12.

[138] One critique of Rancière's aesthetics argues that he neglects the possibility of intentional action, and so erodes the possibility of social critique on the basis of the success or failure of specific intentional actions. See Knox Peden, 'Grace and Equality' in *Michael Fried and Philosophy*. But Rancière, as Peden argues, like Michael Fried and Cavell, does not abandon intention but rather complicates its relationship to the meaning of material objects. See also Moi, *Revolution in the Ordinary*, 200-205.

Rancière, the relationship between the arts and history is far broader.[139] However, like Rancière and Adorno, Cavell perceives the liminal condition of opera as a marker of a particular kind of historical experience, namely one in which the authority of a magisterial or commanding voice is declining. (And, like Benjamin, Cavell views cinema not primarily as 'a matter of art: it has to do rather with shared experience… It is less a matter of aesthetics than of practice, a practice that connects and reconciles public and private, subjective expectation and sharing something in common.')[140] For Benjamin, death in the *Trauerspiel* 'frequently takes the form of a communal fate' rather than 'an individual destiny.'[141] Cavell portrays the end of the *Ring* cycle as a 'wedding ceremony, one to end all weddings'.[142] Similarly, for Rancière the cycle's 'fictional content itself recounts nothing other than the ruin of traditional narrative logic.'[143] This is important, because it bears on the meaning of the universal voice insofar as prior to this break it was clear who could speak for all, whereas under modern conditions, Cavell wonders, 'Who is to say whether a man speaks for all men?'[144] Ordinary language philosophy posits that we are all always speaking or failing to speak for all. In the instance of opera, however, Cavell suggests rather that 'the cloak of conviction is reversed and we are shown the workings that seam together the sublime with the ridiculous. Daring us means again: judge it ridiculous if you're prepared to be judged so, a dare that can be debased, institutionalised, politicised.'[145]

This seems like a theatrical way of defending theatre (a kind of dare) which aligns with a postmodern or deconstructionist reading of Cavell like that of Stephen Melville. Theatricality in Cavell and Fried's defence of conviction, for Melville, acknowledges the conditions of its

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[139] See Diarmuid Costello, 'On the Very Idea of a 'Specific' Medium: Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell on Painting and Photography as Arts', *Critical Inquiry*, 34: 2, Winter 2008, pp. 274-312 for an account of Cavell's concept of medium as both historical and open to revision by its contact with the other arts. Cavell seems precisely to invite such a claim in writing that opera discovers its 'particular powers… thus receiving inspiration and decisively returning inspiration to homologous issues of identity in the other arts' (*A Pitch of Philosophy*, 157). Hammer (see footnote above) criticises Cavell's conception of art as inadequately historical.
[140] Laugier, 'Popular Culture, Ordinary Criticism', 1003. See Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility' in *Illuminations*. See Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*: 'every cultural product leaks intelligence about the make-up of its contemporaneous world… and no products of culture are irretrievable to meaning.' (45)
[141] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 135-36.
[142] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 157.
[143] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 128. See also Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*: 'Foolish subjects like those of [Mozart's] *The Magic Flute* and [Weber's] *Der Freischütz* have more truth content through the medium of the music than does the *Ring*, which gravely aims at the ultimate.' (165) See also Jane K. Brown, *The Persistence of Allegory: Drama and Neoclassicism from Shakespeare to Wagner*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, pp.222-237.
[144] Cavell, 'Foreword' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, *xvi*.
[145] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 158.

possible success.[146] It also, in the vein of the postmodern resuscitation of allegory, '"narrate[s] its own contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence. It tells of a desire that must be perpetually deferred…"'[147] The allegory of the human voice in opera reveals it to be 'expressing its inexpressible abandonment', a condition at once 'public and private'.[148] Like the voice's courting ridiculousness in opera, Melville suggests that claiming a universal or authoritative voice for modern criticism has an allegorical dimension.[149] He writes that postmodernism means that 'modernism must inevitably come to see in itself its own allegory (and so also something like its own failure, its nonidentity with itself – but these then would be the terms of its power and success).'[150] Melville calls Fried's 'Art and Objecthood' 'a piece of theatrical criticism' in response to Robert Smithson's ironic accusation that Fried is being '"quixotic"' in calling minimalist objects 'theatrical': '"What Fried fears most is the consciousness of what he is doing – namely being himself theatrical."'[151] Melville's reading of Cavell with Fried risks dispensing with what makes Cavell's position appealing in its ability to connect the pursuit of artistic modernism with questions of life, which is to say its ability to bring to an end what is, in Craig Owens terms, '"perpetually deferred"'. For Cavell, the 'topic of our attachment to our words is allegorical of our attachments to ourselves and other persons… My words are expressions of my life.'[152] While Melville is right that this 'complicates the line between what we might otherwise want to distinguish, as, for example, life and literature', this does not mean it is meant ironically.[153] Just because waving 'hello and good-bye look alike',[154] or, as Cavell puts it, 'crimes and deeds of glory look alike', still this is

> not because the news has not got out, but because what counts as the one or the other cannot be defined until it happens; and when it has happened there is no sure way [the critic] can get the news out; and no way at all without risking something like a glory or a crime of his own.[155]

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[146] See my comments on Mulhall and Bernstein's reflections on the style of philosophy in *The Claim of Reason* above.
[147] Craig Owens in Melville, 'Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory' in *Seams*, 183.
[148] Melville, 'Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory' in *Seams*, 182.
[149] Ibid. 182-83.
[150] Ibid. 185.
[151] Ibid. 164.
[152] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 355.
[153] Melville, 'Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory' in *Seams*, 152.
[154] Ibid. 235, note 26.
[155] Cavell, 'Music Discomposed' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 191.

Simply because in some cases 'I take them to… be speaking ironically, etc.', the 'others do not vanish when a given case fails me. My experience continues to affix its seam.'[156] In other words, certain types of judgment inhere in ordinary experience: 'some things are on one side, some on the other.'[157] Aesthetic experience may challenge the way this seam is affixed, but for Kant, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure 'grounds an entire special faculty for discriminating and judging'.[158] On Kant's view as Friedlander writes, our pleasure can be identified with the 'very activity of our faculties in judging.'[159]

This returns our attention to the question of the link between language (as in the passionate utterance) and (aesthetic) experience. Aesthetic experience exemplifies a unique interlocking of subjective pleasure with the communicability of shared pleasure. Friedlander writes in his account of the *Critique of Judgment* that draws on Cavell's approach, 'Since my pleasure is taken in making something of my experience, I have an active share in it, and it is that which allows communication.'[160] When we are expressing a judgment on 'bad art', we do not need to draw on the free play of the faculties or come up with new expressions, since 'Bad works fall short *in known* ways. There is nothing surprising in the way in which a work is bad, whereas there is always an element of wonder in the opening to beauty.'[161] In contrast, beauty places a demand on us, specifically, an expressive demand we rarely (if ever) satisfy by simply calling an object 'beautiful', as Wittgenstein notes.[162] 'The language of judgment produces a demand when it is higher or when it shows how one can be resting on one's own ground to freely open meaning in the object.'[163] The aspiration of Cavell's concept of the passionate utterance can be described in terms of the attempt to connect pleasure (or feeling) that is purely my own (as when 'I trust myself in judging' or that 'self-reliance, universality is internalised into the very making of the judgment')[164] with the idea of the universal voice

[156] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 425.
[157] Ibid. 425.
[158] Kant, *CJ*, §1, 5:204, 90.
[159] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 28
[160] Ibid. 27. Friedlander insists, however, that communication does not cause the pleasure of aesthetic judgment, which would be to reintroduce 'an interest in society'. Rather, 'This is not pleasure in *communicating* in fact and being understood by others', 'but rather communicability', which is internal to aesthetic judgment. (27) See Kant, *CJ*, §9, 5:217-219, 102-104
[161] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 29.
[162] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology & Religious Belief*, Cyril Barrett (ed.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978, 2, 3.
[163] Ibid. 26.
[164] Ibid. 24.

espoused by Kant.[165] The passionate voice's flirtation with the edge of sense corresponds with the demand upon expressions of judgment to approach the condition of art, something suggested by Kant's description of 'beautiful art' as displaying 'its excellence precisely by describing beautifully…'[166] Kant describes the work of the artist

> not as it were a matter of inspiration or a free swing of the mental powers, but a slow and indeed painstaking improvement, in order to let it become adequate to the thought and yet not detrimental to the freedom in the play of the mental powers.[167]

Although, Friedlander forestalls 'communicability' from becoming 'actual communication' (a distinction which allows Friedlander to defend the purity of aesthetic experience),[168] nevertheless he concedes that we do in fact talk about beauty but precisely in non-exhaustive ways.[169] In other words, expressions of judgment exhibit the 'very gap between the idea and any attempt to give it presence that requires further exemplifications', but this does not release us from the demand to universality and burden of communicability.[170] What Cavell calls the 'discipline of accounting' calls our attention to the close proximity between 'the exercise of taste', judgment and its expression.[171] Cavell uses this phrase to distinguish aesthetic judgments from cases where conceptual or empirical matters can decide who is

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[165] Kant, *CJ*, §8, 5:216, 101.
[166] Ibid. §48, 5:312, 190. As Sianne Ngai suggests, description is increasingly folded into the aesthetic experience itself, as a 'turnstile' between boredom and interest. See *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 26; 34.
[167] Ibid. §48, 5:312-313, 191. I treated the topic of translation in the previous chapter in part in order to illustrate the significance and work of sharing experience in a manner at once free and playful, and disciplined by the will to attend.
[168] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 27.
[169] Ibid. 26-27. This view makes judgment less fungible to ordinary language analysis, since if judgments are only *communicable* and not in fact *communicated*, we cannot know what people, in fact, *say*. Ngai, following Cavell, holds that judgment does involve 'a compulsory sharing of pleasure' connected to the class of performative utterances that combine description and evaluation. (*Our Aesthetic Categories*, 38-39, see Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 9) Nevertheless, in defending the notion of *sensus communis*, Ngai resorts to the presence not necessarily of real but also *imaginary* others with whom we are in conversation (see also Arendt, *Lectures*, 70-75). For Arendt, as for Friedlander, speech 'depends' upon the *sensus communis* rather than the other way around. For this reason, Zerilli pairs Kant with Wittgenstein to insist on the close connection between speech and agreement in judgment (*A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.72-82). Wittgenstein writes, 'What is true and false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree... It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgments that is required for communication by means of language.' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §241-242). Ngai further suggests that the efficacy of aesthetic judgments relies as much on their background 'compression of evaluation with description' (41) as on their display of 'cultural capital' in 'verbal action' (39). Unlike Friedlander, Ngai embraces the *im*purity of aesthetic judgment precisely in order to highlight its intersection with non-aesthetic judgment which is crucial to being able to link aesthetic categories with economic and political structures. For example, the fact of 'conceptual indeterminacy' in the category of the interesting 'makes it… best suited for linking aesthetic judgments to nonaesthetic judgments, including judgments of a political nature.' (13)
[170] Ibid. 26.
[171] Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 87.

'right' about a judgment (such as when the taste of leather and iron in a cask of wine is explained by Sancho Panza by producing a key and piece of leather in Hume's 'Of the Standards of Taste').[172] There is no 'discipline' in such cases; perhaps acuity but not imagination. The 'vindication' of judgment in such cases is no longer subjective but objective. But the peculiar 'sense of necessity' we feel in aesthetic judgments is felt alongside

> a sense that necessity is, partly, a matter of the *ways* a judgment in supported, the ways in which conviction in it is produced: it is only by virtue of these recurrent patterns of support that a remark will count as – will be – aesthetic, or a mere matter of taste [that is, preference or sensation], or moral, propagandistic, religious, magical, scientific, philosophical… It is essential in making an aesthetic judgment that at some point we are prepared to say in its support: don't you see, don't you hear, don't you dig?[173]

The 'routes of interest' through which we express ourselves mix aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities, through which they demand response and return us to the ordinary.[174]

What artworks do, and what aesthetic criticism responds to is the way in which, as Emerson writes in 'Self-Reliance', '"in every work of genius one's rejected words [return] to us with an alienated majesty"'.[175] Cavell writes that the phrase 'rejected words' characterises 'our ordinary lives as ones of inexpressiveness, suffering not experienced as such.'[176] By exclusively articulating ourselves in non-aesthetic terms, we fail (to paraphrase Cavell) to interrogate what counts for us as conviction, as agreement, as acquiescence, obedience to a rule or genuine translation. The return of 'rejected words' can appear as recycled words, and so haunt us with the standardisation of our experience. Criticism returns us to the task, as artworks recall the 'alienated majesty' of common intelligence which allows for 'recognition of the other's intact power of expressiveness.'[177] Cavell marks this recognition in terms of Freud's concept of 'transference', which evokes what we might call confession or

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[172] Ibid. 87.
[173] Ibid. 93.
[174] Cavell, 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 52.
[175] Stanley Cavell, 'The Incessance and the Absence of the Political' in *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy*, Andrew Norris (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, 291.
[176] Ibid. 291.
[177] Ibid. 291.

communicative exchange (say the teacher and pupil).[178] The idea of transference, like the idea of 'alienated' thoughts, implies that for Cavell what we recognise in other's expressions is what we fail to consciously experience and actually express. Moreover, Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that transference plays a role in the displacement of the wish in dreams, which Benjamin suggested as a possible link between individual and collective experience.[179] Transference functions in the *treatment* of obstacles to expression, precisely by unwittingly sharing our experience which can then be recognised in the other (the 'rejected' returns).[180]

Emerson also has a concept of 'transference' related specifically to the '"possibility of the translation of things into song… transferring the inmost truth of things into music or verse"' which is comparable, he suggests, to the way '"Daguerre learned how to let one flower etch its image on his plate of iodine, and then proceeds at leisure to etch a million…"'[181] What we learn from this image of translation, Cavell argues is

> of learning how to let objects become impressive to us, matter to us (something to sing about, or speak about), fitting their presence, or their absence,[182] into our current repertory of speech, say present themselves to language, upon which their re-presentation, or reproduction in other instances, takes care of itself in the circulating life of culture… The idea of experience as allowing the world to become near by mourning it, not by grasping it, getting to it, but by letting its distance, its separateness, impress us, is the teaching of the immense essay "Experience."[183]

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[178] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.), London: Karnac Books, 1988, 456.
[179] Ibid. 456-457. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, 48: 'Suppose you look on a dream as a kind of language… We might then find a way of translating this symbolism into the language of ordinary speech, ordinary thoughts. But then the translation ought to be possible both ways. It ought to be possible by employing the same technique to translate ordinary thoughts into dream language.' Cf Benjamin, 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, 178-179. I comment on Benjamin's writing on dreams and collective experience in the second chapter. For Benjamin, it is not a matter of simply translating back and forth between, say, dreams and wishes.
[180] Ibid. 458-459.
[181] Emerson in Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 51. See also Rancière, 'assembling, thanks to mechanical presses and the new procedure of lithography, an encyclopaedia of the shared human inheritance: remote life-forms, works of art, popularised bodies of knowledge… It is a period that witness an unlimited proliferation of vignettes and little tales in which a society learns to recognise itself, in the double mirror of significant portraits and insignificant anecdotes that form the metonymies of a world, by transposing the artistic practices of the hieroglyph and the suspensive image into the social negotiation of resemblances.' (*The Future of the Image*, 16)
[182] See Winckelmann in Fried, 'Antiquity Now: Reading Winckelmann on Imitation', *October*, 37, Summer 1986: 'one studied the outlines of the body, or its contour as shown by the impression the young wrestler leaves' (89, note 2).
[183] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 51-52. See also Sharon Cameron, *Impersonality*, pp.53-76.

Cavell also notes Benjamin's essay on the artwork's technological reproducibility, but the resonance of Emerson's concept of transference goes back in the aesthetic tradition to Kant, for whom the flower, etched at leisure by photography, exemplifies 'free natural beauties', and from which the artist takes their rule.[184] Emerson can be interpreted as echoing Kant's assertion that 'Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art… nature in the subject must give the rule to art, i.e. beautiful art is possible only as a product of genius.'[185] Kant insists, however, that

> the gift of nature… cannot be couched in a formula to serve as a precept… rather, the rule must be abstracted from the deed, i.e., from the product, against which others may test their own talent, letting it serve them as a model not for copying but for imitation.[186]

While Kant presents the 'gift' as from nature to art, he also connects the two via the concept of 'genius', an 'inborn predisposition'. Genius for Kant is neither 'detached' nor exactly 'produced and given by nature.'[187] Rather, following Cavell and Emerson, it is the site of transference through which receptivity and activity are joined. The compulsive sharing of pleasure in the activity of criticism is an effect of the 'impression' objects make on us, and the act of making an impression, as with etching, supplies a figure of the world 'coming near' in experience.

Emerson also suggests in 'Self-Reliance' a similar figure, 'that what we are is written all over us, or branded; but here especially the other way around, that our language contains our character, that we brand the world…'[188] There is a close economy between nature and freedom in art, which Cavell following Emerson (and Thoreau) seeks to divulge rather than

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[184] Kant, *CJ*, §16, 5:229, 114 and the end of the footnote to the definition of the beautiful in the third moment, 5:236.
[185] Ibid. §46, 5:307, 186.
[186] Ibid. §47, 5:309, 188. Kant is in this respect closely following Winckelmann's distinction between copying and imitation. See Michael Fried, 'Antiquity Now'. Fried argues that the possibility of a modern recuperation of the level of artistic perfection found in Greek antiquity is premised on a 'third term', namely 'intermediate' artists who Winckelmann characterises as *both* modern insofar as they 'found themselves in a situation more or less identical to our own' (namely faced with an 'experience of lack'), *and* 'ancient' insofar as 'they are seen as having responded to that situation in ways that make them fully as exemplary as the ancients themselves, whose representatives, even surrogates, they often seem to be.' (90)
[187] Derrida, 'Economimesis', 10.
[188] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 39.

conceal. This means also conceding that the suspensive effects of aesthetic experience (including its dis-identifying effects) are always mixed with the desire to be present in our words. Cavell describes 'the inheriting of language, an owning of words, which does not remove them from circulation but rather returns them, as to life.'[189] The act of expression does not arrest circulation but continues it since it is defined at once by the presence of the voice *and* what Wittgenstein calls 'a "gaping space" [*Ein löchriger Raum*]'.[190] Speaking, Cavell reminds us, is

> emitting a breath at every moment (as if a natural risk of writing were transmitting disease) [which] means that with every word you say you say more than you know you say (here genteel Emerson's idea is that you cannot smell your own breath), which means in part that you do not know in the moment the extent to which your saying is quoting.[191]

'Saying is quoting' is a way for Cavell to mark how close our speech is to each other's, and so how close individual is to shared experience. Language is so bound in sociality that the act of speaking always risks exceeding our attempt to make *ourselves* known by showing the extent to which our 'rejected words' are in fact common thoughts, and the 'alienated majesty' of perceiving them in others could be a cause of pleasure rather than guilt. The connection between our speech and that of others is tested in the passionate utterance, which, in aiming to single 'you out appropriately' (and risking failure) 'puts the future of our relationship, as part of my sense of my identity, or of my existence, more radically at stake.'[192] By connecting the passionate utterance and expressions of aesthetic experience, I have argued that Cavell's concept of the voice connects the individual's subjective experience with a particular object to common experience. The act of expressing judgment invites not only others to share the pleasure we feel but also demands response. Cavell's concept of the voice in the context of aesthetic expression connects the disjunctive moment of aesthetic experience with the demand to recognise each other in our words. This connection gives substance to the definition of collective experience exemplified by aesthetic common sense. Moreover, it

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[189] Ibid. 114.
[190] Wittgenstein in Laugier, 'Voice as Form of Life', 68. See also Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006 for the Lacanian concept of voice which echoes this conception of a 'spatial void' that is a point of 'intersection of language and the body… *What language and the body have in common is the voice, but the voice is part neither of language nor of the body*.' (73)
[191] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 116.
[192] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 184.

locates aesthetic experience amid ordinary practices of expression, while maintaining their distinctiveness in seeking new, non-formulaic ways of expressing conviction.

Cavell, Rancière and Benjamin: Aesthetic Experience and the Politics of Communicative Commitment

Like Rancière, Cavell affirms the disjunctive relationship between aesthetic and other kinds of judgments (the 'moral, propagandistic,' etc), which each have their distinctive grammar. But unlike Rancière, for Cavell there are regular and demanding ways in which we support aesthetic judgments and these connect aesthetic experience to moral commitments. This should be distinguished from the focus on 'rules' in sharing experience (as I argued in the previous chapter), which

> occludes the crucially important role of voice in anything that we can meaningfully say or judge politically. Cavell emphasises how saying something intelligible, something that others may not necessarily agree with but can understand why you might say that, requires that you speak in a way that resonates with others in the specific context in which you speak.[193]

Cavell locates aesthetic judgments in relation to practices that recall a 'plural… first person', and so coincides with the technique of ordinary language which interrogates 'what "we" say'.[194] Rather than proceeding from breaks in the consensus, ordinary language philosophy proceeds by 'placing words and experiences… in alignment with human beings in particular circumstances who can be imagined to be having those experiences and saying and meaning those words.'[195] Similarly, rather than dislocating us from an existing community of sense, aesthetic expression, according to Friedlander, has the capacity to deepen analogically our 'view' of ourselves 'equally as legislator and subject' because 'in the community of taste I am a party to a conversation that gives expression to beauty.'[196] But this is inseparable from the demand for

[193] Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, 25. See also Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 206.
[194] Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems in Modern Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 96.
[195] Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 270.
[196] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 26.

> words that evolve by being attuned to the singularity of beauty, showing it to be pregnant with meaning… The idea of the universal voice is… not reducible to common reactions to an object of delight in an ideal case. For voice implies, first and foremost, giving expression. Voicing something is expressing it, making it *available* to others. Internal to aesthetic judgment there are others from which agreement is *demanded*… It is the very expression, the very putting into words, that is pleasurable.[197]

Moreover, the act of reflection (via disinterest, and the free play of the faculties) 'allows beauty to be in common', Friedlander asserts.[198] Cavell's extension of Austin's categories in the passionate utterance, then, does not remove the voice of experience from its ordinary, shared condition. Rather, like aesthetic experience, it seeks to articulate the continued demand for new expression, and poses the question of how conviction is exhibited and how our aesthetic judgments are supported without grounding in convention.

A further risk of Cavell's approach to aesthetic judgment, signalled by Benjamin's critique of aesthetics I discussed in the first chapter, is that an act of virtuosic expression occludes the content of the judgment.[199] Friedlander argues that aesthetic experience and expression is characterised by a demand for 'inexhaustibility, to make [the judgment] manifest by having one word lead to another, finding ever-new ways to avoid bringing words to an end.'[200] In the previous chapter, I distinguished between kinds of endless conversation related on the one hand to aesthetic experience and education and on the other to political and epistemological claims.[201] Hammer articulates this criticism in terms of Schmitt's critique of the embrace of Romanticism which 'depoliticised the liberal social order by transforming political debate into an endless conversation in which an element of self-indulgence and lack of seriousness rendered genuine political decisions impossible.'[202] In suggesting ways to resolve the

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[197] Friedlander, 'On examples' in *Reading Cavell*, 208-209.
[198] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 27.
[199] See Ross, *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image*, 7. Benjamin calls such discourse an 'endless universal polemic' ('Capitalism as Religion', *SW I*, 288).
[200] Friedlander, 'On examples' in *Reading Cavell*, 208.
[201] Norris notes this risk in relation to Cavell's work, writing 'In advancing a perfectionism without perfection, Cavell may seem to fall into the same bad infinity, a linear progress that is never completed. However, this danger is not the unfortunate conclusion of his practical thought but rather the problem with which it begins. That is to say, Cavell does not confront this problem because he abandons a *telos* that might guide him; rather, he eschews the *telos* of perfection because the version of the problem of how to live that concerns him is that of being *lebensmüde*, weary with our lives and ourselves.' (*Becoming Who We Are*, 218)
[202] Hammer, 'Cavell and Political Romanticism' in *The Claim to Community*, 173.

apparent endlessness of aesthetic conversation in Cavell, Hammer suggests moving from the ordinary conversation or expression to the 'absolute expressiveness… of such a sublime disclosure.'[203] Hammer proposes that 'what must be shown… is a sublime event whereby the claimant, in her unknownness and resistance toward discursive intelligibility, transgresses the social totality within which she has been involved and thus promises and radical, if not even utopian, political renewal.'[204]

Just as Rancière insists that the emphasis placed on the unpresentable sublime as the locus of art's political potential is misguided, so Cavell suggests that in 'the idea of the sublime' our capacity for recognition is transferred to the 'other's intact powers of expressiveness.'[205] Someone must account for Hammer's demand that 'what must be *shown*' is the event of transgression.[206] The transmissibility of experience requires that someone actually *say* what the significance is, arrogating the universal voice.[207] Cavell further responds that the charge of 'political [R]omanticism', and specifically that of 'aestheticising the political', unjustly (and ahistorically) takes for granted the stability of the category of politics to exclude the aesthetic.[208] The idea of conversation for Cavell consists in two ways

> essential to a reforming polity, namely the argument of the ordinary, which I say must never be won (since in retrieving words from their exile – of fixity, encrustation, capture, illusory or empty purity – no one has privileged authority), as well as the conversation of justice, which I say must never be lost…[209]

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[203] Ibid. 184.
[204] Ibid. 184.
[205] Cavell, 'The Incessance and the Absence of the Political', in *The Claim to Community*, Norris (ed.), 291.
[206] The opposition of the circulation and arrest of words is analogous to the interesting and the sublime respectively. For Ngai, 'the interesting' concerns the experience of the circulation of information (see *Our Aesthetic Categories*), while the sublime for Ngai suggests (in combination with stupefaction) an overwhelming quantity of information that has the potential to silence us. See *Ugly Feelings*, pp.248-297, especially 285ff.
[207] Hammer differentiates two possible 'aesthetic orientations' in Cavell's discussion of Thoreau, the one preferring the beautiful which 'assigns to Thoreau the task of (re-)discovering criteria, thus placing him in a position to communicate, as a writer oriented toward the redemption of language, with moral and political registers' which sounds to Hammer like a 'naïve, aestheticized politics that… fails to obtain a binding character. However, as a theorist of the sublime, emphasising Thoreau's potential unknowability and resistance toward cultural and political assimilation, he offers a much more powerful and relevant account of art's claim to be political.' ('Cavell and Political Romanticism', 183) It is not clear that we could, from the position of the 'sublime' marked here as 'unknowable', actually say what its relevance is.
[208] Cavell, 'The Incessance and the Absence of the Political' in *The Claim to Community*, 287-89. See also Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Dimension'.
[209] Ibid. 290.

Political and epistemological endlessness defer the moment of equality for Rancière and Cavell. As I argued in the fifth chapter, in the aesthetic and educational context equality can erupt 'at any moment' and the idea is not that education is endless, but that at any moment we might be 'turned' from mere chatter to genuine expression.[210]

The status of this genuine expression of experience is, however, different for Rancière and Cavell. While for Rancière the immanent possibility of equality depends on the 'overly loquacious muteness' of writing, Cavell's ordinary language aesthetics proposes an ethic of communicative commitment. For Rancière, the 'orphaned' character of the letter is essential to its democratic potential to redistribute sense:

> The principle of this redistribution is the regime of the orphaned letter in its availability, that is, what we call literariness. Democracy is the regime of writing, the regime in which the perversion of the letter is the law of the community. It is instituted in the spaces of writing whose overpopulated voids and overly loquacious muteness rends the living tissue of the communal *ethos*.[211]

Where Cavell is concerned to show how expressions of aesthetic judgment are 'calling back to the world', for Rancière it is primarily the outward, disaggregating movement of language that provides its democratic potential. The dispersed 'flow of undifferentiated and democratic ink', for Rancière, 'has paradoxically become the refuse of art's consistency.'[212] Rancière rejects 'living discourse' for its insistence on linking ways of speaking with hierarchical social ordering in contrast to the mobile and redistributive 'dead letter'. Rancière connects 'living discourse' with a determinate social order, a voice that speaks in its proper voice that constrains people and things to

> The exercise of this function in this place. In this disposition, in particular, all words are emitted by a voice, a body, directed towards another body, and have to do with actions to be performed. All speech has a destination, a determinate point of origin

[210] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 98 and Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 98. I discuss the concept of 'turning' in the fifth chapter. See also, 'My invocation of the prophetic voice was principally to warn against false prophets. True prophets are desperate not to have to talk, and what they say is always: "Turn."' Cavell, 'The Incessance and the Absence of the Political', in *The Claim to Community*, 290.
[211] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 95.
[212] Ibid. 175.

> and determinate destination. Every statement is accompanied by a body oriented towards this destination.[213]

Rancière insists that the emancipatory potential of speech is linked to the way it is appropriated by anyone, and moves in unexpected and unauthorised ways.[214] As I discussed in the previous chapter, the scene on the Aventine Hill is key to Rancière's conceptualisation of democratic politics and the redistribution of sense through acts of speech.[215] Genuine political speech for Rancière is, in some sense, only and always *out* of place. The speech of consensus is depicted in Rancière as endless, seamless 'communication' that keeps bodies and identities in place.[216]

Rancière and Cavell agree that modern aesthetics is constituted by a break or disjunction in sense that doubles it.[217] For Cavell, the effects of this break are intelligible in the 'incongruence between what is said and what is meant or expressed'.[218] For both Wittgenstein and Freud, he argues, 'the self is concealed in assertion and action and revealed in temptation or wish.'[219] The identity of experience and the activity of everyday life, which Rancière calls consensus, for Cavell conceals the wishes which for Benjamin constitute a conduit through which genuine experience can emerge. But, as I argued in the second chapter, these wishes can be fulfilled only on the condition of separation and development from their initial appearance. For both Benjamin and Cavell, modernity involves a crisis in 'one's estimate of… the worth of existence', to which we can either respond with apathy or allow ourselves to be 'shaken.'[220] Cavell argues that we have yet to be shaken by the crisis of worth, as (in remarkably similar terms to Benjamin) Emerson describes how the '"actions and events of our childhood and youth"' become '"matters of calmest observation"' *only* after we allow our

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[213] See Jacques Rancière, 'The Senses and Uses of Utopia' in *Political Uses of Utopia: New Marxist, Anarchist and Radical Democratic Perspectives*, S.D. Chrostowska and James D. Ingram (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 222.
[214] See David F. Bell, 'Writing, Movement/Space, Democracy: On Jacques Rancière's Literary History', *SubStance*, 33:1, 2004, pp.126-140.
[215] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 24-26.
[216] Ibid. 27.
[217] I defended this position in my discussion of Rancière's work in the third chapter.
[218] Cavell, 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 72.
[219] Ibid. 72. Cavell continues, commending their respective visions of philosophy as therapy as 'unmasking the defeat of our real need in the face of self-impositions which we have not assessed, or fantasies which we cannot escape.' (72)
[220] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 121

> "affections [to] circulate through it… [remaining] for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour it detaches itself… to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption."[221]

This not only describes the way in which Emerson conceives emphatic experience – namely, via a detour or submersion from which it then emerges – it also describes the way in which his (and Cavell's) concept of experience registers the effects of modernity. Cavell insists that the possibilities of modernity (like the demands of perfectionism) remain unrealised or unachieved.[222] On the one hand, there is 'the human being's dissatisfaction with… itself', for which he argues romanticism is an 'accounting'.[223] This dissatisfaction is also evoked in ordinary language philosophy 'by a sense of a human dissatisfaction with words in which an effort to transcend or purify speech ends by depriving the human speaker of a voice…'[224] The possibility of satisfaction in experience is debased or vitiated ahead of time by our dissatisfaction with the words we use to share experience. Rancière accepts this as a 'misfortune' of 'having 'only the language of written words', which obliges us 'to the sceptical fortune of words that make believe they are more than words and critique this claim themselves.'[225] But Cavell argues that the problem is not in having only words, rather it is their dis-connection from our shared experience. Just as we lack conviction in our judgments, we lack conviction in our expressions, which robs them of the ability to articulate and share our experience and so denies us genuine satisfaction and connection to collective experience.

Cavell points to a desire in 'certain current ideas of meaning as always deferred' (like that suggested by Derrida)[226] to suggest that

> the meaning of what we say and do is perpetually open to the future. This is crucial, but it slights the equally obvious fact that meaning is at the same time *perpetually*

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[221] Emerson in Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 36.
[222] See Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 345 and *The Pursuits of Happiness*, 152. See for comment, Hans Sluga, 'Stanley Cavell and the Pursuits of Happiness', in *The Claim to Community*, Norris (ed.), 190-192.
[223] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 32.
[224] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 15.
[225] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 175.
[226] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.), Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

> *encircled by the present*. Here we need Austin's remarkable insight, at the opening of his essay 'Excuses', that our speech is chronically unfair, unjust, unpostponably conveying more and less than we mean, or desire, or owe. The future might or might not offer us relief.[227]

The need for excuses reveals the desire to avoid responsibility for what we are taken to mean (or do).[228] The sense that our speech indicts (or convicts) us offers a way of distinguishing between the idea that experience is untransmissible or incommunicable, and the idea that we do not *want* to communicate our experience for fear of the responsibility for its meaning which we will then bear, even if it outstrips our intention. To clarify, such responsibility is at once highly personal and connected to historical and political context. The fear of responsibility is noted by Emerson in the failure to *say* and preference for quotation in his essay 'Experience', where 'unluckily that other [who I quote] withdraws himself in the same way, and quotes me.'[229] Similarly, I noted the preference for withdrawal or avoidance in Benjamin's analysis of modernity, privacy and guilt. Benjamin calls the bourgeois family 'the rotten, dismal edifice in whose closets and crannies the most ignominious instincts are deposited. Mundane life proclaims the total subjugation of eroticism to privacy.'[230] Benjamin writes that 'the bourgeois interior… fittingly houses only the corpse. "On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered." The soulless luxury of the furnishings becomes the true comfort only in the presence of a dead body.'[231] Similarly, noting the fear of language as 'possessing the power of death', Cavell identifies Edgar Allen Poe's inauguration of a 'forensic modernity' in which the perversity consists in 'confessing the crime, not the committing of it – as if the confessing and the committing were figurations of one another'.[232] In the hothouse

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[227] Cavell, *Little Did I Know*, 110, my emphasis.
[228] Austin, 'A Plea for Excuses', in *Philosophical Papers*: 'In one defence, briefly, we accept responsibility but deny that it was bad: in the other, we admit that it was bad but don't accept full, or even any, responsibility.' (124)
[229] Emerson, 'Experience' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 308.
[230] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 90.
[231] Ibid. 26. See Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 101.
[232] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 124. See also Benjamin's writing on Poe in 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', *Illuminations*, 172-178 which argues that the 'Man in the Crowd' in Poe's story cannot leave traces. 'If he succumbed to the force by which he was drawn to [big city crowds, the masses] and, as a *flâneur*, was made one of them, he was nevertheless unable to rid himself of a sense of their essentially inhuman make-up. He comes their accomplice even as he dissociates himself from them. He becomes deeply involved with them, only to relegate them to oblivion with a single glance of contempt.' (174) This self-exemption from contempt (despite the *flâneur*'s absorption in the crowd) is reflective of a disingenuous withdrawal from society. C. Wright Mills' analysis of mass society in *White Collar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) also identifies the disturbing combination of complicity and exception made by the member of such a society, 'The uneasiness, the malaise of our time, is due to this root fact: in our politics and economy, in family life and religion – in practically every sphere of our existence – the certainties of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

of the inexpressible, experience – even existence – becomes a sort of guilty secret. As well as the 'Economy' chapter of *Walden* in which Thoreau claims he will '"unblushingly publish my guilt"… upon listing the costs of what he ate for the year',[233] Cavell suggests that the sense of guilty conscience is also provoked by

> Rousseau's perception of our stake in the social contract as that of conspirators, even recognising that the perpetual failure of justice invites the threat of madness, of taking my participation in the difficult reality of my society's injustice or indifference or brutality as it were personally…[234]

By taking injustice *personally*, Cavell argues that I not only turn 'woundedness' into 'isolation', I also have to perceive my stake in the injustice as one of personal guilt (as Thoreau does the cost of his living).[235] Austin's insight that our speech is 'chronically unfair, [or] unjust' makes sense as an excuse for our not speaking: we wish to deny personal responsibility, we would rather pass conviction on than subject ourselves to the pressure of defending, say, our judgment.

Cavell proposes 'an Emersonian theory of language: the possession of language as the subjection of oneself to the intelligible.'[236] This posits the insistence on inexpressibility as the refusal to subject ourselves to the intelligible. What Cavell here calls 'subjection' is, then, analogous to Rancière's concept of 'subjectivisation', which is a process of the 'formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other…Political subjectivization is the

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have disintegrated or been destroyed and, at the same time, no new sanctions or justifications for the new routines we live, and must live, have taken hold. So there is no acceptance and there is no rejection, no sweeping hope and no sweeping rebellion. There is no plan of life. Among white-collar people, the malaise is deep-rooted; for the absence of any order of belief has left them morally defenceless as individuals and politically impotent as a group… [They are] especially open to the focused onslaught of all the manufactured loyalties and distractions that are contrived and urgently pressed upon those who live in worlds they never made.' (*xvi*) See also Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 177.

[233] Ibid. 124. See Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, London: Penguin, 1986: 'Yes, I did eat $8 74, all told; but I should not thus unblushingly publish my guilt, if I did not know that most of my readers were equally guilty with myself, and that their deeds would look no better in print.' (102-103) Thoreau's defensiveness initially condemns the ordinary expense of living, however, what elevates his consumption is his publication of it. Thoreau drags the guilty cost into public, *shares* what we know to be common. We have grocery bills in common, but we take our guilt (and food) privately.

[234] Cavell, 'Companionable Thinking' in *Wittgenstein and Moral Life*, 295.

[235] Cf. Laugier, 'Popular Cultures, Ordinary Criticism': 'we [can] discover perfectionism in the aesthetic demand to find and invent an audience, as a "personal" search for words to describe an experience that *has precisely deprived you of the vocabulary necessary to deal with it*.' (1011) It is precisely the overcoming of the (merely) personal dimension of the experience that constitutes the experience per se.

[236] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 124.

enactment of equality – or the handling of a wrong – by the people who are together to the extent that they are between…'[237] For Cavell this means that

> to speak for oneself politically is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them – not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., *speaks your mind*.[238]

This way of thinking about the link between political community and the expression of experience (a more or less direct expression, as indicated by the phrase 'speak your mind') recalls Rousseau's claim that while the '"state of nature"' of say Hobbes or Locke is

> a projection [and naturalisation] of their own states of society, or their fantasies of it[, w]hat he claims to know is his relation to society, and to take as a philosophical datum the fact that men (that he) can speak for society and that society can speak for him, that they reveal one another's most private thoughts.[239]

This matches the vision of language in Wittgenstein, not as enabling but as requiring *a priori* agreement (in forms of life),[240] which we cannot break by 'mere withdrawal from the community (exile inner or outer)'.[241] Withdrawal suggests, as Cavell does above, a wounded taking of injustice 'personally' rather than an act of dissent, which is 'not the undoing of consent but a dispute about its content, a dispute within it over whether a present arrangement is faithful to it.'[242] In moments of political eruption such as Rancière elevates to 'politics' as such, Cavell demands that what

> I have to say [is] *both* "It [the community] is not mine any longer" (I am no longer responsible for it, it no longer speaks for me) *and* "It is no longer ours" (not what we

[237] Rancière, 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization', 60-61.
[238] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 27, my emphasis.
[239] Ibid. 25.
[240] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §241-242. See Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 94.
[241] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 27.
[242] Ibid. 27.

> bargained for, we no longer recognise the principle of consent in it, the original "we" is no longer bound together by consent by only by force, so it no longer exists)."[243]

Yet Rancière's portrayal of the moment of dissensus that demands equality does neither of these completely. It does point to the fact that the community is defined by force rather than consent, and the enunciation of equality in the mouths of the plebeians disputes both the identity of the 'original "we"' and the claim that the community as it exists speaks for me. However, it also lays claim to the existing community, recognising the possibility of speaking for each other by entering the dispute precisely in the language from which the plebeians had been excluded. The passionate utterance, moreover, erupts unexpectedly but part of its unexpected force comes from the fact that it comes from a body like the voice of an opera singer. The passionate utterance expresses a desire in a specific place and time to have our expression of experience recognised and to demand a response. I argued in the previous chapter that both Rancière and Cavell's conception of a democratic community was in part defined by its openness. Here I emphasise, in the context of defending the role of the universal voice, that the (re-)commitment to such a community is as important to its continuous constitution (as open) as the intermittent acts of disruption.

Cavell treats the disjunction between sense and meaning, 'between what is said and what is meant or expressed', differently from Rancière. While for Rancière, the difference testifies to the possibility of emancipatory experience, Cavell admits that it perturbs our ability to speak about our experience. Recalling the distinction I made between the feeling of being *unable* to speak our experience (as if our words were empty) and the feeling of being *trapped* (or condemned) to speak our experience (as if our words had the 'power of death'), Cavell insists that there is space between these. Given that for Cavell, criticism involves accounting for (and even increasing) our *interest* in an object by 'articulating the conditions which allow a coherent utterance to be made, or a purposeful action to enter the world…', this relocation of speech will also mean re-introducing impurities to the disinterested aesthetic experience defined by Kant and Rancière.[244] However, the methodological suspension of interest remains essential, since it re-opens the question not only of what does interest us, but also how we can interest each other without taking for granted any consensus or determinate

[243] Ibid. 27.
[244] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 6.

standards of judgment. The interest provoked by aesthetic experience has the possibility to re-locate and re-orient us in a world far more amenable to fulfilment. 'In beauty one feels at home or oriented in the world,' Friedlander writes.[245] Finding ourselves known by a text, or located by one – in the same way that society for Cavell 'can speak for' us and 'reveal one another's most private thoughts'[246] – can be 'a moment of jealousy and disappointment, as if the occasion [for expressing it myself] had been stolen from me…'[247] This echoes Emerson's comment, extolling simultaneously the commonness and extraordinariness of genuine expression, that '[i]n every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.'[248] Sharing a thought in this way does not, Cavell argues,

> amount to agreeing with it, in the sense of believing it, as if it were a bunch of assertions or as if it contained a doctrine. To be known is to find thinking in it that confronts you. That would prove a human existence authored in it. But how will you prove your thinking? How will you show your conviction?[249]

The guilty, anxious modern experience I described above (and in the first chapter) treats the possibility of being known with paranoia and refuses to acknowledge a common thought for fear, perhaps, of standardisation or conformity. Yet, Cavell insists, acknowledgment of the shared thought is not agreeing with it, as sharing a background of language and experience does not amount to consensus.

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[245] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 45. The whole passage is worth quoting: 'Common sense is a sense of proportion that cannot be calculated. In common sense nothing is excessive; everything gets its right weight. It is a sense of measure exhibited by occupying a certain standpoint, by a stance toward things. It is not quite a standard against which reality is judged, as a ruler might be placed next to the object. But rather it demands placing oneself in the midst of things by taking everything into account. This balance of common sense is not an averaging but a sense of the world that takes beauty to be the meeting point of its dimensions. In beauty one feels at home or oriented in the world.' (45) See also Kant, *CJ*, §27, 5:257-258, 140-141.
[246] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 25.
[247] Greg Denning, *Readings/Writings*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998, *xix*.
[248] Emerson, 'Self-Reliance' in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 132.
[249] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 118.

Conclusion: The Promise of the Voice

The non-identity of agreement and consensus is demonstrated by the structural possibility of failure in our speech.[250] In order to illustrate this structural possibility, Cavell entertains the idea of speaking as promising (following Shoshana Felman). Although speaking is 'not excusable the way the performance of actions is' (the burden of Austin's 'A Plea for Excuses', and sign of the extent to which Cavell insists on our taking responsibility for our speech), nevertheless Austin 'identifies speech as *giving one's word*, as if an "I promise" implicitly lines every act of speech, of intelligibility, as if it were a condition of speech as such. (Kant held that "I think" is such a lining.)'[251] In such a picture (speaking as promising), expression bequeaths experience to the possibility of fulfilment. Meaning does not occur by the externalisation of experience in the speech act. It is not the turning inside out of some hidden, private substance, some thing which I have or know and can chose to show or not.[252] Cavell writes of Wittgenstein's enigmatic parable of the boiling pot (as an analogy for the 'image of pain'),

> we would not know what the analogy is to looking "over the rim of its top"; we have no perspective of this kind, or ought not to claim one, on our fellow creatures… This is odd, because we certainly know how or where to look for pain, how to locate it – when, that is, we have no thought of actually seeing it.[253]

Similarly, Wittgenstein identifies the 'mistake of thinking that the meaning or thought is just an accompaniment of the word, and the word doesn't matter.'[254] The meaning of an

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[250] Shoshana Felman quotes Baudelaire: '"It is through universal misunderstanding that everyone agrees. For it by misfortune people understood one another, they could never agree."' (*The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, Catherine Porter (trans.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 16)

[251] Cavell, 'Foreword' in Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, *xiii*.

[252] Cavell remarks that 'Wittgenstein's denial that I can properly be said to know seems to be something that compromises the soul's privacy – as if privacy were a question of secrecy. If this is one's idea of privacy, then Wittgenstein's teaching on the subject of privacy will be understood as saying that we have no unutterable secrets; this will then simply mean that we have no unbridgeable privacy. Whereas I take his teaching on this point to be rather that what is accurate in the philosophical or metaphysical idea of privacy is not captured, or is made unrecognisable, by the idea of secrecy.' (*The Claim of Reason*, 330) Put in terms of whether our interest can encompass such experiences, Cavell suggests that it is 'solipsism as narcissism… Narcissus can question himself, but he cannot give himself an answer he can care about.' (331) See also Richard G. T. Gipps, 'The Narcissism of the Private Linguist' in *Cora Diamond on Ethics*, Maria Balaska (ed.), Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp.223-245.

[253] Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 332-333.

[254] Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, IV, 2, 29.

expression is not to be found 'in' the experience or 'in' the speech but in the relationship between them, which we must picture *not* as a kind of steam or exhalation. Cavell quotes Wittgenstein, '"It is in language that an expectation and its fulfilment make contact…"'[255] The idea of speech as promising counters the thought that language 'appends' or is 'tethered' to the world, as though expression were something we did in addition to experience.[256] Instead, Cavell suggests a contrast between the 'intuition' that 'language comes to be hooked onto or emitted onto the world' and 'an intuition that words are, I will say, worldbound, that the world, to be experienced, is to be answered, that is what words are for.'[257] For certain types of expression, in particular the 'passionate utterance', 'it is part of the conditions of felicity of the act that it demand of you to say what its accomplishment has been.'[258] Since there is a distance between the act and its felicity: 'Infelicity, or failure, is not for Austin an *accident* of the performative, it is inherent in it, essential to it.'[259] Felman translates Austin's attention to the felicity of descriptive or factual utterances into an analogue for aesthetic 'satisfaction.'[260] The seductive possibility of speech – especially considered without recourse to a final authority or determinate referent – is the 'perverse pleasure in producing one and the same time a meaning effect and a radically heteronomous reference effect, and in *confusing* the one with the other.'[261] This is similar to the productive confusion of description and appraisal in expressions of aesthetic judgment.[262] In the grammar of aesthetic judgment, our descriptions often express our pleasure or displeasure, yet the pleasure of the experience, and the possibility of satisfaction is separate from the determinate (or mechanical[263]) production of effects.

Aesthetic expressions, like all performative and passionate utterances, are vulnerable to failure. They invite or demand a response, but there is no guarantee that the response will share the pleasure expressed. Such vulnerability should not be mistaken for the idea that

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[255] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §445 in Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 36.
[256] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 119. Here, again, Wittgenstein's thought interjects, 'the mistake of thinking that the meaning or thought is just an accompaniment of the word, and the word doesn't matter… A man may sing a song with expression and without expression. Then why not leave out the song – could you have the expression then?' (*Lectures and Conversations*, 29)
[257] Ibid. 116.
[258] Cavell, 'Foreword' in Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, *xx*.
[259] Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 45.
[260] Ibid. 41; 46. Similarly, for Cavell (and Wittgenstein), the satisfaction of a description marks or precedes our evaluation of its accuracy. 'What is at stake is, even before the idea of knowledge, the sense of how human experience is to be called to account.' Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 2.
[261] Ibid. 54.
[262] See Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 118-119 and Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, 2-11.
[263] See Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, 20-21.

speech is lacking or empty when it comes to expressing experience. The lesson, as Cavell discovers in Beckett's *Endgame* for example, is 'not the failure of meaning (if that means the lack of meaning) but its total, even totalitarian success – our inability *not* to mean what we are given to mean.'[264] The excessive communicativeness of speech (its over-loquaciousness, Rancière might say) is not the over-determination of meaning but the under-determination of meaning by speech. This under-determination puts meaning in excess of speech. However, Cavell argues that the excess of meaning in speech does not absolve us of responsibility for it. Cavell's sources here are Freud and Wittgenstein[265] who share the view that the self is obscure to itself, but also always in the act of revealing more than it knows.[266] Cavell almost recommends Freud to us precisely for the capacity of 'an unexpected association or an unannounced question mark' to instigate 'moments of release [when] the paths of self-knowledge are unblocked.'[267] Cavell repeats the motif of speech 'betraying' meaning, as though we did not want to give it away but could not help it.[268] This is its own kind of failure or infelicity. But it has an entirely different emphasis from the analysis of infelicitous speech which concludes that some kinds of meaning are incommunicable or inexpressible. There is a voicelessness that comes from lack of experience and a voicelessness that comes from exclusion from the possibility of having one's voice heard. Cavell writes, 'That speech is not everything is true; that speechlessness may be forced, and that speech is sometimes difficult is something else.'[269] Cavell concedes that there might be structural and political reasons for speechlessness, but argues that ordinary acts of speech themselves 'possess the power – as well as betray the need – to criticise themselves.'[270] Indeed, Cavell argues that Austin and Wittgenstein hold that our '*lives*' have this power, implying that the trap of speechlessness is not closed. This counters the idea that we are 'victims of expression', which recalls the fear that speech invokes the power of death and emerges from a conception of modern experience as guilty, or speech as convicting.[271] The idea that individual experience may be inexpressible

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[264] Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game' in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 161-162. See Beckett, *Molloy*: 'whatever I said it was never enough and always too much… No, there were no words for the want of need in which I was perishing.' (33)
[265] See Wittgenstein's comments on Freud in *Lectures and Conversations*, pp.41-52.
[266] See also for this connection, Sandra Laugier, 'Voice as Form of Life and Life Form', *Nordic Wittgenstein Review*, 4, 2015, 76.
[267] Cavell and James Conant, 'Interview with Stanley Cavell', *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, 31.
[268] See Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 39 and Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 20 and 123.
[269] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 179.
[270] Ibid. 123. Rancière says as much in *Mute Speech*, as I quoted above, that literature is obliged to 'make believe [that its words] are more than words and critique this claim themselves.' (175) Cavell's emphasis is different insofar it is as much the words themselves – their meaning, or their variety of meanings – that is being criticised, as their capacity to bear propositions or myths.
[271] Ibid. 20.

to others *expresses* the anxiety that we are responsible for meaning that exceeds us and so for the connection between individual and common experience. Expressions of aesthetic experience, as an expression of a fully subjective experience in a universal voice, intensify the burden of conviction.

Against the catastrophic account of modernity, in which 'language as such comes to seem incapable of representing the world', Cavell defends attending to ordinary language as reflecting the possibility that our speech has the power to express our experience.[272] Moreover, in heightened instances like the passionate utterance or in acts of aesthetic criticism, the connection between subjective and shared experience can be established. Cavell portrays our ordinary speech acts as revelatory of the desire to express experience, and presents the fear (or fantasy) of the inexpressible as in flight from this desire and the ordinary acts of expression we (cannot help but) perform. Finally, the link between experience and how we give it voice *is* an indelible part of the process of meaning making, rather than an addition to it. Our individual experience is fulfilled not simply by having it but by having it confirmed and returned to us through expressive exchange. This idea demonstrates Cavell's inheritance of the post-Kantian aesthetic tradition, which he modifies by placing greater emphasis on speech and giving greater depth to the description of the way ordinary speech acts express and exemplify aesthetic experience.

[272] Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, 139.

Ordinary and Shared Experience: Modernity, Aesthetics and the Claim of Experience in Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell

This thesis has argued that using the post-Kantian aesthetic tradition can illuminate the ways in which Walter Benjamin, Jacques Rancière and Stanley Cavell conceptualise collective experience. I began by outlining the significant challenges posed not only to emphatic, collective experience in modernity, but specifically to the Kantian framework of aesthetics in Benjamin's work. I ultimately located Benjamin's critique of aesthetics within the post-Kantian framework. I propose that, through the allegorical antidote to aestheticism, Benjamin sought to ensure that experience was not subject to the endless ambivalence of sensuous pleasure and could be connected to broader claims to truth and decisive orientation in the world of commodities. Benjamin, like Rancière and Cavell, sought clarity in the detail of material objects and their capacity to bear the experiences of the past for the present. I showed ways in which Benjamin sought to make sense of the effect of modernity on experience and, through the topics of the dream, childhood and the wish, analysed his attempts to define collective experience. I argued in the second chapter that the structure of fulfilled experience in Benjamin can be defined by the separation between the (individual) event and its articulation or expression as (collective) experience.

Similarly, Rancière's account of aesthetic experience is defined by its disjunction from the perception of objects as determined by linear history and their connection to the life that formed them. Rancière makes this separation clear throughout his work and uses it to defend an egalitarian conception of the claim of experience *to* any object, on the one hand, and *on* anyone, on the other. These two claims were defended in chapters three and four respectively. They are specifically intelligible through Kant's account of the aesthetic defined by beauty without concept and the disinterested beholder, defended in chapters three and four respectively. However, the importance of the disjunction between aesthetic experience and ordinary life raises difficulties for the way in which Rancière's concept of experience obtains broader relevance. The Kantian thesis of aesthetic autonomy illustrates the fate of this tension. In order to locate the specific claim of art and aesthetic experience, it must be separated and distinguished from everyday life. Indeed, the unique freedom and universality of aesthetic experience is predicated on its suspension of the claims of desire, knowledge and interest on judgment.

In the fifth chapter, I demonstrated how the scene of education illustrates important aspects of aesthetic experience. The novel comparison of Rancière and Cavell in this context defends an egalitarian conception of experience, and illustrates the practical claim of aesthetic experience. The connection between education and aesthetic experience is also essential for my argument that collective experience is not defined by consensus or identical experience but by the capacity to translate our experiences to others. Moreover, the role of free play in all three philosophers discussed in this thesis, as well as in Kant, reflects the position that collective experience is made possible by deep, shared aspects of our humanity which are best revealed when we engage with what is most subjective in our responses and reflections. Although certain mass experiences may be determined by socially determined roles and environments, an emancipating, egalitarian conception of experience neutralises social determination in order to reveal a broader, shared substratum. The relationship between the voice and language in the work of Stanley Cavell exemplifies the connection between what is most subjective and collective experience. Cavell's concept of the voice combines the common resources of language with the expression of judgments, desires and interests at their most personal. Cavell does not, however, draw a direct connection between the subjective voice and the universality of language. Rather, expressions of aesthetic experience stretch the resources of language and challenge the individual speaker to discover and renew the connection between common language and subjective experience. The voice of shared experience will, then, necessarily be non-formulaic and non-reductive. Instead, in each instance, it tests the resources available to us all – language – to express what is most personal, and tests the relationship between speakers of a common language. Claiming a voice in this way comes to exemplify the claim of experience to universal validity, and vindicate Kant's proposal that aesthetic judgments speak with a universal voice.

The post-Kantian tradition tends to differentiate between ordinary and aesthetic experience. However, like the tension between the individual voice and common language or sense, the claim of aesthetic experience is illustrated by the way in which ordinary objects and people can move between aesthetic and non-aesthetic modes. In Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell alike, objects that form part of our everyday lives can be transformed by the suspension of their use function, determinate cognition and the faculty of desire. Rancière's development of the 'power of language, immanent in every object' is qualified in Benjamin and Cavell by the

intensity of the thought that captures detail and transforms it into experience.[1] Rancière's emphasis falls on the dispersive effects of literary and aesthetic perception, whereas Benjamin defends the epistemological significance of ordinary objects. Cavell focuses not only on the experience but also on the expressive effect it incites. There is a dynamic tension within the positions of the three philosophers between the significance for moral and political life of the freedom of aesthetic experience. The thesis has sought to examine this tension by focusing on the relation between individual and shared experience.

In the fifth chapter I emphasised that this power to make ourselves known to each other was guided by the will to translate our intelligence through what Rancière called a 'thing in common, placed between two minds' that would be the 'gauge of that equality… The bridge is a passage, but it is also distance maintained. The materiality of the book keeps two minds at an equal distance, whereas explication is the annihilation of one mind by another.'[2] I showed how Rancière shares Cavell's turn on scepticism, which involves less the overcoming of the separation between minds by the determinate rule following of obedience than the acknowledgement of separation by the verification of our capacity to share our experience. The demand for obedience is comparable to the hypertrophic or literalist conceptions of experience I discuss throughout the thesis insofar as it does not seek to find common experience but to deny it or bypass it. This clarifies further the definition of shared experience and moreover, the kind of similarity we might expect to find in each other's experience. Benjamin writes, in fragment unpublished in his lifetime, called 'Experience' that 'Experiences are lived similarities', which he differentiates from the 'sense of life experience [construed] according to the model on which the exact natural sciences are based. What is decisive here is not the causal connections established over the course of time, but the similarities that have been lived.'[3] Lived similarities evoke 'a deeper, more formless, absorbing of the surroundings' in, for instance, childhood play where the similarities are gathered in an image in which 'the elements come together through some secret plan'.[4] The character of the absorption in the child's play is specifically 'un-coerced'.[5] Friedlander argues that Kant's notion of play is embodied in the child's play, which exemplifies the

[1] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 60.
[2] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 32.
[3] Benjamin, 'Experience', *SW II*, 553.
[4] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 106.
[5] Ross, *Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin*, 24.

'purposiveness without purpose' in aesthetic judgment.[6] The aspect of uncoerced play substantially connects each of the philosophers conceptions of an emphatic experience. Play in Rancière not only opens up a new 'quality of sensible experience', it also invites the suspension of the difference between

> those whom the older order separated into men of pleasure and men of work, and that the new order still divides into active and passive citizens. This state of suspension, the sensible state freed from the interests and hierarchies of knowledge and enjoyment, was characterised by Kant as the object of the subjective universality of aesthetic enjoyment. Schiller made it into the object of a play drive that blurs the opposition between form and content. The former saw the principle of a new kind of common sense, likely to unite still distant classes, within this universality without concept.[7]

While for Rancière aesthetic experience involves the neutralisation of desire, for Cavell it would be better characterised as the temporary suspension, followed by its rediscovery.[8] Benjamin too recognises suspension as essential to the fulfilment of desire, 'For only that which we knew or practiced at fifteen will one day constitute our attraction… Separation penetrates the disappearing person like a pigment and steeps him in gentle radiance.'[9] The point, however, is not simply to leave but to return, a movement Cavell describes in the concepts of divorce and remarriage. The former is necessary to the clarification of the latter's embodiment of the relationship between morality and desire, both at an individual and social level. Acts of play constitute a fundamental part of how we recognise the departure and return of 'the mutual willingness for remarriage, for a sort of continuous reaffirmation' of shared experience.[10] Cavell approvingly cites the sequence remarked in Freud, which Benjamin undoubtedly also recognises: 'The finding of an object is the refinding of it.'[11] The analogy between an object of a wish being re-found only in a transformed state and fulfilled experience is a continuous theme in this thesis, insofar as the discovery in the aesthetic

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[6] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 33; 38.
[7] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 46.
[8] See especially Stanley Cavell, *The Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, 113-132.
[9] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 32.
[10] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 142.
[11] Ibid. 68. See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, James Strachey (trans. and ed.), New York: Basic Books, 1975, 88**.** See also Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 55.

dimension of a pleasurable relation to the material world is at the same time a rediscovery of shared experience in acts of expressing judgment.

There is a substantive transformation in the elevation of individual to shared experience, conceptualised in different ways by Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell.[12] However, each of them suggests that the conduit for this substantive transformation requires attending to our experience of the world in aesthetic terms, which neutralises what is merely idiosyncratic and heightens what is common. Benjamin writes of having a 'sense of the aura surrounding a book', which involves 'the ability to forget… perhaps consigning it to the judgment of our unconscious.'[13] Benjamin's emphasis on forgetting as part of the process of recovering experience in modernity is unexpectedly close to Emerson's, who as Cavell writes, proposes that the '"actions and events of our childhood"' become intelligible to us only after they have '"for a time remained immersed in our unconscious life."'[14] Benjamin extols the importance of being able to 'lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest', and attributes to Paris the capacity for 'this art of straying; it fulfilled a dream…'[15] Benjamin writes that the city 'as it disclosed itself to me… was a maze not only of paths but of tunnels.'[16] The subterranean strata of the 'antipodal regions of my past memories' is translated into 'a registry providing the object with a classificatory number behind which it disappears.'[17] This forgetting in Benjamin, similar to Rancière's insistence upon a disjunction, is essential to the availability of the historical past in the present not as a burden but as the space of possible fulfillment, in particular in the wake of the loss of the transmissibility of tradition.[18] Collective experience in modernity is not the recovery of traditional communities (indicated by the 'allegorical properties' of the classificatory number, reflecting the absence of natural order)[19] but the wholesale reconstruction of a concept of experience.

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[12] See for instance Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 28.
[13] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Critic', *SW II,* 548. Lacan proposes that 'what truly belongs to the order of the unconscious… is neither being, nor non-being, but the unrealised.' (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), New York Norton, 1978, 30)
[14] Emerson in Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 36.
[15] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *Reflections*, 8.
[16] Ibid. 9.
[17] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, H5, 1, 211.
[18] See Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 92 and Ross, *Revolution*, 80. See also Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 108.
[19] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, H5, 1, 211.

The reconstructions of the concept of experience in Benjamin, Rancière and Cavell can be located in historical context via their shared interest in the effects of film and broadcast technology.[20] According to Bernstein, for Rancière, movies combine the 'materialist, secularising undoing of the hierarchical protocols of the representative regime of art' with narratives in which fictions are represented as 'non-detachable products of the freedom to act in a manner of making actual what has not existed before…'[21] For Rancière, the 'reciprocity' and tension between image and narrative becomes the 'source of art's power… [of] letting some new fragment of the world appear, be seen, heard or spoken.'[22] Similarly, for Cavell the technical and fictional powers of film are connected is part of the assertion of something new *in* the world that its reproduces; film can declare the medium of film 'as a medium of the mutual shaping of representation and desire.'[23] This mutual shaping occurs both in the effort to create something that both challenges and acknowledges the history of the medium, which Cavell calls the

> modernist predicament in which art has lost its natural relation to its history, in which an artist, exactly because he is devoted to making an object that will bear the same weight of experience that such objects have always borne which constitute the history of art, is compelled of find unheard-of structures that define themselves and their history against one another.[24]

Cavell's terms for defining the modernist predicament are similar to those I defended in the third chapter in discussing Rancière's account of the aesthetic regime of art, which re-constitutes the connection between material and meaning by separating objects from their history. A genuine education of our selves is an education in our ability to translate and speak about our experience through which we test the boundaries of what can be heard or seen as

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[20] See for instance, Benjamin 'Surrealism' in *Reflections*, 179 and Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 92. See Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 152-159. Cavell also examines the connection between film and democratic conversation in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, pp.101-126. For an account of Cavell's philosophy of film, see Elisabeth Bronfen, 'Hurray for Hollywood: Philosophy and Cinema According to Stanley Cavell' in *Film as Philosophy*, Bernd Herzogenrath (ed.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp.180-199. See on Rancière, J.M. Bernstein, 'Movies as the Great Democratic Art Form of the Modern World (Notes on Rancière)' in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2012, pp.15-65.
[21] Bernstein, 'Movies as the Great Democratic Art Form of the Modern World' in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, 34-37.
[22] Ibid. 37.
[23] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 118.
[24] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 72.

equally belonging to the community. For Cavell, the test of a democratic community is its capacity to contain, without demanding conformity, our desires, pleasures and knowledge, in other words, our separate experience.[25]

The context of a democratic community is important for my conception of shared experience since it exemplifies a radical openness about whose experience matters in the community, and how we express it. I argued in the thesis that the three philosophers share an aversion to conformity and consensus, and each seek to de-naturalise notions of community by re-examining the relation between history and experience. I also have shown throughout that the concepts of experience developed by each of them involved taking distance from normal ways of approaching the world as useful, or with acquisitive desire or appetite, or as an object of conceptual determination. Although they are normal, as in habitual, I have suggested that they obscure a genuine relation to the ordinary world as a space of meaning. By the phrase 'space of meaning' I mean that the object and free, disinterested judgment form a context within which other objects and indeed the world at large can re-gain significance, and also that through this space, we are able to connect our own capacity to judge with that of others.[26] Sandra Laugier writes, following Cavell, 'to find the ordinary would be to find an adequacy between our words and our world; it would be to come closer to our experience.'[27] The various ways in which I have contested hypertrophic or literalist conceptions of experience illustrate the obstacles these pose to conceiving of shared experience.[28] By elevating the disjunction with the ordinary to the sole mark of genuine experience, these reductive conceptions of experience separate individual experience from what can be shared. For instance, the hypertrophy of experience into sheer sensation, and the retreat to sublime but

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[25] Stanley Cavell, *The Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981, 154-155.
[26] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 19. See also Longuenesse, *Kant on the Human Standpoint*, 271.
[27] Laugier, 'Popular Cultures, Ordinary Criticism', 1000. See also Laugier, 'The Ordinary, Romanticism and Democracy', pp.1040-1054.
[28] See on literalism Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995, especially pp.60-93. It is worth noting that few people explicitly defend a 'literalist' conception of experience, however philosophers working in the tradition of ordinary language philosophy after Cavell have identified literalism as a significant weakness in the political and aesthetic (or lack thereof) analysis of, for example, pornography (see Nancy Bauer, *How to Do Things with Pornography*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015, pp.52-86), and in analytic ethics (see Alice Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007, especially for instance pp.49-95). For examples of the hypetrophic, see Krzysztof Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde and the Event*, Evantston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001 and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. For criticism of Caruth's concept of experience, see Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000, pp.266-297.

incommunicable experience both deny that experience can be fully shared.[29] They both presume that the demand to share experience will involve either literally the sharing of sensation as implied by a mass audience, or the reduction of experience to a single, determining aspect of experience such as knowledge or desire that is supposed to guarantee agreement in the guise of uniformity.[30] Shared experience should not be identified with uniform or identical experiences. Indeed, as I suggested using Cavell's allegory of divorce and remarriage for discovery of human freedom necessary for the democratic community, any collective is tested by its capacity to sustain disagreement without fracturing the shared experience of its members. That is to say, as I argued in the sixth chapter, expressions of aesthetic experience exemplify the creation of a space within which, as Kant puts it, we are suitors to each other's agreement without requiring consensus as the condition of an ongoing conversation.[31] In other words, our experience is intelligible and communicable to each other without either being the same or premised on a procedure for securing agreement.

The Kantian background can make sense of the central role of the communicability of judgment in revealing shared experience. Kant posits throughout the third *Critique* the link between exercise of taste and the discovery of sociability, whether in the pleasure that we feel in 'being able to communicate one's state of mind',[32] or in the way the 'beautiful interests empirically only in society… while the suitability and tendency toward it, i.e., sociability, are admitted to be necessary for human beings as creatures destined for society, and thus as a property belonging to humanity…'[33] The existence of 'beautiful art' is linked not with the concept of beauty or art, but with what Kant calls the

> culture of mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called *humaniora*, presumably because humanity means on the one hand the universal feeling of participation [*Teilnehmungsgefühl*] and on the other hand the capacity for

[29] This tendency can be exemplified in part by the trope of eulogising modernist art criticism, see for instance Roxie Davis Mack, 'Modernist Art Criticism: Hegemony and Decline', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52:3, 1994, pp.341-348 and Renée C. Hoogland, *A Violent Embrace: Art and Aesthetics after Representation*, Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2014, 72-74.
[30] This dichotomy is illustrated by the debate between cognitivist and affect theorists, see Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, pp.239-261.
[31] Kant, *CJ*, §19, 5:237, 121-22. The phrase 'suitors' comes from Meredith's 1911 translation for Oxford University Press. Kant writes, '*Man* wirbt *um jedes anderen Beistimmung*' (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Heiner F. Klemme and Pierio Giodanetti (ed.), Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006, §19, 96).
[32] Ibid, §9, 5: 218, 103.
[33] Ibid. §41, 5:296-297, 176.

> being able to communicate [*mittheilen*] one's inmost self universally, which properties taken together constitute the sociability that is appropriate to humankind…[34]

The task of criticism for Kant consists in seeking examples of these capacities.

By insisting that criticism does not merely reflect on the work but actually fulfills it, Benjamin seeks to increase the power of criticism.[35] In doing so, Benjamin sought to avoid the interminable ambivalence associated with the pleasure in sensuous forms. The price of lively, ongoing meaning associated with the work of art for Benjamin is that 'our reflection on the beautiful work is marked throughout by ambiguity… Ambiguity is the condition of the aliveness of meaning in the work of art.'[36] Rancière embraces the aesthetic dimension of language (although he rarely discusses it in terms of communicating *judgments* in the restricted sense Benjamin criticises), demonstrating how 'the flow of undifferentiated and democratic ink, the staging of the war between writings, has paradoxically become the refuge of art's consistency.'[37] Rancière acknowledges our ambivalence about this fate, insofar as the poetic 'power of thought', defined as 'a mind that still only knows itself in the figures and rhythms of language that itself is still caught in the figuration of images and temporal thickness of materiality' is 'destined to disappear' in the time of bourgeois society in which 'mind has become conscious of its own domain and has taken possession of a language that has become a neutral instrument for the expression of thought… It has no more need of poetry.'[38] This 'destiny' is the plot of an explanative history of modernism that Rancière seeks to displace in *Aisthesis*. For example, Emerson called on the poet to 'restore the vulgar materialities of the world of work and everyday life to the life of the mind and the whole… to awaken this potentiality of speech, this potential of common experience.'[39] However, the condition of this re-awakening is the separation from the life of the people and the poet; the 'egalitarian procession' requires that the book 'must be considered like the detached leaves of any tree whatsoever, emanations of universal anonymous life.'[40] For Rancière, the

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[34] Ibid. §60, 5:355, 229.
[35] For a discussion of translation, see ibid. 19-21. See also Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' in *Illuminations*, pp.69-82 and 'On the Language of Man and Language as Such' in *Reflections*, pp.314-332.
[36] Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin*, 21.
[37] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 175.
[38] Ibid. 82.
[39] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 57-60.
[40] Ibid. 71.

proliferating excess of the poem that 'makes everything into more than a thing', which engages in the 'vast redemption of the empirical world', as well as the intensified subjectivism of aesthetic experience ('putting oneself at the centre of all things' to 'affirm this universal intellectual capacity'), is possible not because art is invested with life but because it is productively separated from it.[41] Moreover, while in *Mute Speech* Rancière offered one conception of poetic language in historical terms as the 'harmony with a world in which individual and collective activities are *not yet* subject to juridical or economic rationality',[42] in *Aisthesis*, he suggests that there is in art the resources to respond to such rationality in 'a mode of presenting common things that subtracts them both from the logic of the economic and social order and from the artificiality of poetic exception.'[43] Rancière affirms the break from a conception of 'historical succession' as the 'poetic paradigm', reflecting his thesis that the 'modern world is characterised by a gap between temporalities.'[44]

This thesis has defended the argument that Kantian aesthetics presents a counter-tradition within modernity, opposed to the reduction of experience to economic, calculating rationality as well as to the determination of the social order.[45] Unlike the conceptions of human experience developed by the nascent field of political economy, which are persistently defined by a reductively calculating *self-interested* subject,[46] Kant's conception of aesthetics offers an alternative conception of the breadth of human experience, which, in the absence of self-interested interest or venal desire, and without presupposing a conceptual framework, can illuminate a context of sociability. Rancière extends this framework to propose that Kantian aesthetics also contains an egalitarian maxim that the claim of experience can be taken up by anyone at all.[47]

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[41] Ibid. 65-69.
[42] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 82, my emphasis.
[43] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 72.
[44] Ibid. 57 and 63.
[45] As such, the thesis responds to the argument that Kant's aesthetics are merely an ideological reflection of the liberal bourgeois subject, a thesis outlined in Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp.70-101. By contrast see Jan Mieskowski, *Labors of Imagination: Aesthetics and Political Economy from Kant to Althusser*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.
[46] For a recent iteration see Gintis et al., 'Moral Sentiments and Material Interests: Origins, Evidence and Consequences', in *Moral Sentiments and Material Interests: The Foundations of Cooperation in Economic Life*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2005, 3-4. For a detailed analysis of post-war economic thought and the fate of collective action, see S.M. Amadae, *Prisoners of Reason: Game Theory and Neoliberal Political Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
[47] See also Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*.

Like Rancière, for Cavell aesthetic experience and its expression are defined by their mixing of artistic and non-artistic materials, such as ordinary and poetic language.[48] This mixture compels the discovery of new possibilities for freedom in what is ordinary and shared, including language itself. What Cavell forcefully insists however is that there is something at stake for our lives in writing and speaking. Like the inheritance of objects (which Cavell describes – in connection with Benjamin, and quoting Thoreau – as subject to either '"purifying destruction"' or '"an *auction*, or increasing of them"', neither of which quite allow the 'debris of life its own right to remembrance, or abandonment'),[49] Cavell describes 'the inheriting of language, an owning of words' as an act that 'does not remove them from circulation but rather returns them, as to life.'[50] With Rancière, this can be conceived as a double movement: on the one hand the fixation and placement of the words in a particular speaker, and on the other, their release back into life as though snatched back from an endless dead purity. Words move by being located (move in a double sense as well: they shift meaning and position, and they move – affect – *us*), but they are always available to be re-located and re-circulated. In the sixth chapter, I showed how the 'passionate utterance' is 'synonymous with the judgment of beauty as theorised by Kant'.[51] The passionate utterance, like the role of translation in the scene of education, exemplifies the purposefulness without purpose that characterises aesthetic judgment. Passionate utterances do not take for granted a set of social relations, or the speaker's position within them, just as acts of criticism do not presume the applicability of the concepts it seeks to apply to particular works of art. Rather, sociability (and concepts) are tested in the utterance and its encounter with another's experience. What is tested is not only whether the concept applies, or whether there is in fact collective experience, but the very definition of the concept or the very terms upon which experience is to be collective. There is space within the concept of collective experience for disagreement over the very concepts, positions, desires or identities invoked by that experience.

The expression of aesthetic judgment attempts to achieve what Cavell calls 'neutrality', 'expressed as a willingness to depart from all settled habitation, all conformity of meaning,

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[48] See Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 118-119.
[49] Cavell, 'The World of Things' in *Contemporary Collecting*, 126-127. See also Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*: '"There might also be a temptation to assimilate this to purporting to bequeath something which you do not own."' (110)
[50] Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 114.
[51] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 118.

the human as immigrant.'[52] The expression of aesthetic experience shows us what in our most personal experiences is common. Cavell calls such experiences '"being beside oneself in a sane sense"', which recalls Benjamin's definition of happiness as 'to be able to become aware of oneself without fright.'[53] The importance of the structural disjunction in my conceptualisation of fulfilled experience in this thesis recognises that it must overcome alienation from what is simultaneously most personal and most common. Experience in Benjamin and Cavell in particular is coloured by guilt and anxiety, as well as the damp claustrophobia of interiors, and the disorientation of mass crowds and cities. This disorientation can become a kind of intoxication or dream, where our experience is loosened and connected unexpectedly with others. Although both Benjamin and Rancière locate this dreamscape in nineteenth century revolutionary energies, for Benjamin emancipation is 'a collective task assigned to a collective subject', while for Rancière, it is 'first of all the age of a new dispersive life of meaning…'[54] But dispersion is not the only force operating in modernity.

Kant's aesthetics offers a way of conceiving what Cavell calls 'continuous mutuality' in our shared capacity to engage in acts of judgment.[55] What is special about these judgments is their connection to what is most fundamental about us as subjects of experience. What expressions of judgment reveal, and what beauty makes us feel, is the very commonness of our experience, exposing a sociability at the heart of what is most subjective.[56] Expressions of judgment evince not only the freedom of imagination and playful activity of the mind in which we find pleasure, but also our commitment to share this pleasure and desire for common experience.

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[52] Ibid. 144. Elsewhere, Cavell writes, 'The writer has secrets to tell which can only be told to strangers. The secrets are not his, and they are not the confidence of others. They are secrets because few are anxious to know them; all but one or two wish to remain foreign. Only those who recognise themselves as strangers can be told them, because those who think themselves familiars will think they have already heard what the writer is saying. They will not understand his speaking in confidence.' (*Senses of Walden*, 92-93) And see also Wittgenstein, *The Brown Book* in *Major Works*: 'One could say: "Unfamiliarity is much more of an experience than familiarity."' (242) Richard Eldridge's summation of Kant and Benjamin's images of history involves 'ecstatically coming into one's own.' (*Images of History*, 191)

[53] Ibid. 145 and Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 55. Both might be recalling Nietzsche's aphorism is *The Gay Science* (§275): '*What is the seal of attained freedom? – No longer being ashamed in front of oneself.*' (in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufman (trans. and ed.), New York: Modern Library, 2000, 173)

[54] Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, 29.

[55] Cavell, *Little Did I Know*, 323. See for an earlier formulation of 'mutuality in everything', *Pursuits of Happiness*, 242.

[56] Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment*, 45.

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