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Reading Art Otherwise

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Declaration

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Reading Art Otherwise

Abstract

This thesis considers certain critical moments in the writing about art in modernity. I firstly identify key exemplars as responses to a “crisis of representation” within a broadly conceived discipline of art history in Britain. These mark significant turns in the discipline, one towards a newly invigorated Marxist social history of art in the 1980’s and one towards an increasingly philosophical mode of investigating aesthetic works. Whilst the latter can be said to have most impact after the 1980’s, key aspects of the actual object of study pre-date this.

The exemplars in the first two parts of the thesis are the writing of the British art historian T.J. Clark, principally in respect of his critical work, writing on Manet’s painting of *Olympia* in the article first published in the British journal *Screen* in 1980 and the writings on the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a film which dates from 1959 and not only documented by its script writer, Marguerite Duras at the time, but subject to critical readings within film theory and testimony studies in the 1990s, drawing upon particularly modern French philosophical thought.

I examine how these exemplars present the relationship between aesthetics and politics but also the extent to which the paradigms by which they think that relation can be shown to come up against their own limits. I consider the challenges these exemplars presented to other modes of disciplinary thinking; Clark’s Marxist criticism was part of a major politicisation of the discipline of art history and the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* in itself and supported by Duras’s script presented a major challenge to documentary and “memorial” cinema. But I argue that they return us to thinking the political or the historical in foundational or other essentialist ways under which the aesthetic is subsumed.

It is by way of the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy and critical thinkers influenced by them that I have problematised these exemplars. Derrida and Nancy have provided an approach which whilst respecting the criticality of the tradition, shows where that criticality meets its limits and forecloses on its questioning and openness to the potential ‘other’ in the aesthetic and the political, out of which there emerges a responsibility to continue to think the relation between aesthetics and politics.

In addition, to deepen the context through which I invoke Derrida and Nancy and to offer historical insights to inform current critical concerns within the disciplines of art history, the thesis examines the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin in relation to art and politics and technology written in the 1930s. Heidegger’s influence especially is fundamental to Derrida’s and Nancy’s thought but it is from the contrasting outcomes of Heidegger’s and Benjamin’s thoughts on art and technology that lessons may be drawn in respect of critical issues for contemporary politics and culture. The final chapter refers to some of these critical issues as part of a re-iteration of the contemporary importance of reading art ‘otherwise’ in the wake of a perceived waning of relevance of ‘critical theory’.

This thesis deals with the history and what I refer to as the memory of art history and the limits of certain of its political interventions over the past thirty years. I am interested in folding in a re-thinking of history and memory and what I articulate as the politics of memory into the way in which art history has problematised itself on the basis of certain “political” paradigms. I draw upon primarily two key exemplars of responses to “a crisis of representation” within the discipline, which at the same time indicate a certain intellectual history and the epistemological changes at work throughout a broadly conceived art history. These changes can be characterised by a turn to the sociological and from there to the philosophical, but the turn is not presented as straightforwardly chronological in respect of the texts I identify.

The exemplars are the writing by the art historian T.J.Clark in respect of Manet’s painting *Olympia*, a preliminary version of which was first published in the British journal *Screen* in 1980 and writings on the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a film which dates from 1959, but subject to subsequent writings along with that of its script-writer, Marguerite Duras and critical positions within film theory and “testimony” studies.

In addition I turn to the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin in relation to art and politics, written in the 1930s. These stand as exemplary of a former “crisis of representation” and as contrasting models for dealing with the then contemporary political world, as thought through the relationship between art and technology. They are influences, although differentially acknowledged, within the intellectual history that I address. The work of these thinkers especially with regard to art and technology is highly significant both for its continuing relevance concerning the now contemporary issues emerging around art and technology and for its intricate impact upon the thought of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy whose ideas form the basis for the critical intervention I undertake throughout the thesis.

I am concerned with the how far the critical disciplinary moments in the writing about art that I identify have offered a different view of the relationship between the aesthetic, the political and the historical, or whether despite the challenge presented to other modes of thinking and discourses on that relation, they return us to mode of thinking the political and the historical in foundational and essentialist ways, under which the aesthetic is subsumed.

It is to contemporary philosophy and the work of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy in particular that I have turned, in order to present the possibility for reading art otherwise; that is to say, otherwise than the modes of reading offered by my objects of study, in order to bring these readings to an encounter with their own limits.

“Otherwise” is a play upon meaning, invoking otherwise as different or alternative and “otherwise” as embracing, letting in, being open to the “other than” of “identity formations” or subject positions which start to characterise disciplines and their provenance. ‘Reading Art Otherwise’ also invokes the important sense of responsibility and justice for the past and the future to come, which is involved in a rethinking of the relationship between aesthetics and politics and the possibility of keeping the question of that relation open for the sake of this responsibility. This is a theme that runs through the thesis.

It is Derrida and Nancy who for me demonstrate an approach to taking on the tradition which still respects that tradition’s own possibility for questioning whilst identifying where that questioning meets its limits; that is to say, precisely where it forecloses upon its objects of study and becomes a method towards the unveiling of the truth of an “essence” of the political, the historical or the aesthetic.

My methodology is that of textual analysis which combines exegesis, commentary and critical intervention. Whilst the thesis maps something of a history of intellectual fields and epistemological shifts that have influenced the disciplines of art history, art criticism and aesthetics, and I have been drawn to

texts that are somehow emblematic of that problematising element over a period of time, as suggested above, this is not a chronological mapping.

The thesis produces a critical reading of the Marxist art historian T.J Clark's writings on modern art and modernity and a special focus is placed upon the historical moment of his article on Manet's *Olympia* in the British journal *Screen*. Clark's work and this journal are part of an intellectual history which is also my own and the position of Clark's Marxist, Situationist inflected, social history of art in the 'radical' film journal typifies a certain moment when art history sought to rethink itself and shake off its traditional roots and traits on the basis of its politicisation post 1968. Entering *Screen* is a mark of its embrace of the intellectual ferment drawn from "Western Marxism" (e.g. Adorno, Benjamin, Althusser, and Gramsci) and increasingly more "structuralist" and "poststructuralist" thinkers who formed the basis for a series of epistemological changes across the "cultural" disciplines and represented the possibility for an art history of "the Left". At the same time, Clark's work became crucial in Britain for reflecting upon and reformulating the debate about modernity and its cultural phenomena.

My argument and analysis is that Clark's problematic, the "social history of art re-visited", left the discipline with a certain metaphysical "closure", which art history has subsequently "struggled" with and has turned towards contemporary continental philosophy to deal with. It is in this sense that Derrida and Nancy provide me with the means by which to take a critical purchase on Clark's position and to take a further, different approach to the model of history, the political and the aesthetic that Clark's position subtends.

The readings of the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959 Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras) are given critical scrutiny for related but different reasons. This film is a powerful articulation, woven into its very style and content, of the crisis of representation and its limits following World War 2. Its very fabric traces the ambiguities between representation and memory, how do we remember yet move on, mourning and melancholia. In tracing this, the film itself performs an "epistemological break", I suggest, as reliance upon the grand

narratives of history, museology and documentary representation is fractured. My interest, again, is in how readings of the film, including Duras's own through her synopsis and annotated screenplay, deal with this and represent certain intellectual positions within film criticism. The task here is to critically engage with paradigms that of themselves attempt to embrace or articulate this "fracture", recognising the integrity of these readings; here I touch upon new notions of "film-writing" inspired by the film, its impact on testimony studies and its relation to the philosophy of film of Gilles Deleuze as interpreted by Gregg Lambert, a reader of Deleuze. The film has been an exemplary case for demonstrating Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "time-image" as distinct from the "movement-image". Where the "movement-image" is characterised by the unfolding of narrative articulated via characters and action within the cinematic space, such as to correspond to the space and order of perception and subjectivity of ordinary experience, the "time-image" defines a cinematic 'abstraction', no longer dependent upon such correspondence and its consequential bearing of meaning and conventions of narrative flow. I consider this critical position, but as significantly I examine Marguerite Duras's own powerful reading via her script and commentary. This latter is inflected, as I see it by the literary criticism of and intellectual affiliations with Maurice Blanchot. Affiliation with Blanchot is important in relation to Blanchot's eschewing of any kind of "overcoming" or redemptive criticism or aesthetics of redemption, in the face of the vexed question of the subject, writing, testimony, finitude and death.

I critically problematise the ultimate ethico-political stance of these readings. My point is to use the texts and critiques of texts by Derrida and Nancy both to uncover the metaphysical presumptions and desires to return to the 'work of mourning' or the narrative of the subject for example, which remain within these epistemological positions, and in order to provide an opening for an "otherwise" reading of the film and its fracture of history, memory and politics, traced through the particularities of its aesthetic.

Then I turn to the philosophical work of Heidegger and Benjamin and their differing positions concerning art and technology. There is a set of interconnecting reasons for this critical engagement with these two thinkers on

this subject. Heidegger's influence is fundamental to Derrida and Nancy's thought. But in addition, I suggest, Derrida and Nancy work on and in the contrast between the two models of how we deal with the contemporary world that Benjamin and Heidegger offer us through their work on art and technology *then*, the "frameworks" of which Derrida and Nancy will take to their limits and "extend" rather than break with, for the "*now*" time of our historical exigencies and technologies. The inclusion of their concerns with regard to art and technology, which I present in dialogue with critical commentators and the work of Derrida and Nancy, point to the continuing relevance of these concerns to debates about contemporary art and politics.

The chapter entitled 'Life after Theory' suggests that Derrida and Nancy's thought has been key to thinking through and illuminating the vicissitudes of art history as a discipline that perhaps needs to recast its political and ethical moment in a history of the present that can break through or surpass its "melancholic" stance and its shape through the prism of modernism. The chapter particularly sets out the relationship between Nancy and Derrida's thought and 'the political' in order to state their contemporary importance for the disciplines of art history and criticism. Art History's response to and interaction with the increasing pervasiveness of the technological in the cultural sphere is the impetus for the chapter, which at the same time sets out the significance I attribute to the thought of Derrida and Nancy for a 'life after theory'. There is still a need to rethink art history.

Underlying the thesis is a critical approach to the premises upon which the readings I investigate conceive of history and what I am terming the "politics of memory" and how this relates to the aesthetic. Each of the theoretical positions I investigate reflect certain models of history and how that relates to the political. By way of introduction I offer the following explanation.

If history is thought in terms of a temporal linear chronology of past present, present now and future present, it marks the time of an event of history with the sense of full presence of the present, an originary present as its axis. The premises of thinking history as a continuum is a full presence at origin and in

that sense a metaphysical logic which arguably goes back to Plato. Such a thinking of history is also the structure of genesis and teleology, which reconstructs the past and anticipates the future “end” of a fully present subject of history.

Even if a dynamic or dialectic is introduced to complicate this structure this may remain under a metaphysical logic, which seeks to reduce time to the subject(s) of history. Even if there is recognition of a dynamic between past-as inheritance and an anticipatory future- the now of the present is always divided. If a fully present subject is still understood as the axis of this dynamic then a metaphysical logic still prevails. A dialectical thinking of history depends upon a division between the subject and object of history, the interaction of which drives the unfolding of history towards its telos or “end”. Whether this is thought in material, as per a Marxist position or ideal, as per broadly Hegelian, terms the productive subject of history and an anticipated goal is presupposed. It is this model that I suggest ultimately characterises T.J Clark’s position.

In terms of the understanding of memory under a metaphysical logic, a memory of the past can be understood as that which re-presents that which has been present as an originary presence. Memory is in this sense given, as part of the logic of originary presence. In straightforward terms memory is the means by which the past is recollected or recalled by the subject of memory, the remembering subject. A hermeneutics of memory would seek to think how the past is not just recalled, but interpreted from the horizon of the present on the model of an inter-subjective understanding. A more radical hermeneutics, available in Heidegger’s thought, would understand remembering the past as a response to an inheritance which gives the present and the future its possibilities. The task of memory would be the means by which such possibilities, which are not able to be simply assumed from the representation of the past, are uncovered from the sedimentation of a re-presented past. Whilst this thinking of memory displaces the subject in favour of the other of a memory, which cannot be presupposed by the subject, memory’s task would be the gathering of its uncovered possibilities into the horizon of the subject’s future.

A dialectical model of memory would remember the otherness of the past in a dialectical interaction, unfolding or struggle between self (subject) and other (object of history) out of which the future for the subject can be thought. A more radical thinking of this dialectic would recognise that which had been lost to history in this dialectic and remember in terms of that other which, from the point of being lost, interrupts the dialectic and disrupts the continuity of past and present (even as it is thought in dialectical terms) in favour a dynamic between this interruptive other and a future to come. I suggest that this underlies the position of Benjamin. However this dynamic may still be predicated upon a subject of history and a telos and “end” which may be thought in advance even as hope.

Other ways of thinking history and memory have introduced a thinking of the subject of history as dependent upon the “other” of history. Such thought, especially as I suggest below, can be intimated in the work of Blanchot and is further developed by Derrida. There is no subject without the other and this other is not something than can be assimilated to the subject. The more ‘radical’ ways have also recognised that which is lost to memory and thus ally memory to mourning. More ‘radical’ still is to bring these two thoughts together. There is no subject without the other and the subject is only insofar as it is in mourning.

It is mourning that disturbs the thinking of time. It is in mourning inasmuch as the other is ungraspable and inassimilable to the self/subject, but also in mourning for the future, as in any self/other relation, as we might think it, as one subject to another, one will always die before the other. The relation of self (subject) to the other is always asymmetrical and contains within it a memory and a mourning to come. It is a temporal relation that is “out-of-joint”. It is this position advanced via the thinking of Derrida that opens up the possibility of re-treating the political and aesthetic relation.

The basis upon which this re-thinking of the political and the aesthetic unfolds is thus: The other, referred to above, is the singular other, a singular event/subject the otherness of which cannot be assimilated or made coincidental with the identity of “self”, but upon which the “self” depends and therefore to which the

subject/"I" must respond. The subject/"I" must respond to that which, as singular can never be fully known, or interiorised as a memory for the subject or exteriorised "in memoriam". This is because the other is always infinitely singularly other, even as "it" is necessarily finitely inscribed or present to the self/subject. As the self/subject's temporal relation to the other is always out-of-joint, the other (or the other of the other) has no fully punctual point of historical reference but always remains and reminds and returns in ways which are infinitely incalculable and unpredictable, but to which the "I" has an infinite responsibility. No law of history or theory of memory or mourning or particular substitution for the other or even messianic faith in a future *end* can predict this.

The politics of history and memory thus has to be thought as an in-finite promise to the other which in-finitely interrupts and prevents the closure of the 'future to come of memory', in respect of the irreducible otherness and out-of-joint ness of the time of the other which makes the *task* (as opposed to prediction, prejudgement, calculation or subjective possession) of historical thought, mourning and memory possible.

It might be argued that a politics of memory thought as an in-finite promise to the other to prevent the closure of the future to come of memory, cannot be a politics at all, if politics is understood as thought translated into practical action on the basis of calculation and decision for the future. This latter would be an organized, particular politics based upon a particular space and time and rule of operation, which the former incessantly resists. And yet, this understanding of memory as in-finite promise based upon an out-of-joint temporality or aporia of time can also be thought as the condition of possibility of the latter, in that sense "outside" the political but at the same time that which makes the political, political as opposed to mere determinism.

This dilemma between politics and an im-possible politics is especially pertinent to the thought of art, in terms of history and memory and how this relates to the social and the political and the question of whether and how art can be thought of or read politically.

A metaphysical logic of originary presence would think art as a vehicle for history and memory according to the terms of an adequation to the truth, drawing upon the Platonic model. Re-presentation by the spatio-temporal differentiation of the artwork would stand or fall by this judgement of adequacy and thus would be subordinate to its “law”.

In an attempt to break with this metaphysical logic, art may be thought as “originating”. It is through the spatio-temporality of art that the historical memory linked to future possibilities, which is covered up by the logic of representational thinking can be unveiled, in accordance with Heidegger’s notion of the “unveiling of truth”. Here the spatio-temporality of art is understood to do its own work of temporalising and spacing, going against a representational logic of the present, which consigns art to the temporality of current tele-technologies of communication and symbolisation. If on the one hand this opens up the possibility of a politics of invention, it closes this down into a particular politics and the metaphysical logic this subtends by assuming the “we” for whom such art can be originating.

In addition this latter may be understood as a reactive stance if it fails to fully confront the material conditions of production and reproduction, which constitute the cultural force of the time, other than by setting up an opposition between art and technology, as Heidegger appears to do. The political effort must be to think inside the cultural force of technology and prize apart the difference between a mobilisation of technology for the sake of undifferentiating and a potential mobilisation of technologies for the sake of the spatio-temporal differentiation inscribed within them, through which the force of mourning and memory for the future might be grasped. This is Benjamin’s position. However this politics may still be thought through an ultimately metaphysical conception of history, if the social world and subject and the future horizon upon which the political depends is already presumed.

There is a need for vigilance to avoid collapsing the difference between technology and consciousness and the self/other relation. This leads to the crux of the issue concerning tele-technologies, their effects upon the self/other relation

and history and memory for the future and the necessity for thinking this in terms of Derrida's differance. Any art work or tele-technology is a singular spatio-temporal inscription which inscribes an absent other, even as it must be repeatable and in principle infinitely so (always to come in the future) in order to be read or "countersigned" by an addressee, whose potential death or absence is also implied and infinitely so, as above. So no writing or reading or memory can ever be complete and is always to come and writing and reading are always in an asymmetrical time-out-of-joint relation, as the present/absence can never coincide.

Thus the spacing of time understood as differance is irreducible to any technology and to think in such a way as to reduce the spacing of time, which is the time of the opening of the future for the other to come, to technology is already a denial of and does violence to the future one might want to protect.

An alternative politics of the image or memory in terms of the political will of *presumed* subjects or reading on behalf of a *presumed* subject of oppression (which might include thought in terms of a particular time or place, such as avant-gardism or local versus global political intervention) will yet close down that affirmation of and opening to the future to come.

To return to the content of the thesis, the question of the image, history and memory is broached in connection with readings of artworks each of which in its particular way raises the question of art, history and memory and the politics of this relation. Clark considers the question of art, history, memory and modernity and what might constitute political intervention. Here primarily in relation to his reading of Manet's *Olympia*. In the context of what Clark understands in Marxist terms as the cultural force of the image under capitalism, Clark has been concerned with the attempts of modern art to prize something away from this force, which might speak with a different voice and in that sense offer a different memory. He has been concerned with the stakes and challenges facing modern art in doing this and Manet was his prime example in this writing in the 1980's. The timing is significant, coming as it did, amidst an urgent and earnest

politicisation of art history and film criticism, in Britain, exemplified by *Screen* that was increasingly influenced by theoretical perspectives from France.

The question here is the premise upon which Clark produces a reading of Manet's *Olympia* as "failing to mean" for its critics in 1865. Clark's position, as I read it, takes its distance from the increasing emphasis upon textualism in *Screen* and its valorisation of self-reflexive, and so termed "dis-identificatory practices" as if a self-critique of art was, in itself a sufficient response to the demands upon art to address the meanings within the social. Clark's reading holds that the art work has meaning as part of a social totality, structured through class division and in that sense artworks address or necessarily respond to classed-based meanings, outside the work in the "real". The intelligibility of the art work is understood in accordance with its link with the social totality. Art is thought in terms of the concepts of class, ideology and "real conditions of existence". The figure of "Olympia" in Manet's painting is read as "woman" *in the context of* the ideological and "spectacular" play of the tradition of the nude and prostitution in Paris in the 19th century. The art historian's critical task is to negotiate across the intelligible "truth" of "woman"; her "real conditions of existence" and the 'play' of representation at work in the work. Such reading eschews "textual" reading, inasmuch as textualism can be thought as symptomatic of an aestheticisation, which cannot get out of the aesthetic into the broader horizons of the socio-political conditions. Manet's play upon his own art historical inheritance has a part in this. Clark's political reading will measure the "truth" of "Olympia" in the image of her nakedness, vis-à-vis social class and the imaginary play of spectacular modernity.

Such a reading is problematised in this thesis in two ways. One is to critically examine what it means to think the social as a social totality structured by competing class interests, with all that entails in terms of positions, boundaries, identities, communities of interests and subjects whose meanings give a context to a response from art. This is done by way of a radical deployment of notions of hegemony and antagonism, to suggest articulations of social interests other than through presumed substantive positions. The other, intertwined with this is to read Manet's work as indeed bringing on the ghosts of past art on the borders of

tradition and spectacle in an event of painting which cannot be halted in a hegemonic articulation, except insofar as such an articulation presents a further framing of the object for the subject.

The next reading, that of the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is read as an object of critical discourse, including that of Duras's reading of the film she scripted. My reading considers the film's and Duras's rejecting of an aesthetic of representation and the conventional forms of documentary. Resnais and Duras consider such forms to be inadequate to provide knowledge of an historical event, the enormity of which defies any re-presentational means. Refusing any complicity between seeing and knowing and the conventional understanding that seeing will accede to knowledge of the event, Duras's film puts a personal love story in place of "Hiroshima" and re-works the cinematic conventions of personal memory in the context of a critical reflection upon documentary and "memorial" cinema. This broaches the complexity of cinematic "truth" and fiction, foregrounding cinema as a fictional construct, whether in documentary or narrative mode. In the course of its critical stance against documentary representation, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* re-marked its own memory as cinema, cinema's own memory machine, including its stock-in-trade of personalised "flashback" in order to produce a "false" documentary, which would have political effects. This could be characterised and was, as a self-reflexive "modernist" piece of filmmaking.

The interweaving of the time of the memory of Hiroshima with that of the French town of Nevers produces a "false documentary" to put into question the accepted truth of the cinematic documents of the bombing. This challenges the ethics and politics of the documentary showing of horror with horror, which merely repeats, ad infinitum, the horrific images to the point of banality. The thesis argues that a certain reading of the film produces its own ethical and political dilemma in subsisting an ultimate "subject" of memory, as a living connection to history and memory, even as that subject and the inter-subjective relation between "she" and "he" in the film gives way to the future of Hiroshima and Nevers, East and West at the end. Indeed such a memory for the future of

East and West itself may be deemed to repeat assumptions of nation and community.

An alternative reading recognises that any cinematic representation is anachronistic and out-of-time with the singular event it purports to represent and as such can be read as open to the inassimilable, unknowable absent other-to-come. The film itself re-marks this anachronism. I suggest this is not in the survival of the French woman, living-on after the death of her lover in Nevers , acceding to the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima and ‘giving’ her survival to the Japanese man , which arguably Duras’s reading and other critical readings ultimately suggest. Rather it is precisely in the sharing of exposure to the impossibility of dying with the other, i.e. singularity, which marks the point that the subject is and will be, only in so far as it is already in mourning for the other, in any relation, whether it be an event of history, an experience of love or a work of re-presentation of these. The politics of the memory of Hiroshima is thus not a question of substituting one time of memory for another, but of understanding the time of memory in relation to the singular event of history, as such as an anachronism.

The third chapter broaches the difference between Heidegger’s reading of art and technology and that of Benjamin. In Heidegger’s *Origin of the Work of Art* essay and in particular in the use he makes of Van Gogh’s painting *The Shoes* Heidegger seeks to undermine the representational thinking, which he maintains derives from Plato and Aristotle. This determines the thinking of art, along with the thinking of things, in terms of an oppositional logic which produces a set of distinctions between essence and appearance, intelligible and sensible, form and matter for instance as part of an ultimately “instrumental” aesthetics, symptomatic of, for Heidegger, the “forgetting of being”. Heidegger wants to break this logic and demonstrate the significance of art for the understanding of being and the history of being. Art is related to the truth of being as truth’s disclosing in the work as the site of the rift between the world of meaning horizons and the concealment of the earth. Art is an origin in bringing into effect this strife and the happening of the earth’s self-disclosure with and against the world’s meaning horizons. The “shoe picture” is read as reconnecting the

“equipmentality” of equipment, as belonging to the “world” and the aletheia of physis, as the “e-vent” of history; the dynamic between that which has been handed down and being’s future possibilities as against the indifference of chronological time. Whilst this reflects upon history and memory and art as opening a connection between past and future in an originary way, such that the past is “before us”, the fact that Heidegger wants to think this connection in terms of being and what’s more the being of a future to come of a destined people, forecloses upon that very opening.

Derrida, in his essay, “Restitutions of the truth in pointing [pointure]” a play upon words within his book entitled *The Truth in Painting* demonstrates how Heidegger’s thought is already compromised by his reading of the shoes in the painting of shoes, as a pair, hence producing a representational thesis himself. Derrida further reveals, in Heidegger’s own fashion, by way of a play upon the multiple meaning horizons of the word “correspondence”, the absent correspondence which has been there all along, between Heidegger and the art historian Meyer Schapiro. Both seek to return the shoes to the/in memory of a “rightful owner”, the philosopher on behalf of an original thinking of being which has been forgotten in the sedimentation of historical thought and the art historian as a debt owed to the past, which must be repaid. But ultimately both correspond in reducing the inscription, which is painting, to an economy of exchange, precisely by ignoring it *as* inscription. Heidegger reads it in terms of an inheritance which is gathered up again into the earthly being of a peasant woman and a certain singular world. Schapiro reads it as a sign of ownership in the past, a pair of shoes, whether for a destined “truth” of being in ultimately a substantive nationalism or a subject of the past.

The issues raised here are part of a wider debate about art and politics and the extent to which and how art may be a vehicle through which to bear witness to an inheritance and the (im) possibility of ever fully appropriating or re-appropriating this inheritance which is at the same time to come. The pertinence of this is further explored as Heidegger’s critique of representation and his pitting of art’s originating and disclosing power against the enframing of technology is subject to Derrida and Nancy’s demonstration that Heidegger’s

very figuring of the sending and art's disclosure are dependent upon representation and an originary gathering all along.

This leads to another consideration of these issues from the different perspective of the reading of art, technology, history and politics in Benjamin. Benjamin attempts to forge a concept of history and memory against the catastrophe of the historical thought which thinks a continuous history of progress, which denies the force of the inheritance of that which is lost to history. The technology of modernity becomes the key to this, as technological reproducibility completely alters and in an accelerated way, both the spacing of time and subjective experience. This enables Benjamin to rethink the historical moment, 'photographically' in terms of a constellation of past and present, which seizes on the past at the moment of its disappearance, producing an after-life like an 'after-effect'. In Benjamin's terms this opens up the possibility of a hope for the future, drawing upon the past, whereby the "now" is present otherwise, in relation to and in synchronisation with the "historic index [of images] of the past, entering into legibility at a specific time."¹

Benjamin's 1935 essay *A Small History of Photography* both exemplifies the historian's task of seizing on the moment legibility of photography and the opposition Benjamin sets up between the contingent, fragmented and relational phenomenality of photographic time and the spatio-temporality of the aura associated with art and auratic/aestheticised photography. Later in the 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Benjamin reads this situation more explicitly politically, in terms of either the adaptability of technology to the techniques compatible with fascism whereby the masses are presented with an image of themselves as an auratic spectacle or technological reproducibility destroys the means of hieractic presentation by its interruptive effects and the absence/presence intrinsic to its structure. Benjamin's belief that the power of photographic technology's interruptive effects is open to political articulation with a potentially revolutionary subject of history depends upon his

¹ See Benjamin, Walter., [N3,1] of "N [Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress] " in Smith, G., ed. Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1989) 50

particular understanding of the destruction of tradition and experience in the era of modernity. His is an understanding that is modulated through his Messianism, such that it is the very inauthentic nature of historical experience that provides hope for historical change; a change for which the new technologies with their ability to reciprocate whilst convolute the spatio-temporal dynamics of modern experience provides a potential impetus. Importantly for Benjamin these technologies are understood in their historical as well as contemporary dynamic, as opening the possibilities for an entire re-casting of experiences lost to the 'second-nature' of bourgeois modernity.

Heidegger and Benjamin's thoughts on art and technology have informed the contemporary engagements with these issues emerging in the writings of Derrida and Nancy. One significant influence is that of what I may still venture to call, immanent critique, insofar as, for both Derrida and Nancy, but in differing ways, it is from within technology that we can find the resources for its own critique, providing we *read* the 'spectre' of a messianic crossing and interrupting of the speed of the 'linear' time of the technological, offered within the 'spectral form' of technology (Derrida) or the potential for spacing, circulating and communicating without "pre-given" ends in the structuring/destructuring of technological networks (Nancy). In this sense but also in others, as I suggest in the fourth chapter of the thesis, the critical work of theory within the discipline of art history is not over and done.

This thesis explores a politics of memory in relation to art. Here, such a politics of memory comes up against a memory of politics, which refers to a moment in British art history between 1975 and 1985, when the discipline was radically politicised in Marxist terms. It refers to the work T.J. Clark, whose brand of art history was central to this radical moment. Clark's writing is imbued with a memory of a certain politics, a Marxist politics centred in class struggle as the motor of history and the thinking of aesthetics in relation to this. *How* this is thought is central to this critical debate. It is central to what, for me, was a radical moment of publication and part of a distinctive historical conjuncture within the British 'academy', with an article by Clark appearing in the British film journal *Screen* in 1980.

'Preliminaries to a possible treatment of *Olympia* in 1865'², as its title suggests, was a prelude to a chapter in Clark's book on Manet, *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his followers*, published in 1985.³ This title, nods to and plays upon the work of Manet's friend Charles Baudelaire.

Baudelaire wrote an essay in homage to, in his terms, the 'consummate describer of modern experience', Constantin Guys, entitled 'The Painter of Modern Life', and had his Salon criticism collectively published as *Art in Paris*. It suggests that Clark's work is no orthodox or ordinary 'text' or 'context' invoking social history. The play in Clark's title signals at the very least, *looking* at the *work(s)* for their imbrications of modern life in the very text (ure) of the painting and not some parallel study of art on the one hand and life on the other. Whilst the 'Preliminaries...' article is a touchstone for me in terms of its relationship to the general political moment of *Screen*, it is not possible to give due weight and analysis to the article in the terms I want to here, without a further consideration of the Manet book and other texts by Clark.

² Clark, T.J., "Preliminaries to a possible treatment of *Olympia* in 1865.' *Screen* Vol. 21., No.1, Spring (1980) 18-41

³ Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985)

That this conjuncture is a memory goes back, in part to the political circumstances of 1968, as both past and in some sense ‘living on’ in the seventies and eighties’ historical conjuncture. This moment presaged new theorisations of culture especially in the wake of the retraction of the political possibilities 1968 had promised. These theorisations drew characteristically on the debates concerning aesthetics and politics in the twenties and thirties and the critiques of ‘classic’ Marxism, which came to be described as Western Marxism. This term described discrete theories and thinkers sharing a common demand in the wake of the failure of proletarian revolution to be effective on an international scale, the rise of fascism and the demise of communism into Stalinism. It theorised the role of superstructures in securing the persistence of capitalism in the West and re-invigorated a Marxist *philosophy* and *theory* upon which to base an effective anti-capitalist practice. I elaborate upon this later, in particular the influence of the Western Marxism of the French philosopher Louis Althusser on *Screen* theory.

Debates about Marxism returned in the nineties, this time ‘in memory of’ the collapse of communism as symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.⁴ These returning debates indicate that ‘we’ have not ‘done with’ Marxism, and I necessarily write this chapter in the wake of further re-inscriptions. This chapter spans these other times and references, driven primarily by that impetus in the seventies and eighties when the possibility of an interventionist politics of the aesthetic within the academy seemed alive or living on.

The chapter situates Clark’s readings in relation to the field and force of theoretical positions and debates of the seventies and eighties and the pertinence of ‘Preliminaries...’ It seeks to confront the limits of this moment, exemplified

⁴ This was the spur amongst other things for the conference, entitled “Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective” held in the United States in 1993, out of which emerged Jacques Derrida’s book *Specters of Marx*; its companion volume collecting the conference papers, *Whither Marxism?*; the later responses to Derrida’s text collected in *Ghostly Demarcations*. Whilst not connected, Clark’s book, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes in the History of Modernism* was published in 1999. Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx* trans. Kamuf. P., London: Routledge, 1994); Derrida, Jacques, *Whither Marxism?*, eds. Magnus, B. and Cullenberg, S. (London: Routledge, 1995); Sprinkler, M., ed. *Ghostly Demarcations* (London: Verso, 1999); Clark, T.J. *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes in the history of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)

by Clark's writing for *Screen* and how it relates to or echoes in his later readings of modernism. The chapter aims to attend to the re-treating of the political and its history and memory and the aesthetic otherwise. It crosses a certain *memory of politics* (in a double sense, as memory of a particular historical conjuncture in British art history and Clark's art-historical readings, which are imbued with a sense of mourning and regret for a lost moment or opportunity for the aesthetic to join forces with the political), with a different *politics of memory*.

My argument is that, in so far as Clark's reading is a Marxist one, in which a political, philosophical, sociological tradition gives an understanding of not only the conceptual constituents but also its critical, transforming, and thereby political stance, and, even though Clark will want to complicate any easily received notions of art and society, text and context prevalent in more vulgar forms of Marxist analysis⁵, as I go on to discuss, it is driven by a telos of intelligibility, in accordance with the metaphysical distinction between intelligible and sensible and its concomitant binary, truth/appearance, in its *idealist* sense and this prevails even as this truth is the *material* conditions of life.

From a Marxist perspective, the work of art is a social production, the meaning of which has to be read in accordance with its historical circumstances and the ideologies, which affect and position the work, on the basis of the class stratification and conflict within the social totality. The concept of social totality is *central* to Marxism, inasmuch as forms of culture are inextricably related to the social relations that arise from the organisation of economic production. Debating an art work's political effectiveness will require both rendering intelligible the relationship between the image, history and class and the dominant ideologies at that time (in the case of Manet's *Olympia*, 1865) concerning modes of representation of the nude, the institutions of art such as the Salon and its critics and how both relate to the public articulation of subject-matter (here, undeniably prostitution) and the socio-economic forces and power

⁵ Arguably T.J.Clark's affiliation to Situationism is important here. Insofar as Situationism identified capitalism's infiltration into the very interstices of the practices of everyday life as manifest in the 'society of spectacle', the position of art was either striving to critically reflect upon this situation or was almost inevitably drawn into being part of it.

relations bearing upon all of these. A Marxist account institutes a theorisation, which, I argue, whatever its variants, ultimately deploys a subject/object dualism within the conception of the social as a social totality. It requires a model or system and 'meaning' of history, articulated through historical materialism, in order to be able to systematically relate the conditions for and the meanings of 'art' to a broader set of 'objective' conditions for the 'subject' on the basis of socio-economic determinations. The political effectiveness of the image depends on how far its mode of representation critically intervenes in that relationship on the basis of 'the real conditions of existence' and both *embodies* and *reveals* these as objects for consciousness.

This consideration of memory ineluctably situates the social and political as referents for the artwork as a 'prior' and, in that sense, a 'past presence' at origin. We remain caught in a metaphysical trap, ultimately that of Plato's mimesis. Another manner of addressing memory will suggest that artworks are not 'returnable' to a prior origin in the 'social' and, even as one wants to understand them politically, are not *conditional upon* the socio-political for their reading, but may *provoke* a 'politics of reading' and a 'politics of memory'. This provocation is based on what I argue is the aporetic (de) structure of art works and the aporetic (de) structure of the political and social relations in all their 'infinite finitude'; that is to say, without an appeal to an ultimate transcendental signified or teleology. The 'aporetic' is one of the terms for articulating a re-thinking of the political and the aesthetic as precisely exceeding the conceptual framework of metaphysics and *troubling* rather than confirming its logic.

This alternative thought opens up the possibility for considering the aesthetic, the political and historical as 'event', in that they cannot be predicated upon a 'model' of origin or teleology that inevitably calculates their effect. This is addressed in a strong sense by Derrida as the 'proper' thinking of justice and a politics based upon it, which is the sense in which Walter Benjamin aspired to give justice to the dead as well as the living, because of its full resistance to

exclusionary logic.⁶ Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy ‘retreats’ the aesthetic and the political in the context of a necessary re-thinking of the basis of ‘community’ as ‘with-out’ work or model, as the mutual exposure of singular/pluralities, resistant to any thought of determined or determinate groups or indeed inter-subjective relation (as if we already knew who these ‘subjects’ were), which might grip a fundamentalist politics as well as most other politics of community. In thinking the inter-relation between art and politics, otherwise, I take up arguments primarily found in the work of Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. These thoughts matter to me, not just because of a personal history of formative years within the milieu of Marxist art history, but for their value in structuring a thinking of the political and the aesthetic beyond Marx, necessarily, a post-Marx stance, precisely because ‘we have not done with’ Marxism and find the necessity to ‘re-inscribe’.

Derrida has shown that the ‘political’ has to be thought about through the disjointedness of time, the ‘out of time’ of any social relation. To understand his notion of *differance* in a social and political sense has never been a merely linguistic concern. It is to understand how *differance* has sought to recognise the absolute otherness in any differential relation, which crosses the logic or logos of time as past, present and future, and destabilises the ‘ontology’ of, for example, ‘real conditions of existence’ insofar as they are thought under such an aegis of linear and teleological temporality.⁷ If as Derrida has argued what is at origin is

⁶ For this reading of Benjamin’s idea of history see particularly Newman, Michael., ‘Suffering from Reminiscences.’ in *Postmodernism and the Re-reading of Modernity*. edited by Barker, F., Hulme, P., & Iversen, M., (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1992.): 84-114 “The notion of progress is not rejected: rather, progress without solidarity, the tradition of the victors and their cultural spoils, is empty; solidarity with the generations of the enslaved dead involves both rupture and establishment of continuity. Authority is to be granted to critical-historical interpretation not by (the) tradition (of the victors) but by the claim which comes from the enslaved dead, beyond the presentist orientation of historicism and the future directed gaze of progressive liberalism. Praxis as “redemption” follows from not the interruption of history from a transcendent exteriority, but the immanent interruption of one moment and its phantasmic retrospective and projective continuity by memory coming *from* another, previous repressed moment, including its potential for happiness which has been cut short.” Newman, Michael., ‘Suffering From Reminiscences’, op.cit:95

⁷ This is shown perhaps most explicitly in *Specters of Marx*, 1994, but was there all along as in Derrida, Jacques, *Positions*, originally published in France, ‘Les Editions de Minuit’, 1972, English edition trans. Bass, A. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981 and London Continuum Books, revised edition, 2000). In the chapter ‘Positions: interviews with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta’, Derrida remarks, “I have attempted to distinguish *differance*

differance or the *trace*, as *re-trait*, the mark/identity as the effect of the crossing of space and time, which divides the presence of any identity from itself by a spatio-temporal *deferral* and *delay*, such partitioning of any presence or doubling at origin disallows the possibility of full presence, or past present or future present, or lack as full absence, because the act of spacing by which a present is 'traced' is that which takes away such tracing and demarcating of identity. The trace is a state of 'being', which is at the same time a 'loss' of being, neither full presence nor full absence and subject to an iterability with *incalculable* effects of dissemination. 'Truth', whether that of the political or the aesthetic, can only be established by an effect, which does violence to *differance* by seeking to foreclose upon its dissociating and disseminating effects.

Ethically and politically, *differance* is the thinking of the other, which allows the other 'to-come', entirely unexpectedly without the reduction of the other to the self-same by predicting, expecting or programming the arrival of the other and, at the same time, without positing the other as ultimately beyond 'being' in a Levinasian sense. If, following Derrida, there can never be any pure difference or

(whose *a* marks, among other things, its productive and conflictual characteristics) from Hegelian difference, and have done so precisely at the point at which Hegel, in the greater *Logic* determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it, to interiorize it, to lift it up...into the self-presence of an onto-theological or onto-teleological synthesis. *Differance*...must sign the point at which one breaks with the system of the *Aufhebung* and with speculative dialectics. Since this conflictuality of *differance*...can never be totally resolved, it marks its effects in what I call the text in general, in a text which is not reduced to a book or a library, and which can never be governed by a referent in the classical sense, that is, by a thing or by a transcendental signified that would regulate its movement." Derrida, Jacques, 'Position' in *Positions*, 44. And later: "The metaphysical character of the concept of history is not only linked to linearity, but to an entire system of implications (teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of meaning and truth etc. But I have never believed that there were metaphysical concepts *in and of themselves*. No concept is by itself and consequently in and of itself metaphysical, outside of all the textual work in which it is inscribed...I very often use the word 'history' in order to re-inscribe its force and in order to produce another concept and conceptual chain of 'history'...a history that also implies a new logic of *repetition* and *trace*, for it is difficult to see how there could be history without it." Derrida, *Positions*, 57. And finally, in relation to dialectical materialism, "If I have not very often used the word 'matter' it is not...because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation. It is that in the logic of the phase of overturning this concept has too often been reinvested with 'logocentric' values, values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial plenitude, content, referent etc. Realism or sensualism-empiricism- are modifications of logocentrism...In short, the signifier 'matter' appears to me problematical only at the moment when its re-inscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle which, by means of a theoretical regression, would be reconstituted into a 'transcendental signified'...It then becomes an ultimate referent, according to the classical logic implied by the value of referent, or it becomes an 'objective reality' absolutely 'anterior' to any work of the mark, the semantic content of a form of presence which guarantees the movement of the text in general from the outside." Derrida, *Positions*, 65

system of oppositions, pure self/other-than-self; if in any repetition of a trace necessary to the marking of an identity the mark is subject to a re-mark, which exposes it to its 'other-than-self' and to the necessary chance of contamination or haunting by 'the otherness of its other', its errancy and dissociation, then it problematises the question of the linkage between art and the political. If that linkage has relied upon a *given* truth for art or the political, as I contend is the case here for a Marxist reading, such that the one would confirm the sense and meaning of the other and in the case of Manet's *Olympia*, draw the identity of woman into these confirmations, it is this very *givenness* which must be un-done and re-thought.

This (de) structure of artworks accords with an 'aporetic' thinking around the political which is not to say that artworks are reducible to the political in another guise, which would re-instate another reductive logic. It is a case of reading artworks and the political as *singular* events, as opposed to particular events, inasmuch as they are 're-marked' as they both exceed the logic and conceptual organisation that would institute and interpret them and *re-mark* this excess or exposure to the otherness that conceptual organisation disavows.⁸

⁸ This singularity is articulated in various ways in Derrida's writings about art and literature and always in the context; right on the context, in the midst of the work that generates the context as a response which cannot be generalised. However in a 'general' way, Derrida has commented about art, "Several things drew me towards the question of imagination, in various forms and languages...first of all, there is something about it that has made it a threat to truth, intellect, reality – yet a resource as well. It could easily be shown...in Plato as in others that imagination has an ambiguous nature: on the one hand, it is that which threatens truth and the idea – the image is inferior to the idea, and on the other, it has a positive function – it is philosophically and pedagogically necessary. It is the locus of fiction, but also of a certain synthesis, a place of mediation-especially in Kant where imagination is precisely the third term, the 'third'. And in the end everything we have said about the system comes down to the third. This third term can be taken as the mediator that permits synthesis, reconciliation, and participation; in which case neither that which is neither this nor that permits the synthesis of this or that. But this function is not limited to the form it has taken in Hegelian dialectic, and the this of neither-this-nor-that can indeed also be interpreted as that whose heterogeneity resists all integration, participation and system, thus designating the place where the system does not close. It is, at the same time, the place where the system constitutes itself, and where this constitution is threatened by the heterogeneous, and by a fiction no longer in the service of truth. What particularly interests me here is that which participates in participation and non-participation. And the regular return to this theme – which is also the theme of art, of mimesis – betrays a double postulation in my work, and a raising of the stakes – since we find at the heart of the third as participation that which in no case allows itself to be re-appropriated by participation, and thus by a philosophical system." See Derrida, Jacques, and Ferraris, Maurizio, *A Taste for the Secret* trans. Donis, G. (Oxford: Polity Press, 2000), 5. Singularity is a complex term which involves recognising a work as both singular (unique) and necessarily repeatable, *iterable* and thus operating in a 'general economy' but it is the insistent 'gap' between the singular and the general, each time 'anew' that the singular event of the work at the same time 're-marks' and demands or calls for the response

In a related sense, Jean-Luc Nancy has, across a number of his works, re-thought the aesthetic and the political under the aegis of the 'absence of sense', which is the characteristic of contemporary modernity or, put more forcefully, the exigency of 'our' time and 'world'. This involves a re-treating of that Nietzschean sense of the transvaluation of all values, especially as Nancy traces the 'absencing of sense' along the border of that philosophically troubling division between intelligible and sensible sense. Insofar as there is a loss of any transcendent meaning, or teleology or 'absolute' value, which would provide an

which is also a responsibility of reading. This is what I am trying to capture by the term 'aporetic (de) structure', which necessarily crosses time thought as the present or the presence of the work or text, inasmuch as it re-marks an un-thematisable and un-phenomenologisable 'other' that is anterior to its 'institution' as a work (and thus it could be said that a work is always already 'in mourning' for this absent 'other') and by the logic of iterability, *is still to come* in an *incalculable* way. Derek Attridge comments, "Against [this] transcendentalising and universalising tendency, Derrida tries to do justice to the [literary] text as radically situated – written and read and re-read at particular times and places and possessing a singularity (each time) which can never be reduced by criticism or theoretical contemplation...However, Derrida places his emphasis on...the puzzling yet productive relation between singularity and generality, a relation which for him is...a structural interdependence. For if the literary text were absolutely singular...it would have no access to the human world at all; its readability, its possession of 'meaning'...implies a repetition, a law, an ideality of some type. Thus to be interpretable any literary text must belong to a genre or a number of genres, a set of generalised conventions...but the relation of belonging in this instance is not one that can be easily handled by philosophical thought...Whenever the text signals its own status as writing, as literature, as a member of a specific genre, it does so by means of a mark which is necessarily marked in advance *as* a mark – by what Derrida calls the 're-mark'. This is not a self-reflection nor a classical *mise-en-abyme* ...but a moment at which the categories of form and content, inside and outside, break down; an intimation of an anterior movement – the trace, *differance*, supplementarity – which both produces and restricts the categories of philosophy...a text in which the re-mark and the relation between singularity and generality are staged with haunting power is, to that extent 'literary'...*literature* [is] a term like *writing* or *law*, capable of destabilising the discourses and institutions within which it has its being....This question of the singular and the universal raises a number of issues...one of these is the issue of translation and translatability...for instance, 'A text lives only if it lives on, and lives on only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable...Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately' (Derrida, Jacques, 'Living On/Borderlines'...this is not just a feature peculiar to literature; it is equally constitutive of the operation of justice, which relies upon a union of a singular occurrence and a general law". Attridge, Derek, 'Introduction', in *Acts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), 15-18. It is in these senses that art and literature are analogous to the historical and political in Derrida's terms. A response to literature is akin to a responsibility towards justice for the 'other' before the 'law' in the important double sense of 'before' and at the same time the literary event can articulate the anachronism and 'out of jointness' of time constitutive of history and the 'politics' of justice. It is no accident or diversion therefore to include 'the time is out of joint' and the ghost of Hamlet's father in an encounter with Marxism and history, where the history of both 'texts' is both 'anterior' and 'still to come'. But in case these literary references appear to the reader as too convenient in terms of their content, Derrida's meditation upon the act of drawing and the self-portrait in ruins attests to this same undecideability and instability between the 'law' of the subject and the inscription of the radically temporalised 'other' as the non-phenomenalisable trace which both constitutes and 'ruins' any substantiated and ontological subject and to which there is responsibility to bear witness in the 'name' of justice. See Derrida, Jacques., *Memoirs of the Blind: the Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* trans. Brault, P., and Naas, M. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

essential summation and meaning to existence, so there is a loss of meaning to the ‘world’ of sensuous sense.⁹ This is the premise for Nancy’s ‘re-treating’ of the political and the aesthetic, ‘along the lines’ of the divisions between absolutism and relativism, essence and appearance, the transcendental and empirical, theoretical ‘truth’ and historical ‘truth’, in order to displace these *divisions* precisely to the border at which they meet and are *exposed* to each other. This requires an opening onto the thought of this border as the locale or space for a re-thinking of sense that avoids the oscillation or dialectic between either pole, which each in their own way present as a certain *given truth* of sense.¹⁰

⁹ Nancy articulates this variously, “There is something like a general loss of sense. Sense, that’s the word that matters to me today; a general flight of sense, whether it occurs in a political or aesthetic or religious or whatever other forms. Think a moment about the sense of words like ‘nation’, ‘people’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘right’, ‘beauty’, ‘community’, ‘humanity’, ‘life’, ‘death’, and so many others. It is not just a matter of the traditional complexity and difficulty of notions such as these; rather it is a question of an exhaustion, a zero degree-in the ‘best’ of cases, of an operation of complete re-appropriation which we will have to undertake on the ‘meanings’ that are ebbing away there, that are leaking as of so many cracked vessels...far from considering this general flight of sense as a catastrophe and a loss, I want to think of it as the event of sense in our time, for our time. It is a question of thinking sense in the absencing of sense...philosophy as ‘giver of sense’ is in flight. Philosophy, that’s the cracked vessel. As ‘conception of the world; (by History, the Subject, the City, Spirit or whatever you like), philosophy is at the end of its time – and this extremity of time is ours, the time in which we must philosophize. At an end as well – and worn out – is the philosophy that does not want to give sense but to analyze the conditions for delivering a coherent sense. Clearly, it is a question of something else. It is a question of thinking what ‘sense’ can be when one has come to the end of sense understood in that fashion...Indeed this is probably nothing new. It is our way of playing out again something that already belongs, as well to our whole tradition. In this sense, it is not ‘revolutionary’ and it is not one more ‘philosophy’ or ‘ideology’. But in another way it is revolution itself; the destitution of the authority of sense or of sense as authority, and entry into the unheard of...All of this has just barely begun – although it has been underway since Nietzsche, and even since before him...But today this is where there is some sense: in saying sense is absent, in saying that this absence is what we are exposed to and that this exposition constitutes what I will call not only our present history, but along with Rimbaud, our re-found eternity.” Nancy, J-L., ‘You ask me what it means today?’, *Paragraph*, 16.2, July (1993):109-110.

¹⁰ Nancy plays upon and re-articulates at length, the difference between sense and sense, ‘idea’ and ‘material world’ in his book, *The Sense of the World*. Here Nancy seeks to tackle head-on, across various ‘philosophical’ topics the fundamental problem of ‘sense’. If modernity presents an attendant collapse of any transcendent meaning, or teleology or ‘absolute’ value, which would provide an essential summation and meaning to existence in a ‘mythic’ sense, then the relative world of existence and actuality appears to lose meaning, to the extent that the nihilism of the abyss of the desire for sense, not yet attained, in turn becomes absolutised as ‘myth’. It is this oscillation between the figuring of satisfaction, in which the desire for meaning is resolved in the absolute given of sense as myth or the possibility of satisfaction is negated in the endlessly undoing of the desire for meaning in the endlessly *self*-undoing of desire as the truth of nihilistic dissolution, that has to be addressed. In both cases the punctuality to ‘truth’ prevails in this direct opposition between sense and its loss. See particularly ‘Gift, Desire: Agathon’ and ‘Pain, Suffering, Unhappiness’ in Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World*. Trans. Librett, J.S. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997), 50-53 and 143-153. Librett’s foreword to this text articulates Nancy’s thought of sense and world in relation to aesthetics and politics by recognising that the sense of neither is subordinate to the other, hence the undoing of that

Nancy extrapolates on this re-thinking of sense in terms of fundamental philosophical questions of being, community, history, the political and the political subject and the aesthetic. He demonstrates the extent to which the consideration of the loss or fragmentation of these terms is still premised upon a desire for the 'whole' or transcendent meaning or subject, including the 'collective subject' of history and thus retains an 'immanentism', or closure, which denies the fundamental ontology of being as 'being with' or 'being singular plural'. These latter terms, combined with exposure or ex-position, disposition, partage (sharing), articulate the re-thinking of sense and world and all that follows from it, including aesthetics and politics on the basis of an always already in-common exposure to 'alterity'; an alterity in the sense of always, the 'with', or on the basis of a singularity which only ever 'is' in accordance with this exposure to plurality, being-with, *right at or right on the level of existence*, with no recourse to any prior or future transcendental or 'end' term *including that of the 'Other'*.¹¹

opposition between the aestheticisation of politics and the politicisation of the aesthetic, argued by Walter Benjamin, and that the sense of each should not be totalised even as the history of political philosophy and aesthetics suggests otherwise, in that the thinking of the political and the thinking of the aesthetic has always veered towards a unifying or 'communal' concept, even as it has embraced the idea of the relative or relational or fragment as opposed to 'whole'. It is this veering towards the pre-conceived unity of/or communal sense that belies the actual truth of the 'being-with' and relationality of the political and the aesthetic, as an absolute relativisation as part of a 'fundamental' ontology of being singular/plural or the singular plurality of being. See Librett, J.S., Foreword to *The Sense of the World*, especially xv-xxvi.

¹¹ Nancy's thoughts on aesthetics, politics, community, history and being derive from this fundamental ethical relation of shared division each of/to the other; a being-with, to be thought of in contrast to any sense of common essence; an ontology of the 'social' before, more originary than 'society'; 'individual'; 'self'; essence of being, "What comes to light then, is not a 'social' or 'communitarian dimension' added onto a primitive individual given, even if it were to occur as an essential and determining addition. (Just think of the numerous circumstances of ordinary discourse in which this order is imposed on us: first the individual, then the group; first the one, then the others; first the rights-bearing subject; then the real relationships; first 'individual psychology' then 'inter-subjectivity' – as they astonishingly persist in saying). It is not even a question of a sociality or alterity that would come to cut across, complicate, put into play, or *alter* the principle of the subject understood as *solus ipse*. It is something else and still more. It does not so much determine the principle of the *ipse* whatever this may be ('individual' or 'collective', insofar as one can speak in these ways), as it codetermines it *with* the plurality of *ipses*, each one of which is co-originary and coessential to the world, to a world which from this point on defines a coexistence that must be understood in a still-unheard-of-sense, exactly because it does not take place 'in' the world, but instead forms the essence and the structure of the world. It is not a nearness or community of *ipses*, but a coipseity; this is what comes to light, but as an enigma with which our thinking is confronted." Nancy J-L., *Being Singular Plural*. Trans. Richardson, R., & O'Byrne, A., (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 44. For Nancy, artworks can provide a site, a spatio-temporal setting for thinking and facing this enigma. They can present, or give presentation to or keep open what Nancy terms (amongst other terms) the 'incommensurable', which is at the same time shared out and divided (partage) or, put differently in Nancy's terms, the aesthetic is the (un) doing of duration and spatialization by the

Derrida and Nancy are inspirations for this re-reading of Marx and Marxist criticism and their thought is threaded through this account, but of course, such Marxist criticism has already undergone its inflections, re-inscriptions and re-workings, which are also addressed in this chapter.

The focus on Clark's 'Preliminaries...' article is two-fold. First, the appearance of his writing in *Screen* marks a significant moment in the discipline of art history in Britain, when it might be said the existing disciplinary protocols were undone. Second, the article marks an intervention in the particular trajectory of *Screen*, away from a studied approach to representations as empirical entities *reflecting* or articulating social relations, towards an intensified *theoretical discipline* able to demonstrate the extent to which signifying practices *produce* meaning and the *sense* in which subjects relate to the social world. This sharpened the focus of the 'Preliminaries...' article into an *interventionist polemic against certain traits of the journal* and its 'avant-garde' project, with well-chosen quotes from other *Screen* articles in support, provoking a latter response and subsequent riposte from Clark. All of this manoeuvring indicates the extent to which artworks were the subject and substance of critical debate within the interstices of interpretation of Marx.¹²

Clark had already made his case for a renewal of the great tradition of the social history of art with his article, 'The Conditions of Artistic Creation', published in

incommensurability of the always coming and spacing, as the instituting and at the very same time undoing of its singularity by its dispersal at the very moment of its trace.

¹² The actual form of the debate in 1980 was a series of *Screen* articles beginning with 'Preliminaries' Volume 21:1:18-41, responded to by Peter Wollen, 'Manet: Modernism and Avant-garde', *Screen* 21:2, Summer (1980): 15-25, incidentally 'billed' on the front cover, provocatively as 'Modernism Defended'; followed by a response from Clark tucked away this time as 'A note in reply to Peter Wollen', *Screen* 21:3 (1980) 97-100. The debate here was between opposed positions on the interpretation of Marx's concept of contradiction. Broadly, Wollen takes Clark to task for not giving avant-gardism its due for expressing the 'contradictions' of social life under capitalism, whilst Clark is of the view that it is precisely this *lure* of 'contradiction' that obscures real conditions of existence. Later, Charles Harrison, Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden of Art & Language criticise both for not fully grasping the significance of Marx's concept, C. Harrison, M. Baldwin and M. Ramsden, "Manet's *Olympia* and Contradiction" *Block*, no.5 (1981)." To be drawn into this now would be a diversion, but I do note a similarity between the Wollen-Clark debate and Derrida's own issue, which runs as a thread through *Specters of Marx*, with Marx himself concerning the 'spectral', which Derrida suggests, Marx continually seeks to suppress in favour of 'the real'.

the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1974¹³, where he argued for the re-focussing of the discipline on the relationship of works of art to the ‘ideological materials’ with which and upon which they work. He had put this into practice with his books, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851* and *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*.¹⁴ He had argued against an oversimplified Marxist analysis of art,

I believe that access to ideology is always incomplete – and it is the lack of finish that counts, in our explanation of artistic production. The notion of the ‘representative’ artist, who gives us a complete depiction of the ‘possible consciousness’ of a class – a notion dear to a certain brand of Marxist history – seems to me a figment. (It’s their constant awareness of these facts that makes Walter Benjamin’s work on Baudelaire or Sartre’s *Conscience de Classe chez Flaubert* so much more useful than most of their ‘scientific’ opponents.)¹⁵

But also against a *merely diversified* art history with the social history of art, “taking its place alongside the other varieties – formalist, ‘modernist’, sub-Freudian, filmic, feminist, ‘radical’, all of them hot-foot in pursuit of the New.”¹⁶

The article in *Screen* was thus likely to be something of a polemic against the trajectory that the journal was taking to forge a ‘politics’ of cultural production and a reception that sought the inter-relationship between various theoretical perspectives and ‘radical’ cultural practices, across a broad spectrum of ‘cultural formations’ – film, television, photography, fine art, in order to (re) establish a politically engaged practice of criticism supportive of historical and contemporary critical practices.

If this was a litany of ‘isms’ in hot-pursuit of the new, it nevertheless brought to the attention of its readership a range of debates about art and literature from

¹³ Clark, T.J., ‘The Conditions of Artistic Creation’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 24.05 (1974), 561-2.

¹⁴ Clark, T.J., *The Absolute Bourgeois: Art and Politics in France 1848-1851* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973); Clark, T.J., *The Image of the People, Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973)

¹⁵ Clark, T.J., ‘The Conditions of Artistic Creation’, 561-2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 561-2.

Russia in the twenties and Germany in the thirties, and enabled some art historians to feel part of a radical groundswell of critical, politically engaged debate against what were perceived as the traditional orthodoxies, weakened social critique and abstracted aestheticism of the discipline, sufficient to justify the term 'The New Art History'. The introduction to a book which collected together examples of these new perspectives neatly summarises the situation, "for the first time since the thirties, intellectuals were promised a role in British culture instead of merely enduring it while they awaited the revolution."¹⁷

Clark's work has been concerned with the attempts of art to respond to the conditions of modernity. These conditions, put simply by Herman Rapaport, commenting upon Clark's readings, were of a changing life-world that "is never stable enough to be seen as a thing in itself"¹⁸. Where Rapaport is speaking in general philosophical terms of an epistemic shift characterising 'modernity', Clark, articulates it more precisely in historical terms in the 'Manet' book,

What is visible in modern life, in other words, is not character but class, And yet of course the culture presented its own set of obstacles to the recognition of the fact, or to taking it seriously. In the case of the artists that concern us, the obstacle took the form of an ideology: the avant-garde appears to have been persuaded by the view that modernity was no longer characterized by a system of classification and control but, rather, by mixture, transgression, and ambiguity in the general conduct of life. It seems to me that this was to mistake the real and important margin of error in capitalist society for an overall loosening of ties...The perfect heroes and heroines of this myth of modernity were the petite bourgeoisie. They appeared in many ways to have no class to speak of, to be excluded from the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and yet to thrive

¹⁷ This moment of possibility for the discipline was really captured by the publication of Rees, A. & Borzello, F., *The New Art History* (London: Camden Press, 1986), where the positions in pursuit of the 'new' noted by Clark, were first collected within discipline-specific literature. The introduction to this volume, which seriously and by no means uncritically traces the genesis of the new perspectives on the discipline, acknowledges both the influence of T.J. Clark and the debt the discipline owes to those art historical 'greats' referred to in Clark's 1974 article as well as the impact and trajectory of *Screen* amongst others. See Rees, A.L. and Borzello, F., introduction to *The New Art History* London, Camden Press, 1986 pp. 1-10. For a personalised insider account of the internal debates within *Screen* in the latter half of the seventies, which largely polarised around the steer of the journal towards Lacanian psycho-analysis and the provenance of the journal vis-à-vis art-house or popular Hollywood cinema, see McCabe, C., 'Class of '68' in *Tracking the Signifier: theoretical essays: film, linguistics, literature* (Minneapolis:, University of Minnesota Press, 1985):1-32.

¹⁸ Rapaport, H., 'Vulgarity, He Said: T.J.Clark's Modernism' *New Formations* 44 Autumn (2001): 163-164.

on their lack of belonging. They were the *shifters* of class society, the connoisseurs of its edges and wastelands. And thus they became for a time the alter egos of the avant-garde...depended upon for a point of insertion into modern life. I believe that sometimes in depicting them the painters discovered the limits of and insufficiency of their own ideology and in some sense described these people's belonging to the class system. That only happened occasionally.¹⁹

Clark's reading as a Marxist one ultimately critiques the artwork of 'modernity' from the point of view of that which it addresses and to whom it gives address and that which it opens onto *in terms of necessity in the social* or '*real conditions of existence*'. These conditions are understood in terms of *social* relations, and not reductively economic ones, premised upon the concept of class, which are lived through the possibilities and limitations of ideologies that can nevertheless be recognised as such and rendered intelligible and contestable. The possibilities and limitations of ideologies are key elements in Clark's finding a particular, complicating and 'middle' way between a vulgar Marxist economic-base analysis and an over-simplifying and, as such, over-rating of the intrinsic weight and power of 'signifying practices',

It sounds right – it corresponds to normal usage – to say that any social order consists primarily of classifications. What else do we usually mean by the word 'society' but a set of means for solidarity, distance, belonging and exclusion? These things are needed pre-eminently to enable the production of material life – to fix an order in which men and women can make their living and have some confidence that they will continue to do so. Orders of this sort appear to be established most potently by representation or systems of signs, and it does not seem to me to trivialize the concept of 'social formation' –or necessarily to give it an idealist as opposed to a materialist gloss – to describe it as a hierarchy of representations. That way one avoids the worst pitfalls of vulgar Marxism, in particular the difficulties involved in claiming that the base of any social formation is some brute facticity made of sterner and solider stuff than signs – for instance the stuff of economic life...Economic life – the 'economy', the economic realm, sphere, level, instance, or what have you – is in itself a realm of representations. How else are we to characterize money, for instance, or the commodity form,

¹⁹ Clark, T.J., *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his followers* 258

or the wage contract? *I believe it is possible to put this kind of stress on representation and remain, as I want to, within the orbit of historical materialism.* Everything depends on how we picture the links between any one set of representations and the totality which Marx called 'social practice'. In other words, the notion of social activity outlined so far can be sustained only if we simultaneously recognize *that the world of representations does not fall out neatly into watertight sets or systems or 'signifying practices'.* Society is a battlefield of representations, on which the limits and coherence of any given set are constantly being fought for and regularly spoilt. Thus it makes sense to say that representations are continually subject to the test of a reality more basic than themselves – the test of social practice. *Social practice is that complexity which always outruns the constraints of a given discourse; it is the overlap and interference of representations; it is their rearrangement in use; it is the test which consolidates or disintegrates our categories, which makes or unmakes a concept, which blurs the edge of a particular language game and makes it difficult (though possible) to distinguish between a mistake and a metaphor...it too-social practice itself-is analyzable, at least in its overall structures and tendencies.*"²⁰

For Clark, class and ideology are central conceptual tools, which give shape not only to the relationship between social practice and its representations, but to social practice itself. With reference to the terms by which he describes 'social practice', as that which outruns any discourse, as that which constitutes and de-constitutes representations, on what basis *can* social practice be understood as both more 'real' than representations *and* a social totality, as opposed to social practice as a mobile, fluid, contingent set of discursive inter-relations? How *does* social practice effect and be the condition of possibility for representations and concepts, other than by a hypostasis of more concepts? Class and ideology have to be primary concepts, even as Clark goes some way to saying that they are not. They are fundamental, whilst adaptable in their range and scope in accordance with the changing circumstances of social relations under capitalism, and have an ontological privilege over other conceptual appropriations. This is why for Clark, along with the Situationists, the 'society of spectacle', as the key concept through which to understand the conditions of existence of modernity under

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

capitalism identified as such in the Manet book, has to be ‘the illusion’ of social relations articulated through the ‘image’.²¹

This concept, coupled with the role of Situationism in relation to Clark’s work, was a means to theorise the extent of capitalism’s penetration into the very interstices of everyday life, public and private, work, family and leisure, such that ‘lived reality’ became more and more actualised through the ‘appearance’ of a reality brought about by capitalism’s increasing self-production without end; its manufacture of the very time and space through which reality was experienced, crystallized through the ‘image’. In Clark’s view, this condition of modernity, insofar as it rendered class relations more ‘invisible’ and unstable, requires the understanding of class relations with *increasing urgency*. To recognise the malleability of class and the increasing fragmentation of relations within the social totality within the ‘spectacle’, which is capitalism, rather than render the concepts of class or ideology inadequate or redundant, in fact demands their re-invigoration. In this sense, for Clark, any theory *where the starting point and end point* is the exigencies of capitalist fragmentation at the level of the fragment and the shifting, constitutive or de-constitutive operation of signs and meaning is vulnerable to being *symptomatic of* capitalism rather than a critique of it. But this is to ‘measure’ ‘modernism’ in accordance with the possible revelation or production of, in the sense of a genesis and teleological path to, ‘things as they really are’ and the ‘truth’ of history *under the aegis* of ‘class’ and, in Clark’s terms, ‘social practice’.

The argument of this chapter is that to consider the relationships between history and the political and art and the artwork as one in which, the historical and the political are pre-given and outside of the artwork or as a ground; the historical and the political as that to which the artwork *gives address* as a history already there and ‘resumed’ or ‘revealed’ in the artwork, ultimately depends upon a presumed or founding ‘Idea’ of history. Bound up with this is the question of the *truth* of history, as revealed and in the case of Manet’s *Olympia*, with its veiling

²¹ The concept was developed primarily by Guy Debord and formulated in his book *The Society of Spectacle*. See Debord, G., *The Society of Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, Aim Publications, 1985), *passim*.

or unveiling of truth in the figure of the (classed) woman; thus repeating a metaphysical and ‘mythic’ idea of truth.

Whether in terms of the artist’s work in the work or its reception, within such a model, the consideration of the work as historical depends on a division between the subject and object of history, the interaction of which drives the unfolding of ‘history’ towards its telos or end in ‘truth’. This, to put it bluntly and for the moment risk begging more nuanced questions, is to put the politics before the art rather than see the *inter-relation* differently; not art as an effect of politics or politics as an effect of the art which runs all the risks of the aestheticisation of politics, but what Librett calls, speaking about Nancy, an “agnosticism in aesthetics and politics”. This perhaps awkward term, refers to the ‘re-treating’ of the political and the aesthetic that I have already referred to above, (see n8 page 8 of this text). The nub of the matter for Nancy of the opposition between absolutisation and relativisation is at the heart of the vexed question of the relation between aesthetics and politics.²²

Nancy, in broaching the fragmentation of the aesthetic (without ‘end term’) and the politics of non-self sufficiency (without the *pre-emptive* ‘subject’ of the

²² Librett elaborates, “For Nancy, then, it can no longer be fundamentally a question, as it still was – at least manifestly – for Walter Benjamin in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ of a choice between (right-wing) “aestheticization” and (leftist) “politicization” as terms whose values we could somehow *compare* with each other to figure out which we valued most or which was most important or, rather, all-important, absolutely desirable ‘in the last instance’. In Nancy’s text, this choice no longer appears possible because aesthetics and politics no longer appear as either local or absolute values in themselves. Rather, both aesthetics and politics are internally structured as the impossible dialectical oscillation between the absolutization of value and its relativization.

The choice, in sum, *within* both aesthetics and politics is the choice between the perpetuation of this dialectical oscillation of absolutization and relativization (under the domination of the absolutization of the relative), on the one hand, and its deconstructive, liminal interruption, on the other hand. That is, on the one hand, there is the dialectical mirror-play between the absolutization of the relative (the designation of some particular relative term or terms as adequate presentation of the absolute) and its dialectical opposite, the relativization of the absolute (in the sense of a *finite* or *relative* relativization). This dialectical opposite, the relativization of the absolute is itself, however, merely one *example* of what it opposes, the absolutization of the relative, because it always relativizes in terms of some absolute point of reference in turn, for example, by reducing religion to psychology or history, by reducing psychology to history or history to psychology, by reducing epistemology to aesthetics or rhetoric, by reducing aesthetics to politics or the reverse, and so on and so forth. On the other hand, marginally outside of this dialectic, on and as the border between its two terms, there is relativization ‘as such’, absolute relativization (or infinite finitization), which does not conclude by arriving at any (relative) term, including the nihilistic term of a given, total absence of value or total presence of pure desire.” Librett, J., ‘Translator’s Foreword’ in Nancy J-L., *The Sense of the World*, p. xxv.

political, whether it be understood as the classed, gendered, racialised or sexualized subject), affirms the ‘absolutizing relativization’, such that there is no ‘end’ to this project inasmuch as the absolutization *of* relativization also belongs *within* the dialectic it interrupts as the *border* where each term is ‘transformed into its other’.²³

But precisely because of this, aesthetics and politics, and how they relate to an *emancipatory* project, can be thought *otherwise*. To re-cap, the political ‘subject’ and the aesthetic have to be thought fundamentally differently. It is still a matter of distinguishing between ‘real conditions of existence’ and image in the ‘society of spectacle’, but Nancy is taking another tack and starting point. The ‘real conditions of existence’ *are* fragmentation with spectacle as their representational ‘disguise’. What matters is the ‘re-cognition’ of fragmentation as the absolute relativization of the being-with, not the search for the presumed ‘common bond’, be it class, gender, race or sexual orientation, which art might somehow give shape to. From Clark’s position this might give rise to scepticism that such a ‘re-treating’ of the contemporary political is prey to *the symptoms of modernity* rather than capable of a critical position towards it. I speculate here, but this is Clark from the Manet book:

... [M]odernist painting accepted and reworked a myth of modernity in which the modern equalled the marginal. Shifting and uncertainty were thus taken to be the truth of city life and of perception, the one guaranteeing the other. I have spent my time trying to suggest the strengths and limitations of this belief, and have put more stress than is usual on the latter. In particular I have argued...that this painting did not find a way to picture class adequately; though adequately here should not be understood to mean simply or unequivocally. It was not able to devise an iconography of modern life, one capable of being sustained and developed by succeeding generations. That failure derives above all I think, from its mistaken sense of what class was and how it showed itself, its belief that the founding categories of social experience could only appear – or could only be represented – as an absolute presence on the other side of codes and conventions, or as a glimpse, a flickering into visibility, itself part of the general elusiveness...that sense of class

²³ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

just outlined is basic to bourgeois ideology and [that] a contrary imagery would have to be based on some form of identification with the interests and values of other classes in capitalist society...if certain bourgeois artists now wish to succeed the modernist frame of reference, this will involve them in discovering what remains of modernism might still be used to represent the point of view of the proletariat.²⁴

Is Nancy's retreating of the contemporary an 'acceptance' in Clark's terms? What might the representation of the point of view of the proletariat (have) come to mean?

In sum, Nancy is saying we work with this existence and politicise that by way of re-treating as opposed to a 'retreat of' or mourning of the political; the politics of memory versus the memory of politics.

It is a fine line, and I myself face the difficulty of re-reading a Marxist position that was enormously influential on my own practice as a thinker about, reader and historian of art. Having set out at some length the context of my approach to Clark's texts, I am conscious of a certain leap I have made from Clark's position as I am characterising it, to a deconstructive one, but it is necessary to return to a closer critical exposition of the political context of Clark's 'Preliminaries...' article in order to understand how that deconstructive turn came to matter in the consideration of art and politics and what, for the want of a better word, its antecedents were. What was it that was setting the scene for receptivity towards the 'positions' of Derrida and Nancy?

Intelligibility, mimesis and Marxist reading

I want first of all to characterise a Marxist reading of art, which persists throughout subsequent debates within the parameters of Marxists' positions on art, as one that is driven by the question of *intelligibility*. Such a reading necessarily wants to render intelligible the specificity of products of art, as 'human sensuous activity' within an account for their *historical determination* and the nature and extent of their determining effects.

²⁴ Clark, T.J., *The Painting of Modern Life*, 259-260.

The approach, I suggest, requires teleology of intelligibility and, for the most part, a political, critical reading was conceived in terms of ‘ideological critique’; one which can, in accordance with the Marxist analysis, *result in* the opening of new fields of knowledge; that is to say, expose the workings of ideology in a text and reveal the relationship between the *meanings* that an image/work produces by way of its *appearance as an object to the subject*, in order to *bring about a* real transformation whether in the production of works of art or in their *social* ‘consumption’. ²⁵

The classic Marxist model for this intelligibility is the base-superstructure distinction. The intelligibility of a work of art is ultimately derivable from the material conditions of the economic base; the actual relations, already existing, among which the economic relations are ultimately the decisive ones. This model was fundamental for understanding the relationship between economically based social relations of production and culture; formations and symbolic systems; i.e. those areas associated with ‘ideas’. The superstructure was the realm which, according to Marx, consisted of “the legal, political, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict [between the means of production and social relations of production] and fight it out.” ²⁶ The superstructure thus consisted of forms of social consciousness or ‘appearances’, which was *causally* linked to the economic base and, through which, men and women perceived the realm of social relations. This model, I argue, is a mimetic one, inasmuch as art either equates to the ‘ideological’, or by some means, relates to the real, (‘things as they really are’); in Marxist terms, the ‘real’, as the underlying forces and relations which structure human interaction on the basis of material conditions. Even in respect of those positions within Marxism which seek to re-think the base-superstructure distinction and argue the case for the relative autonomy of art, such a basis for reading has to remain metaphysical and sustain a Platonic mimetic division,

²⁵ Adapted from Macherey, P. & Balibar, E., ‘Literature as an ideological form: Some Marxists Propositions’, *Oxford Literary Review*, 3.1 (1978): 4.

²⁶ Marx, Karl, ‘Preface to *A contribution to the critique of political economy* (1859)’ in Marx, Karl., and Engels, Frederick., *Selected Works Volume One* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983):504

which operates under the same logic as Plato's division between the 'idea' and the 'appearance', or the 'intelligible' and the 'sensible', inasmuch as a causal link has to be maintained between the 'appearance'-as-material of the work and the 'ideology' or indeed the "'ideological/real' struggle" to which the text refers.

This follows whether the reading is operating at the level of the generality of the concepts of 'art' and 'society', or at the level of signification and the material 'marks' that constitute the work. I question such an approach on the basis of intelligibility and its required subject/object dualism, as a reading, which seeks to incorporate its 'object' under its logic. This is also the logic, as suggested above, of 'presumed' or teleological history.

The philosopher John Sallis has succinctly set out some of the key issues I address. He suggests that following Plato, the intelligible has always governed the sensible. This has always been a problem in that the 'intelligible' itself has always been a 'figure'; in that sense, already a representation.

...the figure constitutive of metaphysics is the distinction, the hierarchical opposition, between the intelligible and the sensible...There is in turn, an extended chain of oppositions linked to this opposition (universal/particular, form/matter etc) in a linkage that is quite complex and not readily reducible to a difference merely between primary and secondary or fundamental and derived. For the very sense of fundamental is at stake in these oppositions. As also is the very sense of concept, of figure, indeed of sense itself.²⁷

Suggested here is the very problem at the heart of philosophy, also at the heart of Marxist reading, which cannot be overcome by any kind of mere inversion of terms, whether that inversion is, as per Marxism, the material over the ideal, objective conditions over subject-centred reason, etc. The very idea of meaning, has always involved a 'model', a type, within which the 'idea' has taken on an appearance. Given the paradoxical insistence of the intelligible as a model, how does one interpret the sensible as "a new kind of interpretation capable of

²⁷ Sallis, J., 'Double Truths: Interview with John Sallis', Pasanen, O., *Man and World*, 30 (1997): 108

avoiding all the traps that would merely lead back to the old distinction in some new guise?”²⁸

Marxist reading and “Screen”

In order to consider this problem of intelligibility in terms of a particular historical conjuncture in the seventies and eighties in Britain, it is important to both set the tone of that historical moment and articulate something of the historical context and ferment of debate within, out of, beyond Marxism, which was typified by the shifts and turns in the ‘position’ of *Screen*. ‘Preliminaries...’ has emerged, for me, as existing at the turning point of this ferment, seeking as it did to defend in an almost ‘last redoubt’ sense, a relation between art and politics, which continued to rely upon notions of agency and class-based signs and meanings, defending such agency, from an encroaching disquiet and a turn towards ideas of identity that were less presumptively ‘visible’ and pre-determined. These latter notions of identity or agency were more the outcome of ‘invisible’ and less ‘stable’ unconscious processes of interpellation through signification and psychic process understood as operating like a language.

This conjuncture saw a remarkable set of crosscurrents appearing within contemporary intellectual life and the academy, which brought together a powerful interweave of radical critical theorisations of culture, at a time when the political right was building its popular and state hegemony. Perry Anderson refers to this as “a culture in contra flow”.²⁹ As he suggests, whilst an authoritarian populism established itself outside, inside, “[the Right’s] attempt at a *Gleichschaltung* of the academy tended to raise up the very adversaries it sought to stamp out, even as its drive to impose the values of the counting house and constabulary on society swept forward elsewhere.”³⁰ The terms by which this might be considered a *culture* in contra flow remain somewhat tenuous in Anderson’s account. He links this leftwards shift in the academy to “the turmoil of the late sixties and early seventies [which] threw up in its turn its own

²⁸ *Ibid.*, : 108

²⁹ Anderson, P., ‘A Culture in Contra flow’, *English Questions* (London: Verso, 1992), 192-301.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

political generation, whose characteristic form of expression became the critical journal, generally produced on the edges of the academy and against it”, connected with, “...a buoyant press of counter-cultural leisure born from the same moment...³¹” and

...finally, overlapping from the late seventies onwards, there emerged feminism, which, unlike its counterpart in the U.S.A, was always predominantly a movement of the left in Britain. In the neo-conservative eighties, its persistent dynamic helped to ensure that a radical public sphere did not lose ground even in a time of deepening political reaction.³²

But what Anderson’s account tends to miss, in line with his general overview, are the debates within the ‘left’ concerning precisely just *how* and *how far* the critical culture of the academy connected with a wider sense of the political and the public sphere.

Arguably, it was through feminism, which Anderson, somewhat briefly, acknowledges, that this debate between the ‘inside’ of the academy and the sphere of the political ‘outside’ was most demonstrable and in particular sharpened the divide between what Anderson alludes to as, “one a movement towards the social, or the democracy of significations, the other a shift towards the metaphysical, or the instability of significations”³³ in relation to the critical project of, as Anderson has it, “reconnecting the symbolic processes and shapings of subjectivity in social life to the unfinished political struggle for equality and emancipation.”³⁴

I am not accepting Anderson’s division between ‘the social’ and the ‘metaphysical’ here, as, in terms of the argument suggested above, the social is just as capable of being metaphysical in the connection made between ‘symbolic processes’ and the politically emancipatory project of democracy. However, his remarks do point to the political struggle over the ‘site’ of meaning, which took

³¹ *Ibid.*, 196

³² *Ibid.*, 196

³³ *Ibid.*, 242

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 242

place within the academy, as well as the abiding problem between representation or signification, the subject and the social, which so marks T.J. Clark's intervention. It is salutary that neither Anderson nor Clark *fully* draws upon these debates within feminism, as somehow paradigmatic of this cultural debate at the time.³⁵

What the feminist debates opened up was the point at which, and means by which, one rendered 'class', 'gendered' or 'racialised' positions '*intelligible*'. They did this by exploding the tensions *between* 'democracy' and 'instability' of significations, 'visibility' and 'invisibility' of gendered subjects, 'central' and 'marginal' tenets, 'naturalised' and 'socio-cultural' positions; the social and metaphysical as such. At the same time, theoretical perspectives brought into

³⁵ Anderson mentions feminism once, and he singularly fails to refer to some of the seminal feminist interventions into those critical journals he deems so important in establishing the very culture in contra flow he upholds, such as Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 Autumn(1975):6-18, reprinted in Mulvey, L., *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London:Macmillan 1989): 14-26, the argument of which, analysing cinema from the point of view of its structural incorporation of 'masculine' (from Freud) scopophilia and voyeurism, became seminal in debates concerning precisely the relationship between "symbolic processes and shapings of subjectivity in social life" to which Andersen alludes. Reference to this article and its influence was also a significant omission from Clark's work. However, Clark acknowledged the criticism of his book, *The Painting of Modern Life*, which came from feminism in the Preface to the revised edition of the book, published in 1999. His acknowledgement is a serious one. "More substantively, I agree that the problem of modernity's eternal revolution around the figure of 'Woman' is not explored enough in the book. How to do so without questions of gender in practice *displacing* questions of class remains an issue for me, and for the feminist work I admire...I believe we agree that the problem is not solved by constant evocation of class in the abstract, as a horizon or matrix of symbolic reproduction, without the invocation leading to specific descriptions of class's constraining and enabling force. For all kinds of reasons, the latter is hard to do. Roland Barthes's phrases still ring in our ears: "'The bourgeoisie is defined as the social class which does not wish to be named. 'Bourgeois', petit-bourgeois', 'capitalism', 'proletariat', are the locus of an unceasing haemorrhage: meaning flows out of them until their very name becomes unnecessary,'" ('Capitalism' has lately become the exception to Barthes's rule, but that is because capitalism is for the moment triumphant, and thinks that singing its own praises is the best way of making the other terms – continuing gross facts of privilege and powerlessness – disappear.) Class is still the category, that is to say, most systematically muted or deleted in our understanding of human relations. Which is not to say that gender gets any better treatment overall. In its case, the regime of invisibility gives way to other, cruder forms of representational violence – to endless rehashing of stale half-truths, to ever new feats of freezing and hypertrophy. Working on class and gender, I am therefore convinced, will not get far without fresh attempts to think of the two sets of terms as always overlapping and interfering - as revealing one another's false colours. That is why Marxism and feminism go on being uneasy (in the light of history, justifiably suspicious) allies." Clark, T.J., 'Preface to the revised edition', *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his followers*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), xxix. This gets Clark off the hook in some respects, but at the same time demonstrates his avoidance of those debates within feminism which took to task both the categories of 'woman' and 'class', as they were *assumed* to be or might become in accordance with a 'teleology', and went some way towards those specific descriptions of the constraining and enabling force of class/gender ascriptions.

tension with each other in this debate each had their own limits inasmuch as they were, some more readily than others, caught up in a politics of 'identity' and the valency of 'intelligibility' and a certain givenness or finiteness of identity which such a politics subtends. Thus I am not proposing a feminist argument as a counter to Clark or indeed any other of the perspectives he lists in his litany in the 1974 article. But the feminist debates and indeed Clark's response to them in the Manet book did demonstrate what the problems were at that historical conjuncture. They highlighted that tension between the argument for a collectively focussed politics to counter the oppressive reshaping of social life by 'free market' individualism and trenchant conservatism (to counter the systematic muting and deleting of social categories, as in Clark's argument) whilst at the same time arguments were coming from various quarters about the break up of traditional authority structures and social units and those binding 'meta-narratives' of historical progress *and* a philosophical questioning and displacement of the 'subject' as the determining centre of meaning and history. As part of this, the institutions of culture were a site for theory and critique of the subject as universal and totalising *and* a site for the articulation of an emergent refiguring of the political in identity politics. Hence the particularity of the conjuncture and its paradox, on the one hand un-grounding 'the subject' and, on the other, contesting the ground asking whose identity, whose subjectivity was at stake here; the paradox of an un-grounded, non-universalising subject instantiating 'fragments' of subject-identity positions.³⁶ This was marked by the division, which emerged within feminism between a politics premised upon *visibility* and one premised upon *discursivity*. On the one hand there is the political figuration of the 'visibility' of subject positions as a force within a

³⁶ Jeffrey S. Librett in his foreword to Jean-Luc Nancy's *Sense of the World* points to the analogy between this paradox and that of the "autonomous work of art" after Romanticism, whereby fragmentation becomes its own 'absolute' instantiating 'whole' fragments, each in their own completeness and 'finish'. Librett quotes Nancy, "Disruption transforms itself...into the gathering of itself into itself of the broken piece. The latter converts its finitude – its interruption, non-completion, and in-finitude – into finish. In this finish, dispersion and fracture absolutize their erratic contingency: they *absolve themselves* of their fractal character." 'Art, a fragment' Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World*, 124-125, and makes the analogy thus: "An analogue of the autonomous artwork...would be the given cultural identity seen as a product of the given, collective cultural subject. Where multiculturalism imposes itself as an absolute value, it demands relativization of values (and their subjects) but in identity politics this relativization stops at the level of given cultural groups, whose values are then supposed to count as absolute." Librett, J.S., 'Translator's Foreword' in *The Sense of the World* p. xvii and note 9, 170.

social project of resistance, under what might be termed the model of the power of oppression and a counter-movement to challenge it and a politics of 'women'- how women are *represented* and *mediated* as a 'category' within society, its structures, institutions and cultural formations and yet can act as agents of social change and challenge to these representations. On the other hand, there is a politics of 'difference' which involves the recognition of the instability of the terms of identity itself, such as the term 'woman' and recasting the political at the level of the *discursive* and *signification* and the relation between psychic and social power structures and force fields brought about by language, such that the very terms under which the 'political' might be addressed are not given in advance of the contingency of such terms in an inherently unstable network of language relations.

The 'oppression and counter-movement'³⁷ model seeks to totalise by drawing together differing spaces and sites of oppression as representative of the overarching power relations of capitalism, rendering them visible and contestable, whilst the alternative view calls this model into question for its deployment of an assumed and pre-given categorisation of subjects, social relations and presumed conceptualisations of the spaces and levels in which power relations cohere and oppression and its counter-movement take place. According to this alternative view, power and power relations are never as stable and assumed within institutional spaces as the model of oppression and counter-movement suggests. It is through their articulation, as dispersed in and across various discourses that exclusionary practices and formative differences and discriminations occur. If the principle is to resist exclusionary practices, to make visible and vivify oppression and its contestation, then a political discourse to this effect cannot take any of its analytical categories for granted, and its politics cannot be programmed in advance of this openness to the question of the contingency of subject positions and power relations. It is upon this principle of contingency that both the contestation of oppressive power relations and a politics open to difference can be based. Counter-assertions with regard to 'concrete material reality' against the privileging of 'language' or discourse

³⁷ This 'model' was suggested via Coole, D 'Feminism Without Nostalgia' in *Radical Philosophy* 83 (1997) 17-24

were contestable insofar as this very concrete material reality, and the terms of its political theorisation and politicisation, was in turn a signification, which in assuming a descriptive and empirical force, necessarily produced boundaries and limits, exclusions and remainders, which were put beyond question.³⁸

In broad terms, these were, or were going to be, the stakes of the contemporary political debate as *Screen* was positioning itself at the forefront of criticism as political practice. Already the journal had set out to understand the identity of the disciplines of film studies, literary theory, cultural studies and art history as relational under a general premise of the ‘structural’ relationship between forms of representation in culture and ideology as kinds of ‘*signifying practice*’ rather than discrete ‘disciplines’, with all these entail in terms of disciplinary protocols and inclusive histories; and, as part of this, an argument held that such forms, whilst embedded in history and in the social, had their own *effectivity* at the level of signification. The influence at that time was predominantly Althusser’s Marxism, but it would not be long before the psychoanalytic element in Althusser gained greater force, and language would be looked to not only for its effects in ‘constructing’ identities in a field of relations, but also for its effects in destabilising identities in a field of perpetual potential difference.

Clark’s text comes at a moment in the political critical project of *Screen*. One of the key positions for *Screen*, in the debates within British Marxism, was its particular emphasis upon the ideology of ‘form’ as *signification*. This involves how form, as signification, *produces* meaning, and is not a mere vehicle for meaning. Throughout the seventies, this position was increasingly allied to Althusserian and Lacanian notions of how signifying practices and the symbolic contributed to the reproduction of the dominant order through the *interpellation of subjectivities* (as I discuss in more detail below).³⁹ Hence, critical in this debate was the extent to which ‘founding’ Marxist concepts of class, class

³⁸ See Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of Sex*. (London: Routledge, 1993)

³⁹ The concept of interpellation is found in Althusser, L., ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B Brewster, (London and New York: New Left Books, 1971)

consciousness and ideology were re-thought by Althusser, but then more radically put into question by so-termed structuralist and poststructuralist theorisations of the relationship between structure, sign and subject and how that is extrapolated by way of signifying practices.

There is a history, a genealogy, to this moment that must be sketched here. These questions were debated within the context of a British appropriation of Western Marxism, and a further re-evaluation of the relationship between cultural forms and politics after the insurgencies of 1968. 'Post-1968' brought about a re-invigoration as well as a problematising of Marxist concepts.

Whilst 'Western Marxism' as a broad term includes significant divergences in thought, it nevertheless identifies a major reconfiguration and formal shifting of the fundamentals of Marxist thinking, which had been politically mobilised in the revolutionary situations in Europe emergent from the First World War.

Where those revolutionary upheavals sought the concrete realisation of Marx's theory (the praxis) of the logic of capitalist development in the overthrow of capitalism by proletarian revolution; the ensuing failure of international revolutionary socialism, the rise of fascism, the consolidation of communism under Stalinism in the Soviet bloc, the further entrenchment of capitalism under the guise of democracy in the West all called for a reconsideration of Marxism. In those Western states where the logic of capitalist development appeared to have taken a turn not theorised in Marx the position of economic determinism, and especially economic reductionism, was inadequate.⁴⁰

The fundamental shift, which took place within Western Marxism, was towards the role that the *superstructures* played in determining the persistence of capitalist social relations and in effecting class-consciousness. Allied to this was the question of method and a reconsideration of the *philosophical* basis of Marxism. Out of this emerged some major innovations in Marxist thought. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony explained the mechanism by which a ruling class obtained popular consent by way of the ensemble of ideologies,

⁴⁰ This history is explored in the work, amongst others, of Perry Anderson in the 1970s, See Andersen, P., *Considerations of Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

transmitted through cultural institutions with the support and agency of intellectuals. Resistance to dominant ideology had to be considered in terms of a 'war of position' to secure hegemonic status.

Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse of the Frankfurt School challenged the Marxist view of historical progress and the development of the forces of production as a progressive emancipation of human society. Capitalism's scientific and technological advances brought with them further social and psychic repression of 'the masses'.⁴¹ Freud's thought was significant here, most explicitly in Marcuse. The 'abundance' of capitalism, including the commercialisation and industrialisation of culture within class society, produced particular forms of 'surplus repression' (Marcuse). Where the technological development of advanced capital offered the potential for libidinal emancipation, actual history produced the inverse of this through the repressive de-sublimation by commercialised gratification, including the incorporation and neutralisation of critical artistic impulses. The 'abundance' of capital enabled the integration of the proletariat into an order of 'mass conformity' disabling its consciousness of itself as a separate, exploited class.⁴²

This theme preoccupied Adorno, but he sought to re-think the criticality of art in the context of mass commercialisation. This required a radical re-think of the 'disenchantment' of society in relation to the 'disenchantment' of art. For Adorno, the rationalisation of society bore a supreme irony, whereby "[An] abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects, as does fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them."⁴³ Progressive disenchantment has led to the power of instrumental reason over all aspects of life and, as Jay Bernstein puts it, "...the stamping of the world by the instrument is making it a mirror of our subjectivity, making a world 'for us' [but], in becoming a world 'for us' the world became no longer 'for us' at all and we are no longer for ourselves"⁴⁴. In the face of this, the 'truth' of art is in the non-sublatable negative dialectic of

⁴¹ See Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, H., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. Cummings, J., (New York: Seabury Press, 1972).

⁴² Marcuse, H., *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Books 1964)

⁴³ Adorno, T. & Horkheimer, H., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 13.

⁴⁴ Bernstein, J., 'The Death of Sensuous Particulars: Adorno and Abstract Expressionism', *Radical Philosophy* 76 Mar/April (1996), 10.

illusion and non-illusion. In that sense it is unable to effect a symbolic reconciliation and is strewn between mimetic expression and construction.

Adorno's use of illusion and non-illusion differs from a critique of the mimetic as privileging an original presence and constituting a will to identity and resemblance as representation and 'model' as installing the logos as truth. For Adorno, mimesis is that which undermines the reification of thought in any subject/object dualism. It harks back to a primordial reason and, in so doing, demonstrates that rationality has never been fully realised. It connects with expression as the dissonant resistance to 'harmony', a resistance rooted in suffering. In that sense, mimesis is the resistance to the ideological forgetting of real pain, which is characteristic of an art of consolation or reconciliation. At the same time, however, mimesis as expression has to be supplemented by construction (spirit), but this supplementarity is a process that remains in irresolvable tension.

This tension, socially and historically, is marked by, on one hand, the striving of art to achieve self-sufficiency, to separate itself from the irrational rationality and false reality of the laws of exchange, by pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art and, in so doing, offer hope for the future; on the other hand, the failure of art to do so, is a mark of its imperfection. The 'failure' of art to produce self-identity (any sense of wholeness of 'it-self') reveals the pain of damaged life, through its dissonant features. As Michael Newman puts it, "in the mode of illusion of art and specifically in the modernist work, which turns against its own illusoriness in a sublime self-destruction which gestures towards the truth, that, as art, still it lacks."⁴⁵ It is this tension that Adorno knew was always in danger of being overridden by the pressures of instrumental rationality upon construction and the withering away of mimetic expression into the mimesis of mythic imitation.

⁴⁵ Newman, M., 'Suffering from Reminiscences' in *Postmodernism and the Re-reading of Modernity*. (eds). Barker, F., Hulme, P. & Iversen, M., (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1992):98

However, as long as it remains as aporetic, where the interdependent distinction between synthesis and dissociation cannot be resolved, the work of art maintains the negative dialectic as a site of resistance to the mythic and ‘magical’ (re) enchantment *of art*. This is also the basis for Adorno’s objection to what he read as Walter Benjamin’s undialectical reading of the technologies of mass mediation vis-à-vis ‘autonomous’ art. As Adorno puts it in his letter to Benjamin in response to Benjamin’s, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’,

I now find it disquieting...that you now casually transfer the concept of magical aura to the ‘autonomous work of art’ and flatly assign to the latter a counter-revolutionary function. I need not assure you that I am fully aware of the magical element in the bourgeois work of art (particularly since I constantly attempt to expose the bourgeois philosophy of idealism, which is associated with the concept of aesthetic autonomy as mythical in the fullest sense). However, it seems to me that the centre of the autonomous work of art does not itself belong on the side of myth...but is inherently dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom...Dialectical though your essay may be, it is not so in the case of the autonomous art work itself; it disregards an elementary experience which becomes more evident to me every day in my own musical experience – that precisely the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art changes this art and instead of rendering it into a taboo or fetish, brings it close to the state of freedom, of something that can be consciously produced and made...The reification of a great work of art is not just loss, any more than the reification of the cinema is all loss. It would be a bourgeois reaction to negate the reification of the cinema in the name of the ego, and it would border upon anarchism to revoke the reification of a great work of art in the spirit of immediate use-values...Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change...Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one to the other, either as the bourgeois romanticism of the conservation of personality and all that stuff...or as the anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence

in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the historical process – a proletariat which is itself the product of bourgeois society.”⁴⁶

I dwell on this connection between Adorno and Benjamin in relation to Clark, because of their commitment to an immanent criticism, and the drawing upon the potential for art, or the mediation of the social by art, which Clark shares or desires. Adorno and Benjamin also demonstrate the struggle involved in the immanent critique of art, to resist the passing of art into the (re)-enchantment of the commodity form, or more exactly, in the case of Benjamin, to prize open that hardened commodity and recognise its origin ‘dialectically’ as a dynamic between a hidden past and an unknown future. The work of Adorno and Benjamin is imbued with a certain melancholic imaginary, possibly more positive in its terms of reference than that detectable in Clark, with his overriding premise of the *failure* of modernity and a presaged *memory* of politics and *mourning* of art.⁴⁷

But this strand of Marxism had to stand side by side with, perhaps holding its ground against, another branch of Marxism. Gramsci and Althusser began to hold sway in the burgeoning discipline of Cultural Studies in the late seventies and eighties. Both Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and Althusser’s concept of ‘interpellation’ attested not so much to the ‘damaged life’ brought about by capitalism, but to the more subtle operations by which power *gained consent* and even *constructed* identities.

⁴⁶ Adorno, T., ‘Letter to Walter Benjamin, March, 1936’ in *Aesthetics and Politics*. (eds). Bloch, E., Lukacs, G., Brecht, B., Benjamin, W., Adorno, T., trans. Taylor, R., afterword by Jameson, F., (London: New Left Books, 1979), 121-123.

⁴⁷ I sometimes wonder if this is true even of Benjamin in his most optimistic texts, which are coming up to the front line of the enemy, but never quite shaking off the spirit of the ‘last redoubt’? Clark appears to ‘declare’ this in the title of his book, published in 1999, which reworks and reconfigures a project, which he has sustained over some thirty years, as *Farewell to an Idea*. See Clark, T.J., *Farewell to an Idea: episodes in the history of Modernism*. The impact of the book seems to derive significantly from the depth of Clark’s engagement in the inconsistencies and limits of representations, which are put to the test by, and almost expose, what Clark refers to in the Manet book as “a reality more basic than themselves” and “the test of social practice”, and comes up again in *Farewell*... as a (possibly) *mournful* gloss on modernism’s failed possibilities to transform seeing beyond capitalism’s envisioning. This begs the question of what the ‘reality more basic’ and ‘social practice’ might be *presumed* to be and the extent to which art is that which might present the ‘Idea’ of ‘the real’.

Freudian and later Lacanian concepts were important for Althusser, - suggesting how the social totality, and the place of the subject within it, could be considered in ways other than those that Althusser took to be a misplaced humanism or empiricism. Here were the beginnings of a key shift in the understanding of structure and agency, which questioned the fundamental Marxist tenets of ideology and consciousness. For Althusser, society is not an expressive totality, but a structured ensemble of practices, which, including those classically thought of as super-structural, are read as exercising relatively autonomous influence upon the social formation as structures-in-dominance, in accordance with the concept, borrowed from Freud, of over-determination. It is the mutual interdependence and different permutations of contradiction between these practices that brings about social formation and change with the positioning of social subjects, not the conscious will of the subject. Ideology – like the unconscious – is an immutable structure and practice within society. It is the structural and material articulation of the imaginary relationship of social subjects to their real conditions of existence. Ideology works in all types of society as a means of adapting men and women to their conditions of existence, securing the reproduction of the relations of production. It does not operate at the level of a ‘false consciousness’ but is, in a specific sense, ‘profoundly unconscious’. It is the way in which men and women experience their worlds, a matter of the ‘lived’ relation between men and women and their world; that which connects a ‘real relation’ with an imaginary or ‘lived relation’. Ideology is an inescapable, functional system of imaginary representations, by way of concrete institutions and social practices, because all social structures are necessarily opaque to those occupying places within them. Further to this, utilising Lacan’s concept of the subject’s ‘imaginary’ identification of self, in the ‘mirror stage’, this functioning of ideology works through the interpellation of the subject *as* subject. Ideology ‘constitutes’ concrete individuals as subjects; analogous to Freud’s ‘unconscious’ as ‘initiated’ by the objective structure of the family.⁴⁸ The rapprochement with Freud and Lacan enables Althusser to link

⁴⁸ Althusser, L., ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy* (London and New York: New Left Books, 1971)

Freud's concept of 'negation' with Lacan's '(mis) recognition'. As the film historian David Rodowick explains:

For Althusser, the classical subject of philosophy – defined by self-identity, self-consciousness and non-contradiction is of no use for comprehending [the] problem (of subjects adherence to roles which are constituted by and in ideological apparatuses). Rather one must turn to psychoanalytic models of identification and the construction of subjectivity that describe the subject as divided within itself and capable of acting on contradictory relations of knowledge and behaviour.⁴⁹

Freud's 'negation' enables an understanding of how an individual can hold mutually contradictory beliefs, both affirming and denying the 'truth' of an event without acknowledging contradiction. Lacan's imaginary splits the subject between recognition and mis-recognition, such that a subject submits to ideology either as a recognition of self or an idealised mis-recognition, 'given' as an idealised ego-category of subjectivity. Such recognition enables the subject to be sustained in practical knowledge but, crucial to Althusser, is the stance that it is only scientific, theoretical practice, which produces actual knowledge. The *science* of society will not coincide with the 'lived relations' of its social subjects.

For Althusser, empiricist epistemologies conflated the 'real' with the 'thought-of-the-real' in a 'pre-scientific' ideology of the 'perceiving subject'. Theory itself is a practice, transforming raw material into a product. Only the theory of theoretical practice (dialectical materialism) is able to criticise ideology in all its guises, including those of theory itself. Subsequently, through his reading of Lenin, Althusser politicised theoretical practice by aligning philosophical idealism with bourgeois class dominance, in opposition to Lenin's theoretical practice of proletarian scientific materialism. Theory itself became a site of class struggle.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Rodowick, D., *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 31.

⁵⁰ Althusser, L., *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: New Left Books, 1971).

That said, Althusser returns the concrete, material practices of ideology to the single, ultimately determinative principle-determination in the last instance by the economy. This produces a flaw in his system. Returning the structures and functions of the social totality to the ultimate determining principle of the economic, and retaining the concept of ideology with all that it implies in terms of the relationship between the economic and political moments of the social, renders the concept of overdetermination and the interpellation of subjectivities compromised. Overdetermination is limited to the point of redundancy inasmuch as the economic as the single *determinative* principle determines structures and functions as necessary, so that the field of over-determination is not constitutive but merely that of contingent variation. Similarly, with ideology operant within a structure already determined by the economic, no matter the means by which it functions as a practice, its function remains that of positioning/interpellating subjects in and on the terrain of *class* positions, constituted elsewhere by the economy.⁵¹

Nevertheless, it is the *radicalisation* of over-determination, and a closer adherence to its conceptualisation within Freud's psychoanalysis, later allied to Lacan, which is one of the key elements in opening up the closure and limits of theorisations of the social as a totality, particularly in relation to the 'discursive' as the productive site of identity, and its cultural meanings and differences, no matter how contradictory that identity formation might be.⁵²

⁵¹ Althusser, L., 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1979), 89-116. This was the critique of Althusser coming 'from the other side', as it were, which took his reference to "culmination of 'contradictions'...some of which are radically heterogeneous - of different origins, different sense, different *levels* and *points* of application..." ('Contradiction and Overdetermination', 110) as evidence that there was no necessary correspondence between different levels of contradiction, their effects and the economic. Hence the critical argument that if the 'economic' returns as a 'necessity' in Althusser's theory, the theory's entire conceptual basis is undermined.

⁵² This radicalisation in one formulation takes the next step from 'no necessary correspondence' to 'necessarily no correspondence'. As Stuart Hall points out, "Althusser allows me to think 'difference in a particular way which is rather different from the subsequent traditions which sometimes acknowledge him as their originator. If you look at discourse theory [and here Hall particularly identifies *Screen*], you will see there, not only the shift from practice to discourse, but also how the emphasis on difference – the plurality of discourses, the perpetual slippage of meaning, the endless sliding of the signifier – is sometimes pushed beyond the point where it is capable of theorizing the necessary unevenness of a formation, or even the 'unity in difference' of a complex structure." Hall, S., 'Signification, Representation, Ideology' in *Cultural Studies and Communications* (eds). Curran, J., Morley, D., Walkerdine, V., (London: Arnold, 1996), 12.

It was the utilisation of Freud's psychoanalysis and Lacan's bringing together a theorisation of subjectivity with language as a signifying practice, instrumental in the production of subjectivity, which, for feminism especially, offered a challenge to the Marxist paradigm, which provided no theory of the subject, other than as 'class subject' and no adequate account of the specificities of the position of women within the economically determined stratifications of the social. It was this coming together of psychoanalytic theories of the subject and structuralist accounts of meaning as produced in signification, which were questioning Marxists' historical accounts of ideology and class-consciousness. It is here that the debates within feminism seem to me to most forcefully come into play, although the terrain of the feminist debate and its influence in relation to wider issues of the aesthetic and the political was not always acknowledged or connected up within the pages of *Screen*.⁵³

From the critique of signification, following Althusser and the implication of ideological practices as *signifying* practices, there derived a perspective to treat the differing practices, be they scientific, aesthetic or social, *as texts*, in order to uncover the *materiality* of textual production which 'idealist' reading obscures.⁵⁴

This fed into, to bring us back to that moment of *Screen*, the newly invigorated politics of *culture*, in the wake of the political activism of 1968 and the early

⁵³ This of course went further than putting 'woman' into the framework of Marxist analysis. As noted elsewhere in this thesis, within feminism the theory/practice conjuncture in the seventies and eighties brought about an increasing divergence between a feminism premised upon the *visibility* of woman and a feminism premised on *discursivity*. Considering feminism politically had become divided between a politics of 'women' – how women are represented as a 'category' within society, its structures, institutions and cultural formations and yet how women, as such a category, can act as agents of change and challenge to these representations and a politics of difference, which involves the destabilising of the *term*, the meaning of 'woman' itself. This rethinking of the subject in terms coming from psychoanalysis and especially the 'split' between 'language' and 'body' which Lacanian psychoanalysis enabled to be thought, meant a recasting of the political at the level of the discursive and signification, in as much as neither 'woman', 'gender' 'the social' or 'the political' are given terms in advance of the contingency of discursive relation and signifying practice.

⁵⁴ This was particularly evident in the influential journal *Tel Quel*, which brought Althusser and Lacanian psychoanalysis, by way of Julia Kristeva, together in a rethinking of 'textual' analysis as a 'semiotic' as, "the material character of the signifier and the practice of writing as the subversion of conventional codes, especially those of representation and a deconstruction of the conscious subject in favour of a subject fissured or split by articulation with the order of the unconscious and his or her own body". See Wollen, P., 'Ontology and Materialism in Film', *Screen*, 17.1 (1976): 13, quoted in Rodowick, D., *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 32.

seventies and its subsequent decline. The debates were on again, in the seventies with significant reference to earlier historical moments; Russia in the twenties, Germany in the thirties,⁵⁵ but they were here also being problematised by the radicalisations of Althusser and structuralism and post-structuralism. Lines were being drawn between, on one side, that of meanings being attributable to consciousness, arising from 'pre-given' class formations, as the conditions of existence for consciousness and which the meanings of cultural artefacts 'represent' or articulate and, on the other side, with the impact of those influences from and poststructuralist radicalisations of Louis Althusser's 'structural' Marxism, the argument that such consciousness and meanings were not *prior to*, but were constituted and potentially 'de-constituted' by the very practices of signification.

Within the journal at that time, there were a number of positions drawn increasingly in support of 'counter-cinema'; films which, by way of self-reflexive devices and distanciation, or what were referred to (by Clark) as 'dis-identificatory' practices⁵⁶, put into question the ideologically constitutive effects of representation, precisely through reference to their own material devices for producing meaning; or 'counter-ideological' cinema which, whilst ostensibly formally coherent as ideological production, under the scrutiny of 'symptomatic' reading, reveals cracks and fissures; the splitting through internal tension, making 'the ideology' itself present in the film. Clark asks in his article "do dis-identificatory practices matter?" and, it seems to me, this was at the heart of various positions in the *Screen* debates.

⁵⁵ The debates in the seventies and eighties either directly drew upon or evoked remarkable similarities to those earlier twentieth century debates on aesthetics, which were characterised by a broad opposition between modernism and realism; those between Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukacs were seminal. To oversimplify, in terms of the 'translation' of thirties debates in the context of the seventies, the debate was a contestation between two types of form, which were considered mutually exclusive epistemologically. The 'realist' text assumes a transmission of knowledge to the reader, whose position is stabilised through a more or less invisible discursive apparatus. The 'modernist' text disturbs the unified view or self-presence of the reader by working against identification, especially by drawing attention to the workings of its own textual processes. See 'Brecht against Lukacs' and 'Afterword' by Jameson, F., in *Aesthetics and Politics* London, 196-213.

⁵⁶ Clark, T.J, "Preliminaries..." 37

Laura Mulvey's seminal article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', makes a clear stake for an 'avant-garde' or 'counter' cinematic practice, in as much as her analysis articulates a 'masculine' look as the premise for representation or 'interpellation' of subjectivities. Insofar as the aesthetic text may 'interpellate' subjects within the structures of voyeurism and scopophilia, as identified by Freud, the imaging of woman presents a potential 'threat' to the process of denial and idealised ego identification upon which such interpellation depends. Hence the necessity for the mastery of this contradiction through the 'norms' of (realist) identificatory symbolic processes constituting the pleasures of 'mainstream' cinema and, in consequence, the need for 'politically and aesthetically avant-garde cinema', which will undercut the satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego and negate the transparency of the narrative device; "to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment".⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Mulvey, L., 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', 26. I am not necessarily going along with the binary opposition between 'realist' and 'avant-garde' practices which preoccupied *Screen* and its influences and the reference to dialectics suggests some ultimate 'reconciliation' of the cinematic practice with identity, albeit negatively. Indeed, I suggest that Mulvey's 'counter' example points to something beyond received notions of 'avant-garde' cinema and the framing of 'pleasure' by Freudian concepts. Jean-Luc Nancy, writing on Kant's difference between the aesthetic of the beautiful and the sublime makes this distinction and, along with it, identifies something like the 'end' and 'beginning' of art. "Indeed, the beautiful is perhaps only an intermediate, ungraspable formation, impossible to fix except as a limit, a border, a place of equivocation (but perhaps also of exchange) between the agreeable and the sublime, that is, between enjoyment and joy...If a transport of the beautiful into the sublime is indeed the counterpart or reversal of its sliding into the agreeable...and if in the agreeable the beautiful ultimately loses its quality of beauty (for in enjoyment, the beautiful as satisfied or satisfying, the beautiful is finished – and art along with it), then one must expect the beautiful truly to attain its 'proper' quality only in another sort of departure from itself – into the sublime. That is, the beautiful becomes beautiful only beyond itself, or else it slides into the space this side of itself. By itself, it has no position. Either it achieves itself – in satisfaction, or philosophy – or it suspends itself, unachieved, in the sublime (and in art, or at least in art that has not been sublated by philosophy)." [*One might add or psychoanalysis, or structuralism, or structural Marxism*] Nancy, J-L., 'The Sublime Offering' in *Of the Sublime Presence in Question* (eds). Courtine, J-F. et al., (New York: SUNY, 1993), 33-34. Add to this, however, a more recent meditation by Nancy on cinema, "Cinema is marked by the heaviest and most ambiguous of signs – myth, mass, power, money, vulgarity, circus games, exhibitionism and voyeurism. But all that is carried off in an endless movement to such an extent that evidence becomes that of passage rather than some epiphany of meaning or presence. Cinema is truly the art-in any case the technique – of a world that suspends myths. Even if it has put itself in the service of myths, at the limit, it finishes by taking them away; it carries off all epiphanies of meaning and of immobile presence in to the evidence of movement." Nancy, J-L., *The Evidence of Film* (Brussels: Yves Gevaert publications, 2001), 78.

T.J. Clark's reading and Marxism

Clark's text is an intervention within this arena, which brings to bear his scepticism towards readings that attempt to politicise art works solely on the basis of their formal devices or their medium, and to that effect, pronounce them 'avant-garde'. Such readings devalue accessibility and some kind of 'intelligible; or, more precisely in Clark's account, 'vivid' mode of address, which reaches beyond 'medium'.

Clark's text begins what he would continue the next year in his critical encounter with Clement Greenberg's discourse on Modernism.⁵⁸ Suffice to say, it is the debate with Greenberg and, to a lesser extent, with Michael Fried, which has carried more weight in art history circles. The *Screen* text, and perhaps more significantly, why it appeared in *Screen* at all, has barely been referenced in the annals of this conjuncture in art history, suggesting that the project of understanding 'signifying practices in structural relationship to other signifying practices in a culture', together with a criticism focused on "the regimes of looking allowed to the spectator by texts and their institutional placing...effected by a semiotic analysis which insisted on the artistic text as the product of a social practice rather than a naturalised representation of reality"⁵⁹ and Clark's attempt to address the implications of this in terms of the theoretical terrain that appeared to go with this project was quickly subsumed as part of a pervasive move towards 'identity politics'.

Central to Clark in this article is the presentation of an argument for an intelligibility and determinateness of the art object, which seeks to address an historical situation 'outside of itself', to address a class formation, and a site of class struggle in the 'real', which is to say, an art object which is intelligible 'for the class', which is resistant to the dominant class, and resists its own 'decline'

⁵⁸See Clark, T.J. 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', *Critical Inquiry*, 9.1., September (1982): 139-156. This edition of the journal was a special issue based on the symposium, 'The Politics of Interpretation' held at University of Chicago, 1981. Michael Fried's 'How Modernism Works: a response to T.J.Clark' was delivered at the symposium and also published in the same issue of *Critical Inquiry*. Clark's response to Fried, 'Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried' was published in Mitchell, W.J.T. (Ed) *The Politics of Interpretation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp.239-248. All three articles are included in Frascina, F. (ed) *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*. (London: Harper and Row, 1985), 47-88.

⁵⁹ See 'Editorial' to *Screen*, Vol. 21, No.1, (1980) in which Clark's article appears.

into self-negation in the face of the abandonment of art to the commodity, by the class that first gave art its social base. His position here, to an extent, reflects the views of the Frankfurt School that the ‘class of capitalism’ was producing the decline of its own culture in its intensification of ‘industrialised entertainment’ and commercialised gratification, as referred to above. That said, his position on an art, which resists decline as empty negation, is different from Adorno’s.

Adorno holds out for an art that resists commodification and ‘spectacularisation’ by means of the integral tension between its autonomous ‘laws’ of production and mimetic resolution in ‘harmony’. It is precisely through its failure, its dissonant resistance to harmony, that art resists the power of re-enchantment into capitalist commodity. Clark’s position is marked by his involvement with the Situationist International and their theorisation and condemnation of the ‘Society of the Spectacle’. In his book on Manet, Clark cites Guy Debord and argues that Paris in 1865 represented the beginnings of such a society, whereby “The spectacle is *capital* accumulated until it becomes an image”.⁶⁰ Clark’s particular take on modernism, modernity, Marxism and art cannot be separated from this Situationist history. The Situationist project was driven by the necessity to think and undo the regimen of representation under capitalism, in which art was inevitably caught up, *even more so* in its *separation* from everyday life. According to Situationism, an ‘avant-garde’ art as a negative dialectic offering the last redoubt against or the only possible hope in the face of capital’s representational insurgencies, as per Adorno, asked the wrong questions of and provided the wrong solutions for art.

In fact the industrialisation of art is already a *fait accompli*...Alienated society, by revealing its perfect compatibility with the work of art and growing dependence on it, has betrayed the alienation of art in the harshest and least flattering light possible. Art, like the rest of the spectacle, is, no more than the organisation of everyday life in a form where its true nature can at most be dismissed and turned into the

⁶⁰ As Clark points out in his gloss on ‘spectacle’ in the introduction to the Manet book, the concept is not ‘cut and dried’ but was the mainstay of the Situationist International’s attempt to theorise the extent of capitalism’s penetration into the very interstices of everyday life, public and private, work, family, leisure such that ‘lived reality’ became more and more actualised through the ‘appearance’ of a reality brought about by capitalism’s increasing self-production without end; its production of the very time and space through which reality was experienced. See Debord, G., *Society of the Spectacle*, passim.

appearance of its opposite; where exclusion can be made to seem participation, where one way transmission can be made to seem communication, where loss of reality can be made to seem realisation.⁶¹

The influence of Hegel, young Marx and Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* on Situationist thinking, in terms of the relationship between the alienation of self-consciousness and reification and modes of representation, cannot be overlooked. Debord's text is punctuated with references to Hegel and 'young Hegelianism'.⁶² This, too, will persist with Clark. One might consider, however, that the logic of the Situationist's position on art calls for the dissolution of art all together, as separate activity, as representative of the capitalist 'totalitarianism of the fragment' and its sublation into a 'truly' creative practice of 'everyday life'. Clark acknowledges the irony of the position of Situationism in the Manet book,

The notion of spectacle...was designed first and foremost as a weapon of combat, and contains within itself a more or less bitter (more or less resigned) prediction of its own reappearance in some such form as this, between the covers of a book on art...I wish at least to alert the reader to the absurdity involved in making 'spectacle' [as a concept working at and pushing at the margins of a 'handed-down' Marxism (*my comment*)] part of the canon of academic Marxism.⁶³

Clark will make his position tenable through his academic attempt to unravel something like the beginnings of 'spectacle' in "a shift – to some extent an oscillation - from one kind of production to another"⁶⁴ in nineteenth century Paris, mapping modernism on this. (Clark's later book *Farewell to an Idea* will expand the terrain of both). The map is (precisely) not a close fit. His abiding

⁶¹ From Clark, Gray, Radcliffe, Nicholson-Smith, 'The English Section of the Situationist International (1967)', *The Revolution of Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution*, (London: Chronos Publications/ Boomerang Pamphlet Series, no.3), 13.

⁶² The dependence of the concept of 'spectacle' upon a Hegelian logic of the coming to consciousness of the inherent contradictions of capitalism and the commodity form in order to be overcome, combined with Lukacs' thesis of the recognition by the proletariat of its alienated and reified existence has been well documented by Anselm Jappein: Jappe, A., 'The Concept of Spectacle.' *Guy Debord*. trans. Nicholson-Smith, D., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1-43.

⁶³ Clark, T.J., *The Painting of Modern Life*, 10.

⁶⁴ Clark, T.J., *The Painting of Modern Life*, 9

interest is in how modern art negotiates this burgeoning spectacle (and its own precipice of becoming/being the commodity-form par excellence), at the same time as confronting the inconsistencies, the paradoxes, even the 'deviation' between painting and representation as such. In this sense he certainly *reads* painting. But such a reading is framed by an 'arche' principle or telos of intelligibility in terms of the real; for which think 'real conditions of existence'; the realm of necessity; class struggle, 'out there', or 'more basic'; true. This is attested to throughout Clark's work; from the *Screen* article:

...artistic practice will have to *address itself to* the specific positioning of the body in the economic, political and ideological practices...it has to articulate the relations between its own minor acts of disobedience and the major struggles – the class struggle – which define the body and dismantle and renew its representations. Otherwise its acts will be insignificant – as Manet's were, I believe, in 1865.⁶⁵

It is articulated with more nuances in the Manet book:

But if class could be shown to belong to that body; if it could be seen to remake the basic categories of nudity and nakedness; if it became a matter of the body's whole address and arrangement, something read on the body, in the body, in ways the spectator could not focus discriminately – then the circuit would be broken, and the category courtesan replaced by others less absolute and comforting. The body and money would not be unmediated terms any longer, intersecting in the abstract, out there in the hinterland of images; they would take their place as determinate facts in a particular class formation...Of course, it is not very likely that a picture on its own could do any such thing. Ideologies are not magically dismantled in single works of art; and if paintings try too hard to anticipate social process, they run the risk of ending up speaking to nobody, neither those inside the world of ideology nor those existing at its edges. It remains to be seen how successful *Olympia* was in redescribing the nude. And whether the price of success was too high.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Clark, T.J., 'Preliminaries to a possible treatment of Manet's *Olympia* in 1865', 38.

⁶⁶ Clark, T.J., '*Olympia's Choice*', *The Painting of Modern Life*, 118-119.

It resumes variously in *Farewell to an Idea*. This example, removed from the context of Bolshevik utopianism, illustrates Clark's debate with the art of Malevich and El Lissitzky and the subsequent (horrific) 'failure' of the utopian moment.

Part of the utopianism I sympathise with. Particularly the implication that there is a deep connection between the representational order called capitalism and the belief (which we would call for short Sausserian) that all representational orders are systems of difference, of pure exchange values generated out of the relations between the elements of a signifying system. Marxists would say that the insight here...occludes the further problem of the sign-system's materiality, and thus their belonging to patterns of material production and reproduction which we call social practice. (The stress here is on the historical, material place and determination of the whole language game, not just the phenomenal 'stuff' of any one token within it. Obviously the least modernist or semiotician is capable of recognizing – I would say, fetishizing - the latter.)...the point is that the further field of problems is what, within the signifying regime we belong to, has not to be thought. Everything about the forces and relations of symbolic production under capitalism encourages the fantasy that meanings are the product of a self-enclosed circuit or system, opening nowhere onto the realm of necessity. Pure presence wars eternally with pure absence, the latter winning hands down. Signification is imagined always under the sign of money or nowadays of similar action (conversion) at a distance, happening in the 'ether' of information...It takes a very special (and no doubt terrible) moment for these structures to be thinkable as socially determined.⁶⁷

And then, "...Art, in our culture, finds itself more and more at the limits, on the verge of emptiness and silence. So that practitioners have continually been forced to recognize how little space, or representational substance, they are *given to work with* (my emphasis) in the all-consuming world of goods."⁶⁸

I come back to this again in this chapter as what I am setting out here as Clark's 'position' manifests itself in other contexts, that of the *Screen* article and his

⁶⁷ Clark T.J., *Farewell To an Idea*, 259-260.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 407.

books, but also as stated previously, his debates with Greenberg and Fried.⁶⁹ The point of my emphases is to indicate the extent to which, for Clark, putting it bluntly and crudely here, the ‘world’ of the social relations of production ‘comes before art’, as that which art both is a part but has to work with, and in the best of cases, opens onto necessity, in some meaningful sense, which can escape the subterfuge of ideology (and capitalism’s mechanisation of social relations) and accede to ‘knowledge’ of these social relations (and how they might be otherwise, or perhaps not now). This position certainly recognises the extent to which symbolic production is, as Nancy puts it, “the self-suppression of capital” as “the self-surpassing [that] takes place as the symbolisation of production itself, which allows for coexistence only in the form of the technical or socio-economic co-ordination of the various commodity networks”.⁷⁰ But it does not allow for a thinking of symbolic production *otherwise* than in accordance with the thinking of *appearance* versus *idea*; sense versus intelligibility; thus the notion that an artwork might or might not ‘dismantle ideology’, a kind of ‘good mimesis’ versus ‘bad mimesis’ argument.

The significant and recurring themes throughout Clark’s ‘Olympia’ text in *Screen* are the importance of *historically* situating Manet’s *Olympia* as an object addressing a public (and the ensuing incomprehension of this audience); the need

⁶⁹ For Greenberg see below. Clark’s ongoing debate with Michael Fried, who has also written on Courbet and Manet, has been focussed on Fried’s insistence upon a phenomenological materialism in his reading of art, such that the history of modernism is a history of the artist’s ‘problem’ of painting and the body (the artist’s body) and that of the beholder who is, of course, both the artist him/herself and the beholder as ‘other’. Courbet’s ‘realism’ and Manet’s ‘modernism’ are historically distinct but nevertheless versions of this approach. See Fried, M., *Courbet’s Realism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) and Fried, M., *Manet’s Modernism: the face of painting in the 1860s*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Around the time of writing the *Screen* article, Clark appeared to have little truck with such an approach, as evidenced in his response to Fried’s riposte to Clark’s polemic against Greenberg’s theory of modernism. Clark wrote, “It is not enough in this connection, for Fried to deny that he posits ‘a distinct *realm* of the pictorial’, since his critical practice so insistently reinstates one, in the same sentence we find him saying that painting’s engagement ‘with what it is not’, though inevitable, ‘places in jeopardy its very identity’. But why on earth should it? And isn’t an account of painting which sees it as *gaining* its various identities through engagement with what it is not automatically foreclosed by Fried’s formulations? Won’t he rule out my account of Picasso say, on the grounds that it does not grasp how separate and sustaining the ‘enterprise of painting’ was for the artist in question? In critical practice, isn’t *any* account of modern art’s engagement with what it is not dismissed as being beside the great ontological point? And when it comes to ontology, all the nods to Merleau-Ponty cannot save Fried’s prose from sounding like old-time religion.” Clark, T.J., ‘Arguments about Modernism: a reply to Michael Fried’, published in Frascina, F., ed *Pollock and After*, 86.

⁷⁰ Nancy, J-L., ‘Being Singular Plural’, 50.

to locate this address in the specificities of a complex *historical* situation where the former ideological certainties securing the social order and the orders of class position and sexual exploitation as, in Clark's terms, *part of that* ordering of classes, were beginning to break down. Here again it is significant to note the absence from Clark's text of any critical engagement with the 'feminist' ideology of sex, despite its increasing presence as a challenge to Marxist orthodoxies; the need to *resist* an affirmative reading of signifying practice of Manet's *Olympia* as a set of 'self-reflexive devices' resistant to ideological effects and thereby inaugural of a *politically challenging* modernist art; and the corollary to this, the need to question whether Manet's *Olympia* risks situating itself; situating the body of 'Olympia' within a representation which resonates with other social practices 'outside' of 'art'; or whether it remains within the 'self-declared' confines of art as a form of negation, emptying itself of meaning, ultimately reconciling itself to the society of spectacle which had abandoned it to its own devices in the first place. This historical reading of Manet is clearly meant to have its effects as an intervention within the contemporary debates in *Screen* and I contextualise this more closely below.

The argument I present in respect of Clark's reading is that, in his need to contest the claims for modern art as politically effective, and to present the limitations of those arguments which support 'modernist self-reflexive' practices and the 'foregrounding of medium', which is the basis for his article in *Screen*, with Manet's *Olympia* as his example, he argues a Marxist position which comes up against its own limits.

In arguing the case for intelligibility, in his particular sense of address, belonging, vividness and knowledge, Clark has to posit a distinction between the intelligible and the sensible, but he then must absorb the sensible into the intelligible. He assumes that art does/should resonate with other social practices, as part of its position within the social totality, but in so doing, he falls into a mimetic logic and an argument for an originary site of meaning, whereby, it is those other social practices, which give 'meaning' to the work, from their position, outside of it. As such, it is those other 'meanings', already existent, 'pre-given' in the formed class-consciousness, which the work should *address*.

Under such a logic, if Clark were to read *Olympia* as both ‘exposed to’ its-self (in its stricture between art and commodity) and to other social practices and meanings, which are themselves ‘exposed’ and caught at the limit of meaning, not existent as essentialised class positions and forms of class consciousness, this is negative reading. He does not read *Olympia* as a site of an ‘event’ of meaning that might still breach the closure threatened by the emptying of meaning into spectacle, but which, as an ‘event’ is unpredictable, the effects of which cannot be read off in advance, nor necessarily assumed as fully readable ‘after the event’. In his reply to Peter Wollen, who defended modernism in response to Clark’s article⁷¹, Clark argues for an art that has *vividness* for someone, with inconsistencies and contradictions, which nevertheless “strike the viewer or reader as *qualifying* a meaning in some pertinent way” (my emphasis).⁷² This confirms that mimetic relation; that the work addresses that ultimate meaning, (still) existing elsewhere, presupposed as able to be grasped by the consciousness of the (‘classed’) viewer.

We might find ourselves asking more often than is usual in modernist practice and commentary, questions of the form: Who is this work of art for? Who might its public be (who did it want or intend to take that curious part?) and how does it address them? How and how appropriately? Do its modes of address confirm certain kinds of dominance and misunderstanding, or refute them? Does the work attain to *vividness* for anyone?⁷³

Clark explains this more in terms of social relations in his response to Clement Greenberg.

There is an art – a modernist art – which has challenged the notion that art stands only to suffer from the fact that now all meanings are disputable. There is an art – Brecht’s is only the most doctrinaire example – which says that we live not simply in a period of cultural decline, when meanings have become muddy and stale, but rather in a

⁷¹ Wollen, P., ‘Manet – Modernism and Avant Garde’, 15-26.

⁷² Clark, T.J., ‘A note in Reply to Peter Wollen’, 98.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 98

period when one set of meanings – those of the cultivated classes – is fitfully contested by those who stand to gain from their collapse. There is a difference in other words between Alexandrianism and class struggle. The twentieth century has elements of both situations about it and that is why Greenberg's description, based on the Alexandrian analogy, applies as well as it does. But the end of the bourgeoisie is not, or will not be, like the end of Ptolemy's patriciate. And the end of its art will be likewise unprecedented. It will involve and has involved as part of the practice of modernism – a search for another place in the social order. Art wants to address someone, it wants something precise and extended to do; it wants resistance, it needs criteria; it will take risks in order to find them, including the risk of its own dissolution.⁷⁴

Two interacting logics are prevailing here in Clark's reading. One is the philosophical-political presupposition of a social order and the dialectical interplay between the 'collapse' of one hitherto dominant part of that order and its 'overcoming' by another hitherto repressed part; the Hegelian-Marxist ontology of being as 'community', as conflicting social relations. The other is art's mimetic relation to this. That these logics are inter-related derives ultimately from the philosophical metaphysical unifying principle of the logos, which predominates in the thinking of both the social (community) and art as *essence* as opposed to, as Jean-Luc Nancy insistently re-thinks, the principle of the being-with of *existence* as a singular plural.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Clark, T.J., 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art', Frascina F., ed. *Pollock and After*, 60.

⁷⁵ Nancy considers 'the social' and 'art' in relation to his idea of the 'singular plural', as the *event* of the 'being-with' of existence, right at the existence of the 'with' prior to or otherwise than any abstraction into an 'idea', whether that be 'class formations' or Heidegger's *Dasein*. Both these concepts of Being, as Nancy argues, ultimately depend upon an originating 'essence' or a 'one' even as this 'one' unfolds in negotiation with an 'other'. Nancy wants to think the being 'one' as always already other at the same time. In terms of the argument I am setting against Clark here, this means re-thinking an 'originating' social 'order' – even as that 'order' is shifting and complex, dissolving and re-forming in ways that are difficult to grasp and measure, as Clark has it, and an art that relates to this. For Nancy, social being is other than an originating 'position' vis-à-vis an 'other', but a continuing 'dis-position' – "The very simplicity of 'position' implies no more, although no less, than its being discrete, in the mathematical sense, or its distinction *from*, in the sense of *with*, other (at least possible) positions, or its distinction *among*, in the sense of *between*, other positions. In other words: every position is also a dis-position and considering the appearing that takes the place of and takes place in the position, all appearance is co-appearance. This is why the meaning of Being is given as existence, being-in -oneself-outside-oneself, which *we* make explicit...for the totality of beings." Nancy, J-L., 'Being Singular Plural', 12. Art and the social, the social and art are in a relation which is not ideological, dialectic, negative or affirmative, but is the continually untying and tying of relations which are always already both together and apart. Or, we might say Nancy's non-model of the continually

It is this re-thinking that I am gradually mobilising contra to what underlies Clark's reading of modernism and leads him to bid 'Farewell to an Idea', to the idea that art might address itself to that shifting field of social relations still governed by the arche-principle of class formations, in some coherent and vivid way, but also contra to those inflections of Marxism and structuralism which provided the context for Clark's intervention in *Screen*. With regard to the latter, as Nancy points out, we are by no means done with the ultimately logo-centric model of the social and the subject.

So it is that in all quarters, the subject of the unconscious, the subject of history, the language-subject, the machine-subject, the text-subject, the body-subject, the subject of desire (and everywhere the subject declared to be the simple-effect-of-the-subject, have produced thus far only the aggravation, or even, to put it more simply and more imposingly, the exacerbation of the *status* of the Subject.⁷⁶

By thinking thus, one can avoid that opposition between a modernism of empty negation, which is that very negativity of the subject which the substratum of the subject subtends, and a modernism of political memorialisation or future telos which might 'address' the pre-sumed subject of history and instead re-think history, memory, subject, art entirely differently in terms of the event of difference, singular plural and a spatio-temporality of the giving of Being, beyond an economy of exchange or dialectic or past and future present. So now to turn to a more detailed account of Clark's reading of Manet's *Olympia* in order to uncover

fragmenting, effracting of 'model' applies to both, in so far as they by means of this absolute fragmentation 'create' a world.

⁷⁶ Nancy, J-L., *Ego Sum*, Paris, Flammarion, 1979, p. 30 quoted in James, I., 'The Persistence of the Subject' *Paragraph*, 25.1, March (2002): 129 In contrast to the seeming impossibility of avoiding the 'exacerbation' of the Subject, Nancy proposes or exposes, prior to the philosophical, political or psychoanalytic subject, the 'spasmic' movement of the subject which aporetically withdraws as it emerges, disappears as it appears, is, only in so far as 'it' is this rupture both prior to and in excess of any *thought of* the subject; a kind of extension of space as a spacing which is an incommensurable extension of thought, as Ian James points out, and which returns to the idea of the 'singular plural', "Nancy is re-inscribing existence, each irreplaceable human existence in terms of singularity, one which is not subject to the law of the symbolic, the bar of castration and an economy of lack (and not it might also be said – subject to the subject of the materialist conception of history, in so far as the symbolic is always tied to (self) production.) Nancy allows us to think of space, of, if you like the giving of Being...[A] singularity exists as such in relation to other singularities-thus we come to think space not as an objectifiable, mathematizable extension or presence, but as a temporal unfolding in which singularities, prior to any logic of the subject expose themselves to each other." James, I., 'The Persistence of the Subject', 137.

the metaphysical philosophico-political position, I argue that it subtends. This will be done by weighing up the argument Clark has with strands of modernist criticism, be it the Althusserian-structuralist leanings of *Screen* or the ongoing debate with modernist art criticism, reconsidering the model of the social formation and class conflict which underpins Clark's position on art and the social in the light of 'post Marxist' radicalisations of certain Marxisms⁷⁷; this is further problematised by extrapolating on Derrida and Nancy's arguments concerning singularity and existence.⁷⁸

Clark's reading

I want to pose this as a problem for Marxist readings, as exemplified by Clark and now turn to a more detailed consideration of Clark's reading. Clark's interest was in investigating the critical reception of Manet's *Olympia* at the time of its entry to the Salon in 1865. Clark's concern was to try to unravel the circumstances which led to an unprecedented incomprehension on the part of the critics and as Clark suggests a 'failure to mean' of the work.⁷⁹

He charts this through his interpretation of the failure of the critics to establish any reading of the work within the usual frames of reference and norms of critical vocabulary; he cites the scarcity of any reference to historical precedent

⁷⁷ Primarily Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's rethinking of the 'social' as a system of differences, only 'temporarily' articulated into a 'movement' or 'prevailing discourse' by way of a hegemonic relation. Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*, (London:, Verso, 1985).

⁷⁸ Broadly, and for the sake of my exposition, the distinction between Derrida and Nancy here on the question of 'singularity and existence' resides in emphases upon time and space by each in consideration of a shared re-thinking of spatio-temporality and Being and the being of the subject 'prior to' or in 'excess of' the modalities of thought handed down by the tradition of metaphysics. If, for Nancy, singularity and existence have to be re-treated politically right at the point of the 'with' of being-with, outside of any presumed thought of the totality or telos of 'production', for Derrida singularity and existence are spatio-temporally riven by an extreme temporality between a past that has never been present and a wholly unpredictable future; a past and future of the subject prior to any thinking of the presence of the subject; the 'secret' to which any linguistic act is always already a response without our 'knowing' this. Derrida has articulated this variously as 'differ-ance', the 'secret' of the 'spectre' and, whilst this thought of 'being' has always been political, it has been given greater political significance since *Specters of Marx* made the distinction between an ontology of being on which to base a politics and a 'hauntology' of being which takes account of this singular spatio-temporal dimension. See Derrida 'Passions: an oblique offering' especially pp. 24-31 in *On the name*. (trans). Wood, D., Leavey, J., McLeod, I., Palo Alto: University of Stanford, 1995), 3-31.

⁷⁹ Clark, T.J., 'Preliminaries...', 38.

and the tradition of the Nude; the scarcity of reference to Manet's previous works; the failure (with perhaps one exception) to make any sense of the connection between the painting and its accompanying piece of poetic text; the 'silent' or 'unspeakable' reaction to *Olympia* as a representation of prostitution. All such frames of reference, Clark suggests, would be a normal part of the network of ideological discourses available to critics, through which a reading and meaning of the painting might have been constructed. And yet, according to Clark, *Olympia* remained recalcitrant.⁸⁰ The terms in which any critic was able to articulate a reaction to *Olympia* bordered on the inarticulate. Clark examines what he reads as this awkward response of the critics to *Olympia* in relation to the signs in the painting. *Olympia*'s signs, he suggests, do not cohere, do not add up to a 'finished sentence'. Clark examines what amounts to the *ineffectiveness* and *failure to signify* of the work and he seeks to position this *politically*, by questioning whether there were signs 'outside' of the painting, 'out there' in the society that *Olympia* could have articulated to different political effect.⁸¹

Clark's exegesis on the critical reception of *Olympia* centres upon art, class ideology, and sex. His aim is to situate the painting as a moment in a particular historical conjuncture and examine its 'political' effectiveness.

In the *Screen* article, as I suggest above, this is in part a polemic against some versions of 'political effectiveness' allied to 'modernism' prevailing in *Screen*. Clark studies the evidence of the critical reception of the painting and folds into that, or folds that into his own close reading of the work. Clark is, of course, basing his critical investigation on a Marxist theory of art. The work of art is a social production, the meaning of which has to be read in accordance with the historical circumstances and ideological positions which effect and structure it, on the basis of class positions within the social totality, which is its ultimate determination. What follows from this and will be investigated here is that a Marxist political *reading* of the work will want to insist upon the connection between appearance/image; ideology; history; and class and will want to make that connection *intelligible*. Further, as its *political project*, a Marxist reading will want to present the case for the possibility (or not) of the 'political' art work.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 22

⁸¹ This brings the argument back to his arguments with Clement Greenberg, as suggested above.

Such principles underline Clark's reading. I consider that he carries them through a critique of Manet's *Olympia* as (certainly in the *Screen* article) a 'failure' as a political work, inasmuch as the work did not *address itself to* the historical conjuncture of prostitution and class struggle, in Paris in 1865 in *sufficiently clear terms*; sufficient to accede to knowledge. This, of course, is not to do with Manet as a painter, as such, or his particular class position, but to do with the position art and artists found themselves in, and the resources with which they had to work, vis-à-vis a society of burgeoning "spectacle".

Clark meticulously interrogates the signs, as markers of sexuality and class and how these might or might not map onto each other, in a painting which ostensibly refers to the tradition of the nude, whilst at the same time referring to the 'scene'; the accoutrements of sex for sale, prostitution. There are, I suggest, two overlapping conflicts at work, one of which is clearly tested in Clark's reading, that of prostitution and class (and the tradition of the nude's complicity in emptying this conflict out of the equation) and that of woman as threatening, powerful in her refusal to be made abject, versus woman as compliant and being abject (this last is the nude's 'stock in trade'). Clark wants to approach the latter named conflict through the former. He wants to think about *Olympia* outside of its 'game' and 'play' within the 'image'; within the 'artistic tradition', wherein the imaginary relation of 'woman' has persistently been at stake, and situate it elsewhere; "...not in some magic re-presentation, on the other side of negation and refusal, but in signs which are already present – meanings rooted in the actual forms of life: repressed meanings, the meanings of the dominated."⁸² Clark wants to show how, at the level of the sign; *Olympia*'s signs resisted being comprehended. He argues that what is at stake in that resistance is the work's political effectiveness. *Olympia* remains 'in' that realm of the imaginary, which is 'art'; referring to *that* realm, whilst refusing to take "her" place *there*, but also refusing to take a place anywhere else. That is, refusing to address, to somehow take a place for or on behalf of the dominated. As remarked above, he again

⁸² Clark, T.J., 'Preliminaries...', 38.

qualifies this as a matter of effect and address, of where (or perhaps to whom?) the work belongs.⁸³

Clark reads how, in the painting, the signs of sex/'woman' as site of 'imaginary relation' are incomplete or drawn up in a contradictory order. He focuses on three aspects: "the question of access and address...the 'incorrectness' in the drawing of the body...the handling of hair and hairlessness".⁸⁴

In terms of the first, *Olympia* "contrives...stalemate, a kind of baulked invitation."⁸⁵ In comparison with Courbet's realism, which had "invented a set of refutations" for the "placing of the spectator in a position of imaginary knowledge" by its deliberate sabotage,⁸⁶ in *Olympia* the spectator is given no established place for viewing and identification, nor offered "tokens of exclusion and resistance."⁸⁷

This lack of access occurs through *Olympia's* gaze and the uncertain placing of the body within the picture's composition. Her gaze is "poised very precisely between address and resistance", so that, "it comes to be read as a *production* of the depicted person herself...it is *her* look, her action on us, her composure, her composition of herself." Her body is "at a height, which is just too high, suggesting the stately, the body *out of relation* to the viewer's body: and yet not stately either...looking directly out and across with a steadying, dead level interpellation."⁸⁸ Such a 'stalemate of placings' is compounded by the composition of the body itself.

⁸³ See Clark, T.J., 'A note in Reply to Peter Wollen', 98.

⁸⁴ Clark, T.J., 'Preliminaries...', 33-37.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁶ "Courbet's *Bather* is an attempt to make the nude, of all unlikely genres, exemplify the signs orders of social class...meant to be read as a *bourgeoisie*, not a nude...searching for ways to establish the nude in opposition to the spectator, in active refusal of sight... [Where] the pose and the scale and the movement of the figure end up being a positive aggression, a resistance to vision in normal terms." Clark, T.J., 'Preliminaries...', 34.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

In this second aspect, “the body is constructed in two inconsistent graphic modes, which once again are allowed to exist in too perfect and unresolved an equilibrium. One aspect is ‘emphatically linear’...smooth hard edges, deliberate intersections” and yet, “at the same time the image was accused of *lacking* definition. It was ‘unfinished’, drawing ‘does not exist in it’; it was ‘impossible’, elusive, ‘informe’...”⁸⁹ As Clark reads it, “two systems co-exist; they describe aspects of the body and point to aspects of that body’s sexual identity, but they do not bring those aspects together into some single economy of form.”⁹⁰

This occurs similarly in the third aspect: Manet’s treatment of hair and hairlessness. Apart from the hints at and displacements of signs of hair on the body, there is a crucial reversal of terms with regard to *Olympia*’s head of hair. Hair let down in the painting of the nude is a permissible sign of the disorderly and unkempt, an invitation to Woman’s sexuality. Here, *Olympia*’s face is ostensibly framed by the brown Japanese screen, which “makes the address and concision of the woman’s face all the sharper”⁹¹ and suggests a lack of loosened hair. Yet there is a shock of auburn hair to the right of *Olympia*’s head, barely visible in relation to the brown of the screen. The visual difficulty in seeing this hair further confuses the “orders” of sexuality.

The face and the hair cannot be fitted together because they do not obey the usual set of equations for sexual consistency, equations which tell us what bodies are like, how the world is divided into male and female, resistant and yielding, closed and open, aggressive and vulnerable, repressed and libidinous.⁹²

In sum, as Clark has it, “The signs of sex are there in the picture, in plenty, but drawn up in a contradictory order; one that is unfinished, or rather, more than one; *orders* interfering with each other; signs which indicate quite different places for *Olympia* in the taxonomy of Woman; and *none of which she occupies*.”⁹³

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 36

⁹² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

This last point is the crux for Clark. It is a question of place. *Olympia* appears to resist the established ‘taxonomy’ of woman, but to what end? Where does this resistance and recalcitrance take ‘us’? Is there another place, a place of intelligibility, where the painting gives form to that intelligibility and goes beyond a self-referentially and inter-textual reference to the imaginary. Does *Olympia* merely perform the “dance of ideology” as Clark calls it, whereby the painting “erodes the *terms* in which the normal recognitions are enacted” (the imaginary relation woman/nude/prostitute) but “leaves the structure itself intact”?⁹⁴

Clark seems to *want* the painting to situate itself “somewhere else [where woman/prostitute is] part of a fully coded, public and familiar world, to which fantasy has entry only in its real, uncomfortable, dominating and dominated form.”⁹⁵ As Clark elaborates,

One could imagine a different picture of a prostitute, in which there would be depicted the production of the sexual subject...even, perhaps, the production of the sexual Subject in a particular class formation [and as such] (she) would have to be given, much more clearly a place in another classed code – a place in the code of classes...a place in the world which *manufactures* the Imaginary, and reproduces the relations of dominator/dominated, fantasiser/fantasised. [to do so] what would be needed would be, exactly another set of terms...which would themselves have to be *settled*, consistent, forming a finished sentence.”

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Clark’s call for a work that goes beyond or undercuts the “dance of ideology”, as he puts it in the particular context of this article, has to be considered in relation to debates within Marxism concerning the position and effects of art as a practice within the social. I have already referred to some of the issues and it is apparent that, while he here adopts the terminology of Althusser’s ‘imaginary, ‘lived’ relation, Clark is making a distinction between that world of ‘signification’ and

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

‘codes’; that world known *through* signifying practices and the ‘actual’ world, where those imaginary relations are *produced*. He is not accepting the ‘productive’ power of signification, as such, nor is he suggesting that the ‘actual’ world where those imaginary relations are produced is the unconscious. He is demanding that the last instance of determination by the economic and the essential social class relation actually does come to underpin the theorisation of signifying practice and ideology as ‘Imaginary’ and that representation presses itself up against the actual world; the ‘real everyday life’ of class domination.⁹⁷

This provokes a counter-argument in respect of Derrida’s ‘differance’ and an interrogation of structuralism and semiotics from the ‘other side’, as it were. Clark’s reference in *Farewell to An Idea* to the fetishisation of the ‘sign’ is pertinent here.⁹⁸ Derrida would certainly agree that ‘signs’ are socially produced. Derrida would disagree, however, with the implication here that you can ‘get at’ this social production outside of any further network of ‘traces’ and ‘differance’, except by calling a halt to their play by some conceptual categorisation, which is yet another form of network or ‘text’. Derrida’s argument is not to fetishise the text, but to both recognise how the ‘text’ is always already in some sense a ‘fetish’ and to demonstrate the fetishisation at work in the seeking after a ‘transcendental signified’ and plenitude of meaning prior to the ‘text’ which the text represents. As Derrida has variously exposed, if language is a system of differences without positive terms and any and every sign is the effect of difference from other signs, there can be no knowable term, concept, idea or ultimate sign that determines or grounds language as a presence (or representation), even within some implied ‘field’ of ‘social determination’. The effects of difference which are language are ‘named’ as opposed to conceptually categorised by Derrida as ‘differance’, as the movement of spatial differentiation and temporal delay by which any sign also bears with it the trace of that which it

⁹⁷ As was shown above, Clark wants to make a distinction between signification and its social determination, outside of or prior to any ‘text’ by means of which that social determination is given form.

⁹⁸ See previously in this thesis, Clark T.J., *Farewell To an Idea*, 259-260.

is not and thereby prevents any assumption of full presence or full being, except by violating the non-full identity implied in difference.⁹⁹

This has become a well-known ‘quasi’ concept from Derrida, and I present it in order to make the link between what has often been understood as a linguistic pre-occupation with Derrida and a philosophico-political frame of reference. Alternatively put, I am trying to locate what links the ‘Difference’ essay with, for instance, ‘Specters of Marx’.

T.J. Clark, 's Marxist reading and the debates within Marxist criticism

My point is to examine T.J. Clark’s assumptions with regard to the art work/image, which assume that the locus of a work is in ideology, but in the work giving form to that ideology it can render that ideology intelligible and available ‘to-be-read’ on the grounds of the founding totality and determinateness of the social. Due to the positioning of his ‘preliminary’ text, it is also necessary to consider more closely his position in the context of debates within Marxist criticism at that time and to refer more directly to those moments when these debates enter his text.

I have suggested that Clark’s reading wants to reaffirm a particular kind of determination in establishing the political effectiveness of art works. For the

⁹⁹ As Derrida has it in his essay ‘Difference’,

“It is because of difference that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of a past element and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject. In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*). And it is this constitution of the present, as an originary and irreducibly non-simple (and therefore *stricto sensu* nonoriginary) synthesis of marks, or traces of retentions and protensions (to reproduce analogically and provisionally a phenomenological and transcendental language that soon will reveal itself to be inadequate), that I propose to call *archi-writing*, *archi-trace*, or *difference*. Which (is) (simultaneously) *spacing* (and) *temporization*.” Derrida, J., ‘Difference’ in *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Bass, A., (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf Publications, 1982), 13.

most part he wants to re-instate something of a 'representational' position in the sense that he wants the work to provide an 'adequation' to the real. This it seems is what underlies his call for determinateness and address to other 'meanings', other social practices, inasmuch as these are already class-based, socio-economic determinations. Indeed, I would suggest he argues for representation in a Platonic sense of 'good' mimesis, presenting in appearance, the 'truth' of being, which is not to say that he is calling for a 'transparent' realist work, but that there has to be some point of reference to something determined in the 'real' that gets you out of the 'imaginary relation' to appearance, that shows how that relation is constructed, that challenges that construction of the imaginary by giving the viewer another determined place, at the site of the conflict of classes.

Underlying this assumption is the idea that 'reality' (as object) determines the place of the subject within it and the subject's condition of *experience* of the appearance of 'reality'. It follows that it is the 'text' that produces meaning (by way of the appearance of the object) for the subject, but not, of course, in Marxist terms, a meaning independent of the 'ideologies' generated within the social formation, which inform the work, but *upon which the work works* to represent another 'appearance' of that 'reality'.

According to this view, the object is available to, and is recognised in, the (false) consciousness of the subject, on the basis of the subject's experience of it. It is thus the task of ideological critique, as political critical *reading* to unravel the *ideological appearance of meaning* of the object. This is done, for instance, by exposing the loose ends and gaps, the 'cracks in the work' disrupting the attempt at seamless 'reality' or coherence, *or*, demonstrating how a work runs counter to or works the 'prevailing ideological discourses', offering a different *view of* another 'visibility' of 'reality'. This is such that the work; the aesthetic, as political is read as articulating ideology and knowledge, as the aesthetic working of ideology accedes to 'knowledge of' the ideological.

The task of criticism is to display how these ideas, as appearances, are historically determined as ideologies, or counter-ideological positions, which

have their effect in the relation of the subject to the object (reality). The assumption being that the object (real) is in principle *knowable*.

Such thinking, I argue, despite its clear acknowledgement of the relative 'autonomy' of the aesthetic, resumes the model of thought exemplified in the base-superstructure distinction: which is a *mimetic* relation; the work/appearance, as super-structural, represents the intelligible (mis)recognition of the social formation which the given subject can experience; there can be posited a relation of 'identity' of the super-structural appearance i.e., the 'work' with the founding principle: socio-economic relations. The critique sets out to expose the identification between the 'work'/ appearance and ideology on the basis of this founding, 'originary' principle, 'outside' the work, having a determining effect upon its 'inside'; the work *as* a 'work'.

Here the questions for criticism are, "what meanings are produced *within* the text/appearance and, as such, emanate from it, to the extent that they represent an ideological position?" and "how can we read and, through this reading, find within the text a counter-ideological position, which can 'expose' the construction of this ideological stance *as* a 'false'/(mis) recognition *derived from the* ideas emanating from the social relations (of production) or present the text as the critique of these *on the basis of* such social relations?" Clark's reading of *Olympia* suggests that the work here falls short of 'exposing' the construction of an ideology, fails to work the ideology to accede to knowledge of the ideological, and remains caught in a play of its (the ideology's) terms.

As previously indicated, Clark's reading is an intervention in the contemporaneous debates within Marxist criticism, which had been stimulated by the need to break with the base-superstructure distinction and its model of determination and to establish another kind of determination, by way of the relative autonomy of ideological *practices*.

Prior to the publication of Clark's article, there had been, in the Marxist consideration of art, a significant move away from the point of view of

meaning's *production in and by the text* as an attributed *mimetic* expression/reflection of 'reality' experienced by the subject.

There were two aspects to this move. One is suggested by Colin MacCabe, who Clark quotes in his article:

Marxism's abiding problem has always been to explain the way in which capitalist relations reproduce themselves in non-coercive ways. Throughout the seventies there were many who felt that the key to such an understanding lay in an analysis of culture which would not simply read it off as an effect of the economic base but would understand its ability to *reproduce subjectivities*, a reproduction finally determined by the economic relations but the *mechanisms of which had to be comprehended in their own right*.¹⁰⁰

The move was towards a consideration of the relation *between* text and audience and the claim was to think of this as an interactive space, a *productive site* of meaning. This was the shift from the thinking of the production of meaning as representation-as-reflection of 'the real'-as-ideological, to thinking of meaning as *constituted* by a 'relatively' autonomous relation between 'image' and spectator, in which spectators were 'constituted as' subjects of ideology.

This move was implicitly or explicitly responding to Louis Althusser's problematising of what he considered to be a reductive Marxist empiricism. It was Althusser's furtherance of the relative autonomy of the superstructures and the relative independence of their effectiveness, and, as he argued, determinateness as ideological apparatuses, *constitutive of subjects' imaginary relation to* the relations of production, which set Marxist criticism towards a reading of works as a relation between text and spectator, as the site of 'imaginary' meaning. But, as previously suggested, if we think of Althusser's retention of the notion of 'determinateness', that relation between text and spectator being is one in which texts *produce* by way of the 'interpellation' of subject positions under determinate conditions.

¹⁰⁰ Rodowick, D., *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 5.

However, what I might term as a second move, further radicalised the efficacy of texts. The influence of semiology opened the way to a critique of Althusser's theory as one that fell back into the mimeticism and realist empiricism he had sought to critique. Inasmuch as it is logically necessary in Althusser's theory that ideological forms necessarily reproduce the subject's imaginary relation to the relations of production, he had to retain a concept of *representation*. Only through such a concept can the social relations at 'origin' be *guaranteed* to be secured in the ideological forms effecting imaginary (mis)recognition. There has to be some way of determining their determinateness. As such, relative autonomy is a logical contradiction.

The 'semiological' argument suggested that, when the relatively autonomous effectivity of texts in positioning subjects was read through semiology, the *arbitrary* relation between signifier and signified was emphasised as opening up the possibility of the independence of action of the signifier over the signified, such that the securing of subject positions and meaning can no longer be thought of on the basis of an a priori guarantee of relation between 'essence' and 'appearance'.¹⁰¹

The securing of subject positions, it was argued, had to be thought of differently, no longer in terms of a pre-conceived determinacy, but as a consequence of the political struggle over meaning and subject positions. However, what emerged was a politicised modernist criticism, which valorised those (modernist) texts, which interrogate 'themselves' by presenting the very disjunctures between signifier and signified; that is to say, those texts, which *reproduce* gaps and fissures and disjunctive moments between signifier and signified *in the work*. But, on these terms, the 'struggle' takes place (already) in the work and this active semiosis is passed on to the reader in the difficulties and complexities of reading for the spectator i.e., the gaps and fissures 'self-exposed' in the work are

¹⁰¹ See again, Stuart Hall's criticism, "...you will see there, not only the shift from practice to discourse, but also how the emphasis on difference – the plurality of discourses, the perpetual slippage of meaning...The endless sliding of the signifier is sometimes pushed beyond the point where it is capable of theorizing the necessary unevenness of a formation, or even the 'unity in difference' of a complex structure." Hall, S., 'Signification, Representation, Ideology'. ,

either made visible to the spectator or reproduced in the spectator's consciousness.

This yet again returns to a mimetic relation. The gaps/fissures in the work are *represented and modelled* in the reading of the spectator. As Rodowick suggests, referring to Rodolphe Gasche:

...reflexivity...always relies on a version of negativity which, by inscribing within the text the process of its own construction, will render 'visible' to the reader the suppressed elements of the textual work. But is [this] not precisely the measure of a self-evidential representation that the discourse of political modernism set out to criticize in illusionist [cinema]? Rather than a difficulty in reading, which is supposed to encourage a productive and active semiosis in the spectator, is it not the case that what is asserted in place of a mimetic theory of representation is in fact a 'negative' identity theory where contradictions produced 'semiotically' within the modernist text are said to be reproduced as 'gaps and fissures' in the spectator's consciousness? As an epistemological relation, (and here I would add political relation) reflexivity can only be awkwardly considered here either according to a standard that equates visibility with self-evidence in the semiotic constructedness of art, or as the doubling of a reflexive situation in the spectator whose conscious activity mirrors that of the text.... reflexivity becomes an envisioning of the spectator as a specular reflection of the internal dynamics of the forms of the text.¹⁰²

Colin MacCabe, who Clark quotes, was sceptical and critical of such political weight being given to the signifier, 'independent of' the signified, insofar as it leads to a valorising of the text which 'interrogates itself' and the intelligibility of which is *no longer measured against its representation of* a socially and culturally recognisable reality, as if *that in itself* 'exposed' the workings of, or broke with, ideological representation. MacCabe noted in relation to 'realism' in film, the 'classic realist' text would now be read negatively as only ever placing the spectator in a position of 'imaginary' knowledge and depriving the viewer of any position of political or social action. Hence we might surmise that the question is still for MacCabe, as quoted by T.J. Clark, "[to provide] a materialist

¹⁰² Rodowick, D., *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 60.

reading [specifying] articulations within the [picture] on determinate grounds.”¹⁰³

However, MacCabe’s position, I suggest, re-iterates that central problem of determinacy and representation, and remains caught in the problems of the Althusserian dilemma between representation and signification.

As MacCabe wrote, “If one is concerned to analyse art in its social and political context, then one of the absolute necessities is to give an account of the processes of identification and disidentification, the methods by which *fictions bind us into representations of both world and self.*”¹⁰⁴

All this is important for situating Clark’s text. The conviction Clark and MacCabe share, I think, is that the logic of signification has still to be understood as a logic of *representation*. This is a logic, which presumes a locus for ‘identity’ on the basis of a causal determination. The emphasis given to *fictions* that *bind* here, which find resonance in Clark’s wish for determinacy, the ‘code’, ‘the finished sentence’, appears to evade or fall short of the issue, made evident by psychoanalysis, that identification is bound up in a process of the retreat of identity, which prevents identity from ever approximating the status of an ontological given. Identification may provide the *illusion* of the ‘bound’ stable identity, but is the process of the splitting of ‘self’ in order to ‘recognise’ self. It is also the case that, whilst following Freud, it can be said that psychic identification and the social order are indispensable to each other, it is another question to consider the role that identification plays in politics. It may be argued that subjectivity and ideology interact, or are one and the same as per Althusser, but, given identification as an erotic investment, premised on (in Freud), the; substitution of one for another occurring at unconscious as well as conscious levels (hence continually open to fantasy), the meaning of any particular identification is going to exceed any of its social, historical and political determinations.

¹⁰³ Clark, T.J., ‘Preliminaries...’, 30.

¹⁰⁴ Rodowick R., *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, 32.

Psychoanalysis has shown that, despite Freud's own efforts to separate identification and desire, and at the same time show their indissociability (as 'required' by the social order), Freud himself at times accedes to the collapse of the distinction, and others have shown that identification *is* desire, as the desire to have the desire of the other.¹⁰⁵

Further, disidentification can be interpreted as a 'disavowal' of an identification already made in the unconscious,¹⁰⁶ and finally, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have shown, the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics is not one of proximation, but of distance. It is the *unlikeness*, which is the mark of identification, to be *like* but not the *same as*; it is that difference which gives rise to politics, as the desire for an illusory sameness.¹⁰⁷

Hence, following this latter argument, if Macabe is here suggesting that art be thought of as a site for 'identification', it cannot be *in* a political context as such, for already, if it is the site for identification, it is the provocation *for* politics. In that case, the Salon criticism in Paris, in 1865, or indeed the pages of *Screen* in 1980 are not the political *context for Olympia*; *Olympia* is the provocation for a political act to make meaning.

I shall consider Clark's article in more detail and suggest that here Clark still reads the work and the relation between text and audience in accordance with a logic of representation. He wishes to retain the distinction between text and audience as a subject/object relation, by which he can read the work for its 'adequation' to the 'originary' 'real' outside of the work, where the meanings *are already established* for Clark, as a *condition for* the processes of identification on the part of the spectator.

This logic runs through Clark's article and the implications of this I shall take up and want to measure. The logic of Clark's position sits along with the position he

¹⁰⁵ See Borch-Jacobsen, M., 'Dreams are completely egoistic' in *The Freudian Subject*. Trans. Porter, C., (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988), 10-52.

¹⁰⁶ See Butler, J., 'Passing, Queering' in *Bodies That Matter*, (London: Routledge, 1993, 167-186.

¹⁰⁷ See Lacoue-Labarthe P., and Nancy J-L., 'The Unconscious is destructured like an Affect' (Part 1 of 'The Jewish People do not Dream') *Stanford Literary Review* 6, Fall (1989): 191-209.

is more or less explicitly criticising throughout: that of a politicisation of ‘self-reflexivity’ and the ‘dis-identification’, which is present in the argument for a ‘political modernism’. *Both* positions, I argue, install a mimesis; but as a mimetic assumption of an originary identity, appearing and made visible for the viewer to ‘take up’. Both positions continue to hold a ‘fixed’ concept of ideology and its operation within the social totality. The arguments depend upon this fixity of concepts, such that the politics of their reading is reduced and limited in its effectiveness.

Clark’s reading, discursivity and the social

Here, I focus particularly on a more radicalised conceptualisation of the social, in order to expose the limits of the concept of social totality upon which Clark’s reading depends.

As I have previously noted, Clark begins his article by remarking upon the lack of critical response to Manet’s *Olympia* on its submission to the Salon jury in 1865. “If we apply the test not merely of approval, but of some sustained description of the object in hand—some effort at controlled attention to particulars, some ordinary mobilisation of the resources of criticism in 1865 – then response to *Olympia* simply does not exist, except in a solitary text written by Jean Ravenel”.¹⁰⁸ A response was comically articulated in caricatures and some art critics themselves attempted some kind of comic response but, as Clark says “jokes, in this case, were rarely productive of knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ This emphasis on the relationship between a work, its spectators and the production of *knowledge*; that something about the work is in principle (and, I suggest, this operates as an *apriori* principle), *knowable*, and that it can be brought to knowledge, from its position of ‘hidden’ meaning, is fundamental to Clark’s reading and continues to re-emerge throughout his text.

Clark situates his article as one that seeks to investigate the relation of texts to spectators as part of the ongoing debate within the pages of *Screen*. I have

¹⁰⁸ Clark T.J., ‘Preliminaries...’, 20.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

already alluded to this debate. Here I would reiterate those factors, which appear to be of particular importance for T.J. Clark. One is that any consideration of the relation between reader and text should still adhere to some notion of *determinacy*. If it follows for Clark that whilst spectators are not constructed by texts, and nor are they *simply* positioned in relation to them on the basis of ‘class outlooks’, neither are spectators’ readings ‘free-floating’; spectators have predispositions, informed by the array of their experience of other discourses. These discourses, I take Clark to interpret as representations *on determinate grounds* with their ‘origins’ in ideology, in history, which on encountering another text re-work that reading and seek to ‘determine’ meaning on the grounds of this new encounter, forming a newly configured ‘inter-textual field’ of representations, in history and ideology.

Clark quotes film theorist, Peter Willemen,

The activity of the text must be thought in terms of which set of discourses it encounters in any particular set of circumstances, and how this encounter may restructure both the productivity of the text *and the* discourses with which it combines to form an intertextual field which is always in ideology, in history. Some texts can be more or less recalcitrant if pulled into a particular field, while others can be fitted comfortably into it.¹¹⁰

That is to say, for Clark, within this ‘discursive field’, although the *concept* ‘ideology’ is deployed here, it remains privileged as the element *in which* discourses are situated, and forms the ‘set of circumstances’ of the inter-textual encounter and the conditions by which, ultimately, a text may be determined as ‘recalcitrant’ or otherwise. Ideology in this sense is the mis-recognised essence of the social. The attribution of positivity to ideology is co-extensive with an attribution of positivity to the social. It is this thinking of the social as an underlying principle or system of ideological mediations that Laclau and Mouffe

¹¹⁰ Clark T.J., ‘Preliminaries...’, 22. This quote from Peter Willemen comes from an earlier edition of *Screen*. See Willemen P., “Notes on Subjectivity –On Reading *Subjectivity Under Siege*” *Screen* 19.1, 1978: 55.

unravel in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*¹¹¹, and I shall make use of Laclau and Mouffe to demonstrate what I consider to be the limits of Clark's reading, in its consideration of the social and political.

Clark continues his examination of the critical reception of *Olympia* by setting that 'failed' reception against the prevailing 'discourse of Woman', available to the critics as an intersecting set of terms 'Woman/Nude/Prostitute', but also appearing in their responses in spasmodic and awkward references. He reads these categories as the available 'historical' representations, which is to say 'ideological' representations.

Clark sets these out as a set of circumstances, which, although he suggests are 'unstable', nevertheless can be assumed for the arguments sake, as he posits these discourses as possible preconditions of readability for *Olympia*.

I think it is clear that two main discourses were in question: a discourse in which the relations and disjunctions of the terms Woman/Nude/Prostitute were obsessively rehearsed...and the complex but deeply repetitive discourse of aesthetic judgement in the Second Empire. These are immediately historical categories of an elusive and developing kind.¹¹²

The instability of these discourses is clear; the disjunctions, the necessity to rehearse and repeat; and yet in order to read *Olympia's* 'failure', Clark has to establish (in the familiar manner of the historian) a sense of their 'normal functioning' and 'the regular ways in which these discourses worked' as ideologies *within* a social order and as forms of 'mis- recognition'. So, of 'the prostitute', he writes

She was maintained – anxiously and insistently as a *unity* [Clark's emphasis], which existed as the end-stop to a series of differences which constituted the feminine...the courtesan was a category in use in a well-established and ordinary ideology; she articulated various (false) relations between sexual identity, sexual power and social class...at the

¹¹¹ Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a radical democratic politics* (London: Verso, 1985),

¹¹² Clark T.J., 'Preliminaries...', 23.

same time she was declared to be almost unmentionable – at the furthest margin of the categorisable – but that only seemed to reaffirm her importance as a founding signification of Woman”.¹¹³

Similarly, the nude is ‘normally’ a point at which the discourse of sex and art criticism intersect, “[And] the one provides the other with crucial representations, forms of knowledge and standards of decorum...[the form] in which sexuality is revealed and not-revealed, displayed and masked, made unproblematic...she can be known, in her nakedness, without too much danger of pollution.”¹¹⁴

Olympia seriously disturbed the fragile ‘normal’ operation of these discourses, so as to generate, as Clark has it, a series of significations provoking a ‘non-reading’ and ‘negativity’. I have already indicated his analysis of the perplexing inconsistencies and ‘contradictory’ economies of form in the work. These ‘contradictions’ generated,

For instance the various figures of uncleanness...and the way these figures cannot be maintained as descriptions of sexual and moral status, but always teeter over into figures of death and decay. Or the figures which indicate the way in which the hand of *Olympia* – the one spread over her pubic hair – disobeys, crucially, the conventions of the nude. The hand is *shamelessly flexed...improper...in the form of a toad... dirty*. It is in a state of *contraction*. It comes to stand for the way *Olympia*’s whole body is disobedient: the hand is the sign of the unyielding, the unrelaxed, the too definite where indefiniteness is the rule, the non-supine, the concealment which declares itself as such: the ‘unfeminine’ in short. Or again the figures of physical violence done to the body, or of hideous constraint: *a woman on a bed, or rather some form or other, blown up like a grotesque in India rubber, a skeleton dressed in a tight jacket made of plaster outlined in black, like the armature of a stained glass window without the glass...*¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25

So that “*Olympia* was not given a meaning that was stabilised long enough to provide the framework for any further investigation – for some kind of knowledge, for criticism.”¹¹⁶

Further to this, Clark comments on how, in relation to the criticism of Jean Ravenel, who did read the affinity to Baudelaire in the painting and named Olympia as “*petite fabourienne*” a working-class prostitute,

The identification of class is not a *brake* on meaning: it is the trigger, once again, of a sequence of connotations which do not add up, which fail to circle back on themselves, declaring their meaning evident and uniform. It may be that we are too eager, now to point to the illusory quality of that circling back, that closure against the ‘free play of the signifier’. Illusion or not, it seems to me the necessary ground on which meanings can be established and maintained: kept in being long enough, and endowed with enough coherence, for the ensuing work of dispersal and contradiction to be seen to matter...to have matter, in the text, to work against.¹¹⁷

Clark’s text sets up opposition to any reading that does not operate within the terms and grounds of ‘identity’ and within the terms and grounds of *an intelligible structure of significations*, which refer us to, and are anchored in, ‘identities’ ‘out there’ in the social. He eschews any reading that might suggest an oscillation between avowal and disavowal of the image. He appears to be asking for a final signified, or that ‘ultimate horizon of meaning’ to which any connotations will extend. For Clark, contingency must always have a point of determination.

In Clark’s final treatment of *Olympia*, he puts forward a somewhat different case for the work’s recalcitrance. He seems to say that it is *Olympia’s nakedness*, which both signifies a class position and confounds critical reading. Nakedness and class are given an ‘analogous’ reading:

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

Class is the name, I take it for that complex and determinate place we are given in the social body; it is the name for everything which signifies that a certain history lives us, lends us our individuality. By nakedness I mean those signs – that broken, interminable circuit – which say that we are nowhere but in a body, constructed by it, by the way it incorporates the signs of other people.¹¹⁸

The critic's perplexity lies in the fact that *Olympia's* class is nothing but this body; its 'whole effect', with no place or space for imaginary relation.

They were perplexed by the fact that Olympia's class was nowhere but in her body; the cat, the Negress, the orchid, the bunch of flowers, the slippers, the pearl ear-rings, the choker, the screen, the shawl-they were all lures, they all meant nothing in particular. The naked body did without them in the end and did its own narrating. If it could have been seen what signs were used in the process – if they could have been kept apart from the body's whole effect – they might still have been made the critic's property? They would have been turned into objects of play, metaphor, irony, and finally tolerance. Art criticism might have begun.

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It appears at first that here Clark has his 'circling back' to his 'materialist reading, on determinate grounds'. The body does its own narrating, but, this is the hi-story/class 'given identity', fixed in the social which lives the body. The looked for material, terminal signifier, which brings the 'interminable' play to a (temporary) halt. Body and class meshed together in the history, which lives them, as the final signified, the 'end' (goal) of its politics to show 'real conditions of existence'?

But this does seem at odds with his 'lament' over Manet's seeming 'dance of ideology' in the article for *Screen*. Does it remain a 'failure' in Clark's terms because, "She came from the lower depths. The images of sickness, death, depravity and dirt all carried that connotation but they stayed as *passing figures*

¹¹⁸ Clark, T. J., *The Painting of Modern Life*, 146.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

*of speech precisely because the critics could not identify what in the picture told them where Olympia belonged”?*¹²⁰

What does it mean to say ‘The naked body...did its own narrating’? Did it or did it not narrate ‘class’? Did it narrate at all?

“[I]n order that the painted surface appear as it does in *Olympia*, the self-evidence of seeing – seeing the world, seeing Woman – had to be dismantled, and a circuit of signs put in its place.”¹²¹

Olympia’s nakedness divorced from ‘a circuit of signs’ offers a ‘heterogeneous’ reading. The principle of there being a *founding* meaning or signified is the logic of Clark’s text. Why else read critics’ awkward attempts at criticism as perplexities, because *Olympia* did not ‘*add up*’ to a ‘fixed’ signification or meaning? Can we read *Olympia* otherwise?

What if he were to take the discourse of woman/female sexuality, in which *Olympia* takes part, to *really be* discursive? In such a case the notion of a founding signification cannot be maintained. If ‘woman’ ‘is’ those ways in which ‘she’ is in discourse, where do we find the founding moment? If we dispense with the ultimate horizon of meaning or founding signified, then the whole question of the political effectiveness of the artwork has to be thought through differently. Rather than asking for determinacy on the basis of a founding principle, the political will *derive from* the need to make meaning set against the indeterminate and contingent undermining of fixity, generating an exposure of reading to the risk of the ‘perhaps’, each time ‘anew’, articulating meaning which cannot be predicted in advance or predicated upon an assumed prior ‘knowledge’ of the social.

Clark speaks of opposition and contradiction. As Laclau and Mouffe demonstrate, both these conceptualisations derive from *objective relations* on the assumption of a ‘fixed ground’. An opposition is a state of ‘A – B’, where each

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 146

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

term has its positivity, independent of its relation with the other. A contradiction is a state of 'A – not A', where the relation of each term with the other exhausts the reality of both. Hence we can speak of a 'contradiction in terms' at the logical-conceptual level, where logically each term 'cancels out' the other.

This is not to say, however, that contradictory positions are not 'held to be true' in 'reality'. But the point is that, as Laclau and Mouffe state,

in both cases [opposition and contradiction], it is something that the objects *already are* which makes the relation intelligible. That is in both cases we are concerned with full identities. In the case of contradiction, it is because A *is fully* A that being-not-A is a contradiction...In the case of real opposition, it is because A is also fully A that its relation with B produces an objectively determinable effect: i.e. Opposition.¹²²

But as Laclau and Mouffe argue, this statement of 'objective relations' can say nothing of the lever by which opposition or contradiction becomes social conflict or social antagonism, as defined by Marx as the principle of historical development. Closer to home, Clark himself acknowledges the need to 'posit' a ground against which contradiction might have some 'force', i.e. a discursive relation,

It may be that we are too eager, now to point to the illusory quality of that circling back, that closure against the 'free play of the signifier'. Illusion or not, it seems to me the necessary ground on which meanings can be established and maintained: kept in being long enough, and endowed with enough coherence, for the ensuing work of dispersal and contradiction to be seen to matter...to have matter, in the text, to work against.¹²³

But where, in a *discursive* relation (and Clark himself proposes the '*discourse*' woman/sexuality), do you determine the point at which that 'closure' takes place and objects are determined and maintained *as if* they 'already are'?

¹²² Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 122.

¹²³ Clark T.J., 'Preliminaries...', 30.

This is where Laclau and Mouffe's thinking of 'antagonism' exposes the limits of a reading centred on intelligibility as objectively determinable in a founding 'being present'. In a discursive situation, we can think of identities as 'antagonistic' relations, whereby the presence of the 'other' prevents any identity from ever being totally 'itself'. This is a process of endless deferral of identity. No object can be 'fixed' or 'sutured' or attain pure difference. This is because, by the definitional limits of antagonism, the relational chain of differences, being as it is always 'interrupted' by the 'other', can never be traced back to or projected towards the 'ultimate horizon' of a fully formed 'object', identity or signified, that can be unaffected by the discursive context in which that object is situated.¹²⁴

As Laclau and Mouffe propose, the terms would be differential relations, always partial and only ever 'temporarily' sutured into moments, which could be considered 'unities' only by a process of hegemony. This would apply at the level of the signification 'Woman', and at the level of the differentiating instances, considered to be 'identities', as woman; nude; prostitute. For instance, let us suppose the term 'prostitute', which is the key term of Clark's reading, is, as Clark puts it, 'anxiously' maintained as a unity. How does this process work? In Clark's terms, each singular instance of 'prostitute' is caught between an 'imaginary relation' (ideological) to a class position ('courtesan'), and a reference back to a conflict of class positions, established in the 'actual forms of life' of prostitution. This is the 'dance of ideology' of which Clark speaks a 'two-step' oscillating between imaginary (mis) recognition and the 'truth' of prostitution in the socio-economic order.

For Clark, the social has to be thought of as a totality constituting its parts, in order for this 'dance of ideology' to be in place. There has to be an order of class and an order of ideology, produced by the structure of the social. This has to be understood as a 'totality' in order that the 'orders' of class, ideology and their representations can be causally linked.

¹²⁴ Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 105-122.

Laclau and Mouffe demonstrate a different thinking of the social, which deconstructs the oppositional logic, upon which a reading such as Clark's depends. They present the social as a discursive field of differential relations in a process of hegemonic articulation, which establishes a relation between elements such that their identities are modified as a consequence of that articulation. In the course of articulation, differential elements are stabilised to the extent of becoming 'nodal points' or 'moments' which *partially* fix meaning and allow for an 'identity' which *never achieves 'literality'*.

Laclau additionally presents this, in reference to the problem of ideology.¹²⁵ Taking this concept as a starting point, he shows the 'impossibility' of society as an *essential* totality. The concept of ideology has had two 'classic' approaches. In one, ideology is thought to be a level of the social totality; for the other, ideology is false consciousness. The validity of the first approach, clearly, depends upon a concept of the society as an intelligible totality, a structure upon which its elements were founded. The validity of the second approach depends upon a concept of human agency – a 'subject' whose misrecognition is the source of ideology.

As Laclau points out, the first approach, as a holistic one "had been to fix the meaning of any element or social process *outside* itself i.e. in a *system of relations with* other elements. In this sense the base-superstructure distinction was ambiguous; seemingly a relation, but also having a centre." ¹²⁶

But the other important aspect to this was the requirement that the structural totality had a positivity of its own, such that it operated as an underlying principle of intelligibility of the social order; a *founding* totality presenting itself as an object of knowledge. But,

Against this essentialist vision we tend nowadays to accept the *infinitude of the social* that is the fact that any structural system is limited, that it is always surrounded by an 'excess of meaning' which it

¹²⁵ Laclau, E., 'The Impossibility of Society' in Laclau, E., *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. (London: Verso, 1990), 89-92.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

is unable to ‘master’, and that consequently ‘society’ as a unitary and intelligible object which grounds its own partial processes is an impossibility.¹²⁷

Having accepted the principle of a system of relations, it follows that identities within it are *differential relations*, (as per Saussure’s linguistic theory) and if these relations are no longer *fixed*, then “the social must be identified with the infinite play of differences that is *discourse*.”¹²⁸ It follows from this that, as there has to be some meaning to the social, there has to be an attempt to effect this ultimately impossible fixation. “The social is not only the infinite play of differences. It is also the attempt to limit that play, to embrace it within the finitude of an order”.¹²⁹

This attempt, which is by definition unstable and precarious, is the attempt to ‘act’ upon the “social”, to *hegemonise* it.”¹³⁰ This is the process, as previously mentioned, of the relative fixing of the social through the institution of nodal points. An important consequence of this is that these ‘nodal points’ cannot be predetermined for all possible social formations (which would reintroduce an *essential* principle element).

Each social formation has its own forms of determination which are always instituted through a complex process of over determination and therefore cannot be established a priori. With this insight, the base-superstructure distinction falls, and along with it the concept of ideology as a necessary level of every social formation.¹³¹

Similarly, with regard to the thinking of ideology as false consciousness, which necessarily requires a social agent whose identity is fixed and non-contradictory, (it is only on the basis of recognising its true identity that we can assert that a consciousness is ‘false’), two things have tested its limits. One is the increasing gap between ‘objective class interests’ and the actual consciousness of individuals. Secondly, the very identity of social agents has been questioned, due

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 91

to the flux of differences, which have made apparent that the homogeneity of social agents is an illusion.

The same excess of meaning, the same precarious character of any structuration that we find in the domain of the social order, is also to be found in the domain of subjectivity... if any social agent is a decentred subject, if when attempting to determine his/her identity we find nothing else but the kaleidoscopic movement of differences, in what sense can we say that subject's misrecognise themselves?¹³²

Following this, ideology as 'false' consciousness is dissolved, but then what of ideology? Clearly misrecognitions still exist. Otherwise there would be no need to deconstruct them. But what is ideological now has to be thought completely differently.

The ideological would not consist of the misrecognition of a positive essence but exactly the opposite. It would consist of the non-recognition of the precarious character of any positivity, of the impossibility of any ultimate suture. The ideological would consist of those discursive forms through which a society tries to institute itself as such, on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences. The ideological would be the will to 'totality' of any totalising discourse. And insofar as the social is impossible without some fixation of meaning, without some discourse of closure, the ideological must be seen as constitutive of the social, [given that] the social only exists as the vain attempt to institute that impossible object: society¹³³

Hence, Clark's reading *is* necessarily, itself *ideological*. The number of references Clark makes that attest to his 'will' to 'totality', in an attempt to 'suture' art and the social affirm this.

That said, Laclau ends his essay on the 'Impossibility of Society' by stating, "Utopia is the essence of any communication and social practice".¹³⁴ If the 'will

¹³² *Ibid.*, 92.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 92

to totality' or to 'identity' is the essence of any communication or social practice, then it tells us that our political goals are already 'contaminated' by ideology, so it becomes a matter of how one understands the 'contamination; of this goal, but also how one understands that any attempt at the establishment of meaning, at establishment as such, as a politics, is always already exposed to chance and risk, insofar as social identification, individual identity, is riven by its 'other-than-identity'; its 'absent' (yet not 'pure' absent) other.

Laclau's position is premised on an understanding of society as a force of transient social relations, none of which are a priori privileged. Contrary to Clark whose premise, as outlined earlier, is to call for the necessary intensification of 'ideological struggle' in 'class terms' in the face of social fragmentation, as exemplified in 'spectacle'. Laclau's

...challenging and controversial thesis is that these phenomena [the effects of late capitalism with the decline in organising power and credibility of traditional structures and the rise of differing social interest groups] of dislocation and fragmentation not only lead to a proliferation of political possibilities, but are also the conditions under which something like freedom is possible; that freedom is a consequence of dislocation.¹³⁵

This appears to be another position that takes up and reads 'positively' the fragmentation of class into diverse interest groups and, through the radicalisation of the concept of hegemony, presents an 'inversion' of the orthodox Marxist reading of 'class struggle' and the 'battle of ideologies'.

However, I think there are important differences between Laclau's position and that of Derrida or Nancy. In order to think a radical hegemonic articulation whereby diverse 'force fields' of interests in a system of differences without positive terms are politicised into an emancipatory project, Laclau follows a Lacanian model of an 'absent fullness' at the hub of any social relation (like the Lacanian 'Real'), which, in a system of differential signs that 'are' only in so far as they differ from, are 'other to' each other, can only be a negative 'term'

¹³⁵ Critchley, S., 'On Derrida's Specters of Marx', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21.3 (1995): 1-30.

outside of signification as such. The hegemonic articulation is in this sense mobilised by way of a particular sign (concretely representative of one particular interest), emptying itself out to take the place of, to become a marker for the generalised space of the absent fullness at the hub of the system of relations.¹³⁶ Laclau characterises this process as ‘phantasmic’. So in respect of say ‘the dance of ideology’ and ‘free play of the signifier’ with which Clark critically engages in ‘Preliminaries...’ summarised in his statement,

The signs of sex are there in the picture, in plenty, but drawn up in contradictory order; one that is unfinished, or rather, more than one; *orders* interfering with each other, signs which indicate quite different places for *Olympia* in the taxonomy of Woman and none of which she occupies.¹³⁷

We can surmise in Laclau’s terms, a ‘phantasmic’ positioning of *Olympia* as a ‘quasi’ spectral offering to an articulation of ‘meaning’ in a political stance, unable to be predicted in advance of this articulation and precisely not occupying a position in the taxonomy of Woman ‘before’ the hegemonic relation has done its work.

Laclau claims this structure as being akin to Derrida’s ‘spectralisation’ of Marx via the ‘concept’ of hauntology. But Laclau’s own account of Derrida’s ‘spectres’ and the relation to his own model of phantasmic, emancipatory politics, demonstrates the difference between the two positions. In ‘The time is out of joint’¹³⁸, Laclau both affirms the kinship between his own radicalised hegemony with Derrida’s ‘spectral’ reading of Marx and the difference between Derrida’s position as an *ethical* one, whereas Laclau’s is a *political* one, or more forcefully, hegemony potentially provides a political content and structure to the ‘realisation’ of Derrida’s ethical injunction (so far as it goes?).

¹³⁶ Laclau, E., ‘Why do empty signifiers matter to politics?’ in *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 36-46.

¹³⁷ T.J., Clark, ‘Preliminaries...’, 37.

¹³⁸ Laclau, E., ‘The time is out of joint’ in *Emancipation(s)*, 66-83.

Laclau explains how Derrida's deconstructive reading of Marx, via the principle of a hauntology, opens onto the undeconstructible notion of justice. This unfolds via 'the logic of the spectre' and 'the question of the messianic'.

[T]he spectre is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name; neither soul nor body and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the spectre. There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reappearance of the departed.¹³⁹

As I have previously stated, what is made clear by Laclau, is that anachronism, or a time out of joint, is essential for spectrality, "the spectre, interrupting all *specularity* desynchronises time."¹⁴⁰ Such anachronism or spatio-temporal disjunction renders undecidable both 'spirit' and 'body', ideology and 'the real'. Marx's chasing down of the spectre in favour of an ontology of the emerging proletariat, dispelling ideology and putting an end to a need for 'politics' as the articulation of 'the real present' against ideological obfuscation, constitutes a 'suppression' of the spectral relation, a refusal of the 'other' of being, both anterior past and open future, which the logic of the spectre constitutes as the opening for justice. This deconstruction of Marx, demonstrating that which prevents Marx from establishing a non-haunted ontology other than by suppressing that which constitutes the ethico-political dimension of his thought, begs an alternative reading of politics. The link here, for Derrida, is between the logic of the spectre and the structure of the 'messianic'.

What remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice – which we distinguish from law or right or even human rights – and an idea of

¹³⁹ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Laclau, E., 'The time is out of joint', *Emancipations*, 68.

democracy – which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today.¹⁴¹

As Laclau explains,

By the messianic we should...understand something belonging to the general structure of experience...linked to the idea of promise...the promise implicit in an originary opening to the 'other', to the unforeseeable, to the pure *event* which cannot be mastered by any aprioristic discourse...This is entwined with the notion of 'justice' as linked to an absolute singularity, which cannot be absorbed by the generality of law. The chasm between law and justice cannot be closed...on the basis of these premises, Derrida elaborates...democracy to come, *a venir*...[without] any teleological assertion...without eschatology...without determinate content...Singularity as the terrain of justice involves the radical undecidability which makes the decision possible...¹⁴²

However for Simon Critchley, in what is quite a symbiotic, whilst richer in detail, reading with Laclau on Derrida's *Specters*, the alternative reading of *politics*, as such is still left begging by Derrida.¹⁴³

My question would be: is the passage from the messianic appeal for justice to laws and norms and rules [a politics no less] always a fault, always in default? If so, why is it a fault and what sort of fault is it? Clearly for Derrida, to refer to the messianic appeal for justice to moral and legal conditions is a transgression of the apparent priority, or indeed as priori antecedence, of the messianic – what Derrida elsewhere calls 'the universal dimension of experience' – but is this transgression not also a necessity...namely the moral, legal-social *instantiation* of justice, the a posteriori and particular instance of the a priori status of the messianic? Isn't the question not *whether* to totalize but *how* to totalize; that is how to link the a priori and the a posteriori, the universal and the particular, the transcendental and the empirical?...Is not this faulty move from justice to law precisely that which is thought by Levinas in terms

¹⁴¹ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, 59.

¹⁴² Laclau, E., 'The time is out of joint' in *Emancipation(s)*, 74.

¹⁴³ Critchley, S., 'On Derrida's *Specters of Marx*', 1-30.

of the move from the other (autrui) to the third party (le tiers), from ethics to politics? ¹⁴⁴

Critchley will situate the possibility of what he sees as the ‘transition’ from ethics to politics within a radicalised hegemony.

If deconstruction is the attempt to show the constitutive undecidability, radical incompleteness or untotalizability of textual, institutional, cultural, social and economic structures, then hegemony is a theory of decisions taken in the undecidable terrain opened up by deconstruction, and which, in my view, is precisely that way in which we might begin to think about the politics of deconstruction. The burning question here is whether and how we can combine the logic of deconstruction with the logic of hegemony; does undecidability paralyse the possibility of the decision or does it, on the contrary enable it? ¹⁴⁵

Laclau, somewhat differently from Critchley, but with more or less the same outcome suggests,

...it is no longer a question of finding a ground from which an ethical injunction should be *derived* (even less to make such a ground of undecidability itself) [surely something that Derrida is at great pains to avoid?]. We live as *bricoleurs* in a plural world, having to take decisions within incomplete systems of rules...and some of these are ethical ones. It is because of this constitutive incompleteness that decisions have to be taken, but because we are faced with incompleteness and not total dispossession, the problem of a *total* ethical grounding – either through the opening to the otherness of the other, or through the metaphysical principle – never arises. ‘The time is out of joint’ but, because of that, there is never a beginning – or an end – of time. Democracy does not need to be – and cannot be – radically grounded. We can move to a more democratic society only through a plurality of acts of democratization. The consummation of time – as Derrida knows well – never arrives. Not even as a negative idea. ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Critchley, S., ‘On Derrida’s Specters...’, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Critchley, S., ‘On Derrida’s Specters...’, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Laclau, E., ‘The time is out of joint’ in *Emancipation(s)*, 79

This may be debating finer points of interpretation of ethics and politics, but it is important not to obscure what is key to both Derrida's thinking here and to a different historical aesthetics and politics of memory that I am trying to work out. Both Critchley and Laclau appear to reify 'undecidability' and 'deconstruction as justice'. Both attribute a transcendental status which must either be traversed (Critchley) or conceived otherwise (Laclau). This is to deny the fact that Derrida never attributes a transcendental status to justice, but is always scrupulous about its place in the undecidable terrain of mutual contamination between the transcendental and empirical, justice and law, universal and particular; the outcome of which can never be predetermined. Indeed, contrary to Laclau, Derrida does not develop any theory of decision based upon, as Laclau's logic of hegemony appears to pre-suppose, a full 'absence', a Lacanian 'real', as the fulcrum for hegemonic articulation.

Even these sympathetic readings of Derrida want to turn his deconstruction, deconstruction of Marx's thought, deconstruction as justice, into a political *programme*, however 'ungrounded' it might be. Derrida confounds and frustrates by alluding to a 'politics' that 'is almost secret'. The 'logic' of the spectre and the messianic is the (a) logic of the secret; the secret of inheritance, but also, I suggest "the secret" of singular plurality and 'exposition' in Nancy.

Let us consider first the radical heterogeneity of an inheritance, the difference without opposition that must mark it, a 'disparateness' and a quasi-juxtaposition without dialectic...you must...inhabit it in contradictory fashion around a secret...One would be affected by it as by a cause-natural or genetic. One always inherits a secret, which says, 'Read me, will you ever be up to it?',¹⁴⁷

This secret is not an enigma. For Derrida in this instance, I think it stands for what I have been attempting to trace throughout this chapter as a connection between aesthetics and politics that avoids preconceptions that foreclose on 'meaning' and programmatic 'reading' and enables, to put it in somewhat telegraphic and banal terms, an openness and *hospitality* for the 'other'. This for

¹⁴⁷ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, 40.

Derrida amounts to a certain ‘politics of memory’, which Laclau and Critchley prefer to separate as an ‘ethics’ which I now need to rewind more closely in relation to the reading of art works and art history, picking up the threads that I have already interwoven into this critique of T.J. Clark’s reading.

Going back to the positions of Laclau and Critchley two things strike me. One is that Laclau’s position ultimately depends upon recognition of the difference between signifier and signified whereby one ‘term’ can ‘empty’ or ‘phantasmise’ itself to act as a ‘transcendental signified’ around which a politics can begin. “The chasm between law and justice” becomes somehow ‘filled’ with a hegemonic articulation. Derrida’s position throughout his work is one that seeks to resist and destabilise both the distinction between signifier and signified and especially any notion of transcendental status to signification. This comes to mark an ultimate referent or ‘anterior’ to the *work* of the mark, as a form of presence which guarantees, here ‘the political’ from the ‘outside’. Similarly, with Critchley’s argument for the question being “How to totalize? How to form the link in terms of some form of political *presence, instantiation* of justice?” is, I suggest, missing the point about undecidability. It seems to me that undecidability is not another word for incompleteness or untotalisability as some kind of ‘state of things’, with which we have to deal as part of the ‘ends of man’ as finite, against infinite possibilities. As Geoff Bennington suggests, we need to be mindful of, “Derrida’s refusal of the classical account of the impossibility of totalization on the grounds of the empirical finitude of man, faced with the inexhaustible richness in experience.”¹⁴⁸, and avoid,

The paradox of traditional political thinking of all colours that by taking its model from conceptual thinking... projects freedom as a state at the end of a progress ideally oriented by calculable and programmable laws. Freedom is ejected from now except in the negative form of unforeseen obstacles.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Bennington, G., ‘Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)’ in *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso, 1994), 42.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

The point is that undecidability is not a modulation within the order of calculation that we can cancel out or ignore as an obstacle. It 'is' that mutual contamination of transcendent and empirical, precondition and condition, that mobilises the event of any decision, nomination, call, making of a mark or reading, for that matter, and that more than once. In this sense, with reference to Critchley's question, there is no sense in which undecidability is an obstacle *and* there is no choice. Bennington quotes Derrida from *Parages*:

...where, the criteria for decidability ceasing to be assured, a decision can, finally engage and the event take place. More than once...ventures beyond the too-well-received divides between performative speech and constative speech, into those environs where a borderline begins to tremble. It regularly undecides itself, between the event of citation, in advance divisible and iterable, and the desire of the coming itself, before any citation. But the event-meeting, decision, call, nomination, initial incision of a mark-can only come about from the experience of the undecidable. Not the undecidable which still belongs to the order of calculation but the other, which no calculation could ever anticipate. Without this experience, would there ever be the chance of a step taken; a call for the event, a gift, a responsibility? Would there be any other thing, any cause then other than causality? Would not everything be delivered over to the programme?¹⁵⁰

It is within this ethico-political 'arena', and on these 'terms' that Derrida's readings on art and literature lie. Just as Derrida is wary of any political programme that would pre-empt that anachronistic 'hauntology', that crossing of absence and presence that is the demand of the here and now, 'outside' of any ontology, so too is he wary of any philosophical, sociological or aesthetic 'programme' that denies the *work* of *differance* or the 'trait' when it comes to art.

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida speaks of writing four times around the truth in painting. Characteristically, Derrida's 'around' is within and from out of the problematics of any discourse on painting and how far that discourse is deemed separate from, but 'contaminated' by, that which 'exceeds' or is the excess of its very object. From the beginning, Derrida asks questions of what it means to talk

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

of 'the idiom in painting', 'to owe' or 'tell' the 'truth in painting' and the relationship between stating and performing (constative and performative, saying or doing) as speech acts, when it comes to painting and the entire question of the 'trait' –the characteristic, as per idiom belonging to painting, the mark, and the broaching at origin, as the trace, *differance*. Derrida, both in terms of presenting his argument and graphically in the arrangement of the interrupted and interrupting 'marks' (which David Wills calls 'half crochets', referring to graphic marks in fifteenth century printed bibles separating text from commentary), which, in Derrida's chapter on Kant's Aesthetics entitled *Parergon*, are remarkable for their signifying or half-framing an absence in the text, indicating by the very lemma that which is absent from Kant's discourse, produces a discourse or commentary on the frame itself.¹⁵¹ As Derrida indicates in his preface entitled *passe-partout*, as that which separates and interrupts framing, the 'partition at the edge', the feature of *divisibility*, the frame will be the central question in his discussion of the work of art.

Four times then *around* painting...to recognise and contain, like the surrounds of the work of art, or at most its outskirts: frame, title, signature, museum, archive, reproduction, discourse, market, in short everywhere where one legislates on *the right to painting* by marking the limit, with a slash marking an opposition which one would like to be indivisible...The common feature of these four times is perhaps the trait. Insofar as it is never common or even one, with and without itself. Its divisibility founds texts, traces and remains.¹⁵²

To legislate *on the right to painting* begs the question of the *differance* between, I would say, *justice* and the *law* figured in the trait, wherein one might say the trait is both within and without, and exceeds the 'legislature' of framing.

Discourses on painting are perhaps destined to reproduce the limit which constitutes them, whatever they do and whatever they say; there is for them an inside and an outside of the work as soon as there is a work. A series of oppositions comes in the train of this one, which,

¹⁵¹ see Wills, D., 'Lemming' in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. (ed). Cohen, T., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 111.

¹⁵² Derrida, J., *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. Bennington, G., and McLeod, I., (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 11.

incidentally, is not necessarily primary (for it belongs to a system whose edging itself reintroduces the problem). And there the trait is always determined as an opposition-slash. But what happens *before* the difference becomes opposition in the trait, or *without* its doing so? And what if there were not even a *becoming* here? For *becoming* has perhaps always had as its concept this determination of difference as opposition. So the question would no longer be “What is a trait?” or “What does a trait become?” or “What pertains to the trait?” but “How does the trait treat itself? Does it contract in its retreat?” A trait never appears, never itself, because it marks the difference between the forms and contents of the appearing. A trait never appears, never itself, never for a first time. It begins by retrac(t)ing. Follow here the logical succession of what I long ago called, before getting around to the turn of painting, the *broaching* of the origin: that which opens, with a trace, without initiating anything.¹⁵³

Derrida’s broaching of the subject captures the ‘breach’ of the trait in the figure of the *passe-partout*.

One space remains to be broached in order to give place to the truth in painting. Neither inside nor outside, it spaces itself without letting itself be framed but it does not stand outside the frame. It works the frame, makes it work, lets it work, gives it work to do...the trait is attracted and retrac(t)ed there by itself, attracts and dispenses with itself there...it is situated. It situates between the visible the visible edging and the phantom in the centre from which we fascinate...*Between* the outside and the inside, between the external and the internal edge-line, the framer and the framed, the figure and the ground, form and content, signifier and signified and so on for any two faced opposition. The trait thus divides itself in this place where it takes place...I write on the *passe-partout* well known to picture framers. And in order to broach it, right on this supposedly virgin surface, generally cut out of a square of cardboard and open in its ‘middle’ to let the work appear. The latter can moreover be replaced by another, which thus slides into the *passe-partout* as an ‘example’. To that extent, the *passe-partout* remains a structure with a moveable base, but although it lets something appear, it does not form a frame in the strict sense, rather a frame within a frame. Without ceasing...to space itself out, it plays its card or its cardboard

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

between the frame in what is properly speaking its internal edge and the external edge of what it gives to see, lets or makes appear in its empty enclosure: the picture, the painting, the figure, the form, the system of strokes (traits) and of colours.¹⁵⁴

Derrida's figure of the *passe-partout* seeks to complicate any assumed simple concept of the aesthetic or the conceptual framework of any discourse on painting inasmuch as we cannot easily divide the 'inside' and the 'outside' of any such discourse. As David Carroll puts it:

Derrida argues that, for Hegel and an entire history of philosophy, the empirical existence of (the) work of art has provided a starting point for the philosophical investigation of the meaning and origin of art. The purpose of the philosophy of art, in this context, is to raise the empirical nature of art to a higher level and endow it with historical and philosophical meaning to negate and transcend the specifically aesthetic elements of art. The aesthetic object is, in this way, predetermined in terms of the historical-philosophical end it is made to serve. But even if such an end were not imposed on art if it were possible to approach art only on its own terms, with art as its own end, the questions that would then be asked of the 'non-determined concept' of art, argues Derrida would in themselves predetermine what one means by art. This holds true not just for traditional philosophical questions (such as what is the truth of art? its meaning? its origin?) but also for 'modern' questions concerning the form of the work, its internal functioning, its performative effects. Each of these questions assumes, at the very least, an opposition or set of oppositions-truth/falsehood, meaning/form, internal/external, saying/doing-that limits and predetermines the definition of art and how it will be treated. Art could be considered as predetermined therefore – not only in theories whose purpose is to have art serve some exterior end or purpose, but also in theories whose purpose is to have art serve only its own internal purposes.¹⁵⁵

The corollary to this is, yes, that "The question Derrida pursues in his essays on art is how to break out of the enclosure determined by this inside/outside opposition – not in order to destroy all notions of aesthetic specificity, but to

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁵ Carroll, D., *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*. (London: Methuen, 1987), 134-135.

conceive of specificity in some other manner; not to diminish the status of theory but to make it more critical and effective”¹⁵⁶(my emphasis) *and* accords with his reference elsewhere to the ‘third term’:

at the same time the place where the system constitutes itself and where this constitution is threatened by the heterogeneous and by a fiction no longer in the service of truth. What particularly interests me here is that which participates in participation and non-participation. And the regular return to this theme – which is also the theme of art, of mimesis – betrays a double postulation in my work, and a raising of the stakes – since we find at the heart of the third as participation *that which in no case allows itself to be re-appropriated by participation, and thus by a philosophical system.*¹⁵⁷ (My emphasis)

But the key point is why should this matter, what are the ethical and political stakes as well as the aesthetic or indeed theoretical ones? If Derrida’s reading puts into question such binaries as a text/context division upon which T.J. Clark’s reading of Manet and modernism ultimately depends, why will an approach to aesthetics and politics along the lines of a radicalisation of hegemony not do? After all, here the engagement with the aesthetic and the political is on an undecidable terrain, of radical incompleteness and differing/deferring of “textual, institutional, cultural, social, economic structures”, as suggested by Laclau and Critchley above. It will not do because in the end we encounter another framing, which turns the singular to an example, the particular of a universalising hegemonic condition. It is in terms of singularity that Derrida importantly re-reads and deconstructs the ‘aesthetic’ and thereby can proffer a reading of justice ‘before’ the law and ‘outside’ the thinking of totality.

I have briefly here concentrated on the ‘passe-partout’ section of *The Truth in Painting*, precisely because it sets the scene for what is a *mode of reading* and *inscribing on* the ‘right to painting’ and the aesthetic that, to my mind, accords with Derrida’s approach to the ethico-political as an act of thinking before and

¹⁵⁶ Carroll, D., *Paraesthetics*, 135.

¹⁵⁷ Derrida, J., and Ferraris, M., *A Taste for the Secret*, 5.

between the difference between justice and the law and resisting presumptive ontological or phenomenological frameworks or teleological programmes. In that sense, to do justice to the aesthetic and to mark its *singularity*, is to recognise that spacing ‘before’ the law, and recognising but without falling *entirely* for the trace of absolute alterity ‘beyond’ the law. It is this working of the frame across the aesthetic and the ethical and political that interests me.

To approach this requires a linkage between Derrida’s writing on aesthetics and his deconstructive gestures in relation to the ‘frame’ – as a starting point for consideration of the ‘work’ of art, the self portrait and the rights of inspection of the photographic image and his other interventions concerning hospitality, the supplement and the messianic. Derrida’s writings on the aesthetic are not confined in their reverberations to aesthetic questions, but is there an aesthetic question without an ethical and political one? Such a linkage has been suggested in an article by Ranjana Khanna,¹⁵⁸ which deploys Derrida’s deconstructive reading of the frame and Kant’s ‘Parergon’, together with his ethico-political meditations on hospitality, exemplarity, community (as, for Derrida, always something to parenthesise, in resistance to its totalising, exclusionary force) and justice in relation to the ‘postcolonial’, the key issues being the relationship between the ‘frame’, ‘host’ and ‘supplement’, the distinction between the particular as an example of the ‘universal’, or part to whole, and the singular as being unassimilable to this part-to-whole ‘context’ and how the singular as a supplement of the supplement troubles received wisdoms of ‘community’ and notions of hegemonic articulation.

In *The Truth in Painting*’s chapter on “Parergon”, Derrida writes on the parerga of the ‘frame’ and ‘the example’. These are supplements and supports for that which is thought ‘intrinsic’ to the aesthetic and the beautiful. As such they are both necessary to the intrinsic in order to determine what is intrinsic and what is extrinsic but, at the same time, they are denied, naturalised or simplified by the philosophical discourse.

¹⁵⁸ Khanna, R., ‘Frames, Contexts, Community, Justice’ in *Diacritics*, 33.2, (2003), 11-41.

A frame determines and ‘hosts’ a work, but may be denied existence on its own terms. Insofar as Derrida gives us to think of the frame as *giving rise to* the work, with its own materiality it is a ‘prosthesis’ at origin, an originary supplement, doubling any simple origin. As much as the frame gives host to and ‘protects’ meaning, it is permeable and open to the other (unknowable, promise or threat) outside of the frame, or a singular event exceeding the frame ‘from the inside’, like Barthes’ *punctum*, an unknowable effect that wounds and lingers as an ungraspable memory.

This piercing, for Barthes, is at first unlocatable, as if it is responding to memories or nostalgia etched into the body of the viewer, thus causing an interruption in the force field of the stadium. It also introduces a different time-frame, and a spectral presence that indicates being out-of-joint.¹⁵⁹

Khanna connects the punctum effect both to the “spectral presence that indicates being out-of-joint” with Derrida’s reading of Kant’s ‘without’ of the ‘pure cut’ – the ‘essence’ of the beautiful and the aesthetic as such in the finality-without-end.

In a section on the notion of beauty in Kant, he [Derrida] explains that the “cut” caused by something outside of the force field of the work contains the unknown. The “cut” does not simply engender an already formulated alternative. It opens the work up to the possibility of a different intervention or response as yet unknown, and is stripped of recognizable utility...The aesthetics of the parergon is especially concerned with this cut or interruption. It is a nonknowledge intervening in the force field of the work enclosed within a frame.¹⁶⁰

Derrida analyses Kant’s frame of the beautiful, premised on the ‘without’ of the pure cut, enclosing the object in its ‘finality-without-end’. The cut opens the ‘work’ to the ‘without’, which is necessarily unknowable as *without* end or purpose. This is an open ‘without’, which has an *edge*. It is the ‘without’ marked by the edge, that counts for beauty; the *inassimilable* ‘other’ without, which cuts to both form and give ‘force’ at the border. The frame is thus the ‘law’ which

¹⁵⁹ Khanna, R., “Frames, contexts...” 18

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18

inscribes and delimits but, at the same time, it exposes to the without (limits) of the law beyond law.

We cannot deny, naturalise or 'dialectise' the antinomy of the frame. But frames can be worked otherwise, are liable to openings, twists, unhings, gaps in the joints thus out of joint. Openings about which we may hypothesise as to the law of unconditional, absolute hospitality, but in reference to Laclau and Critchley, above, to *hegemonise* would surely impose another frame, or substitute a particular example, rather than a singular instance.

It could of course at some level be supposed that the singular can serve as an example. An example (for Kant) is a particular instance supporting a general or universal 'law'. Derrida points out that the frame or the *passe-partout* can allow a number of examples to substitute within its boundaries. But for Derrida, the *singular* and the *particular* themselves form something of an antinomy.

To recap on 'singularity', singularity involves recognising a work as both unique and necessarily repeatable, *iterable*, thus operating in a 'general economy' But it is in the insistent 'gap' between the singular and the general, each time 'anew', that the singular event of the work 're-marks' and demands response, which is also a responsibility of reading. This is what I am trying to capture by the term 'aporetic (de) structure', which necessarily crosses time, thought as the present or the presence of the work or text, inasmuch as it re-marks an un-thematisable and un-phenomenologisable 'other' anterior to its 'institution' as a work (and thus it could be said that a work is always already 'in mourning' for this absent 'other') and, by the logic of iterability, *is still to come* in an *incalculable* way.

Singularity bears with it an ideality that is irreducible to any framework or context that, nevertheless, lets it be and is thus in turn irreducible to the particular and/or the example. It cannot be explained by its context but, as a singularity, it cannot be understood other than through its particular instantiation. This is the *aporia* through which responsibility has to take place and, insofar as singularity bears a certain *loss* in relation to context, this 'response' has

something of the structure of *mourning* about it. For Derrida, however, this is neither a mourning of introjection nor a melancholia of incorporation in the strictly Freudian sense. Mourning is mourning for the inassimable 'other', respecting its radical alterity and within the structure of 'time-out-of-joint' bearing a relationship to an 'other-to-come'. It is in these senses that art and literature are analogous to the historical and political in Derrida's terms. A response to literature is akin to a responsibility towards justice for the 'other' before the 'law' in the important double sense of 'before' and at the same time the literary event can articulate the anachronism and 'out of jointness' of time constitutive of history and the 'politics' of justice. To articulate this (de)structure within a logic of hegemony is to perform something of a double-framing. First it is reduce the singular to the example or particular instance of a general (universal) tendency, and then it is to expect that particular instance to 'perform' that generalising, universalising gesture.

To read *Olympia* on the basis of undecidability around the question of woman/prostitution as generalisable into a (another) potentially (unifying) political position (frame) is perhaps the inverse of Clark's determination (in the last instance) by class.

Whereas the concepts of counter-hegemony and hegemony emphasise alternative modes of new power structures, that of hospitality returns one to the openness to damage, caused by the arrival of the supplement and to undoing rather than building an alternative of recentralized force-fields. Less about building hegemony or community, it listens for fractures so as to understand how a force of criticism functions in the supplement politically and ethically.¹⁶¹

In response to (the) painting, we need to hypothesise around a certain 'blindness', a passivity to the 'other' which damages the 'frame' of sight and carries an inassimable force, thus instigating a certain 'exposure' and unravelling of seeing that disables a return of the other to the same, whether that 'same' be signified by a political position or aesthetic effect or self-reference.

¹⁶¹ Khanna, R., 'Frames, Contexts, Community, Justice', 34.

Derrida brings this into play with the ‘scene of drawing’ in *Memoirs of the Blind*.¹⁶² Derrida thinks the trace directly in relation to the drawn, and then the painted, mark where he posits that the act of drawing involves a ‘primary’ or ‘anterior’ blindness; a necessary passivity towards the rupture by absence, the ‘invisible’ trait at the beginning of any tracing of the mark, the absolute singularity of the event of drawing, which makes possible the mark, as *re-mark*, the delimiting and the withdrawal of the mark and the necessary exposure of the mark to chance.

This has repercussions then, both for the ‘event’ of drawing and the ‘signature’. The ‘event’ of the trace is both absolutely singular and with-draws, but at the same time ‘is’ in the trace as *re-mark* in the spatio-temporal work of difference. The event is thus both subject to an ‘otherness’ outside of any simple thinking of space and time and appropriation by consciousness, while it is also inside the differentiating structure of difference. Similarly, the signature, the gesture, the self-presentation of the artist, and here we can think on any making of the mark as a kind of ‘self-portrait’ and model for self-consciousness, has to go through and be deferred by the pre-original trace of the other, making its full presence to ‘itself’ impossible.

Derrida illustrates this through his account of the particularity of the self-portrait’s necessary detour through the ‘other’. The self-mark of the artist is dependent upon its designation by an ‘other’, the viewer, while the viewer is dependent upon the designation of the mark (artist’s self-mark/self portrait) as a ‘work’/ ‘self-portrait’ by a title or signature as part of the ‘framing’ of the work, as work. The subject as self-present identity is deferred both by the other of the viewer and by language and signification. Self-possession is always impossible in its dependence upon the other, whilst the attempt at self-possession is necessary in order for there to be a relation to the other.

Derrida’s remarks here on the event and the signature bear upon the passivity and blindness of *witnessing* and the ethics and politics involved in bearing witness to the other. This makes us think of painting as a bearing witness to the

¹⁶² Derrida, J., *Memoirs of the Blind*

event, the 'truth', the 'world', or writing on painting as bearing witness to the witness. And in both cases, witnessing and witness are effaced by the trace that at the same time makes them possible. Witnessing always comes after the event, even in the instance of eye-witnessing, because its account can only be an originary supplement to the event which is always already 'absented', but made possible through its tracing. The event, in that sense, cannot be seen, known, represented or adequated and thus, bearing witness to the witness requires a response to that which withdraws; that which is unrepresentable and unknowable. Witnessing of painting, in painting, mourns or receives the effacement of the other, which is not present, presentable or of a presence, but neither is a pure absence.

Derrida's work as one reads and re-reads it across time, offers an alliance between the singularity of artworks and the aesthetic (as that which participates and at that same time does not participate in the conceptual order, affirms and at the same time denies by its very heterogeneity and re-marking the mimetic relation, traces and at the same effaces in the trace thus exposing the absent presence) with the aporia of time, which 'links' the absolute past, immemorial, unrepresentable, with the absolute future, without horizon, without telos, incalculable, and thereby the inscribing that which is lost to history, in the name of justice, by virtue of this (a)temporality.

From another but related perspective, Nancy's work re-inscribes the aesthetic as contiguous to an absolute relativisation of the spacing of the in-common, as a completely otherwise thought ontology of being as existence. Derrida wants to complicate the thinking of being as ontology by crossing it with a 'hauntology'. Nancy wants to complicate the thinking of being as common *essence* with a re-thought ontology as a 'being-with', which is the exposure of singularity to plurality without recourse to or return to an *immanentism* of the 'in-common'.

In both we derive a relationship between the aesthetic and the political thought 'otherwise'.

So I return to the reading of Manet's *Olympia*. The body is undialectisable, not in terms of a *collapse* of dialectic, but more in terms of the resistance to dialectic as image in the unsublatable 'remainder', the spectral 'revenant' of Derrida, or the discontinuity, the surprise fragmentation of sense and our 'norms' of sense-making in terms of 'received' notions of subjectivity, grouping, class, gender, sex- boundness, as per Nancy's inoperable 'community' of reading to which 'we' are exposed, absolutely relativised in that sense, an interrupted dialectic.

Still,

The ruin is not in front of us; it is neither a spectacle nor a love object. It is experience itself neither the abandoned yet still monumental fragment of a totality, nor, as Benjamin thought, simply a theme of baroque culture. It is precisely not a theme, for it ruins the theme, the position, the presentation or representation of anything and everything. Ruin is rather the memory open like an eye, or like a hole in a bone socket that lets you see without showing you anything *at all*, anything *of the all*...There is nothing of the totality that is not immediately opened, pierced or bored through...The naked face cannot look itself in the face...but because the other, over there, remains irreducible because (s)he resists all interiorization, subjectification, idealization in a work of mourning, the ruse of narcissism never comes to an end...¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Derrida, J., *Memoirs of the Blind* 69

There is no doubt that Derrida's politics includes a work of mourning. But the 'spectral' relation he articulates in *Specters of Marx* and casts similarly in other texts,¹⁶⁴ makes clear that his notion of justice for the other, only graspable through a 'time-out-of-joint', suggests a past and a memory, which cannot be represented as a past-present, nor predicated upon and calculated on the basis of known future-present or 'final judgement'. The past is an inheritance and a memory which is an endless task in the here and now, without ever 'overcoming'. Thus there can be no work of memory, which would signal the completion of memory. If, for Derrida, there is a 'work of mourning', this is always both singular and 'at large', exterior to any singular death and our singular response of mourning 'in us', to this death. Whilst such interiorisation cannot be denied, neither can it be complete, as it is always exceeded by the absolute alterity of the mourned 'other', such that mourning begets a reorganisation of space, rendering 'aporetic' the division between inside and outside, self and other.¹⁶⁵

Within the philosophic and psychoanalytic tradition, with reference to Freud, there derives a sense that mourning can be completed and death sublated into history and memory.¹⁶⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested that this is the sacrificial logic, which has not only been at work in the event of collective memory and commemoration, but has informed the very thinking of community and the politics it subtends, which is an overcoming and surmounting of human finitude, "a beyond and surmounting of...the unravelling that occurs at the death of each

¹⁶⁴ For instance, Derrida, J., *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Lindsay, C., Culler, J., and Cadava, E., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) and Derrida, J., *Cinders* trans. Lukacher, N., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1987).

¹⁶⁵ In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida makes the point that there is in the passage and moment of transition in any act of memory, that which resists the recuperative powers of memory, as a 'failure' of recollection, which, whilst being the negative and finitude of memory, is also the very opening of difference. The difference between an ontology of memory in an origin and a 'rhetoric' of memory as the 'traces' which 'preserve' but occupy no presence and always remain 'to come'. Op.cit,70.

¹⁶⁶ Freud, S., 'Mourning and Melancholia' in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. and ed. James Strachey, Vol XIV 1968 239-258

one of us – that death [which] when no longer anything more than the death of the individual, carries an unbearable burden and collapses into insignificance.”¹⁶⁷

This is the logic of the community of immanence, signified by figures like the lovers who commit suicide together, which “accomplishes the infinite reprococity of two agencies”, and thought of by Hegel as the principle of the State, residing in the fact of “having in another the moment of one’s own subsistence, [an other] whose reality is never more present than when its members give their lives.”¹⁶⁸

Death in such a community, is not the unmasterable excess of finitude, but the infinite fulfilment of an immanent life: it is death itself consigned to immanence, it is in the end that resorption of death that the Christian civilisation, as though devouring its own transcendence, has come to minister to itself in the guise of the supreme work.¹⁶⁹

For Nancy, death *is* appropriate to the thinking of community, but in an entirely other sense. As Derrida suggests, death presents an absolute alterity, which, in Nancy’s application to the thinking of community, is the profound sense that death reveals that the community is an *impossible communion*. Death reveals the impossibility of immanence, the impossibility of subjects substantiated into a collective subject. As Nancy suggests, we can only experience ourselves as *existent*, as our ‘non-experienced experience’ of the death of *others*. “What community reveals to me, in presenting my birth and my death is my existence outside of myself.”¹⁷⁰ Our being is always finite, as the ‘experience’ of birth and death is always ‘outside of’ and ‘other’ to self, whilst being inalienably ‘proper’ to self as existing. What we share is not the substantiated ‘I’ hypostasised as a

¹⁶⁷ Nancy, J-L., ‘The Inoperative Community’ in *The Inoperative Community*, Ed. Connor, P., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), 7. In this text Nancy responds to both the thinking of death and community in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* whereby the consciousness of death is something more than mere annihilation, but testimony to the necessary overcoming of particularity and externality in the passage of the ‘spirit’ towards the absolute reconciliation of the universal with its particular embodiment, realised politically in the overcoming of the individual in the body of the state and its ‘inversion’ in Marx, where the state is the realisation of a dialectical materialism as opposed to idealism, which has its own share of sacrifices along the way.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26

‘we’. What ‘we’ share is the ‘exteriority’ to the self, the ‘other-to-self’, which is an unenclosable *exposure* to others.¹⁷¹

It is in the light of these thoughts from Derrida and Nancy, which bring together death and the politics of the subject and community in an entirely other sense, that I have approached the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. I argue that the film questions the completion of memory and posits that memory will exceed the means by which it is re-presented by and for the subject, at the same time questioning the premise upon which a collective memory can be given to, or on behalf of, a community. However, in terms of Marguerite Duras’s reading of the film she scripted, it ultimately resolves these questions by a passage through a series of negations and ambiguities within an auto-critique of the image of cinema, which culminates in the truth of the non-truth; the impossibility of knowing or talking about the truth of Hiroshima other than by a ‘fictive’ narration which bespeaks a nihilism. However, if, out of the telling of this narrative, a catharsis takes place and a collective survival emerges, I argue that this ultimately sublates the *event* of Hiroshima and forecloses upon its future memory and the thought of the future, which an event of such enormity demands.

Using Derrida’s radicalisation of memory and the future to come, and Nancy’s re-thinking of the subject and subject of community, and aside from Duras’s reading, the film offers the possibility of another reading. *This* reading recognises that no cinematic representation can contain the singularity of the historical event, which is always in excess of and unassimilable to any completion by memory. But, as such, the *justice*, which the memory of the event demands, remains in the uncloseable tension between the event and its memory and is thus receptive to an open future, the subject, politics and community of which cannot be assumed in advance or be thought to arise out of the *working through* of the memory of Hiroshima.

¹⁷¹ Here Nancy is elaborating upon and bringing together Heidegger’s notion of Being as “ek-stasis”, as an “immanent transcendence” and therefore an “impossible” immanence, Heidegger’s, arguably “undeveloped” notion of Being as *Mitsein* (being with) and Heidegger’s notion of “authentic” being as “being-towards death”. See Nancy, J-L., *The Inoperative Community* 14-15

The first part of this chapter is a commentary on the film studied through Duras's own reading of the film as evidenced in her synopsis, the script and her 'notations' for the film. Taking a cue from these, I read the film in relation to the eroticism and the love affair upon which the film is premised. It is this erotic relationship intertwined with a memory, which appears to put seeing, knowing, memory and (re) presentation in question. But to what end? It is this question, which reverberates through the second part, where philosophical and critical debates emerge considering the place of art in memory of an event where ethical and political questions of justice come to the fore. This returns me again in the third part to the film and the very question of the 'event' in the film, which prompts another reading.

"Sacrilegious recollection"

Hiroshima Mon Amour was first released in France in 1959, directed by Alain Resnais with a script by Marguerite Duras. Resnais had been commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture to make a film about the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima by the Americans in 1945. Resnais had previously made a documentary film about the Nazi Death-Camps (*Night and Fog*, 1955). He gave up on the initial idea of a documentary on Hiroshima, "just another *Night and Fog*" and enlisted the help of Marguerite Duras. That does not mean to say that elements from *Night and Fog* are not present in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. One of these is Resnais's interest in how memory and mental images of the camps relate to the actual documented footage, at what point does this documented past become the past and for whom? The other is the reference to French collaboration in the process of internment. The questions of 'how you remember?' and 'whose sense of the past is it?' are central to Resnais.

Hiroshima Mon Amour produced a "sort of false documentary" as Duras termed it. From the outset of her synopsis, it is clear that this film is to approach the horror of Hiroshima by way of a calculated subversion of the genre of documentary, which in its reliance upon the repetition of received images reduces, by its very amplitude, the horror to banality. "Impossible to talk about Hiroshima, one can only talk about the impossibility of talking about

Hiroshima”¹⁷², she states. This is the effect of documentary cinema and the paradox that ensues from it; that you can talk about Hiroshima anywhere. “One can talk about Hiroshima anywhere, even in a hotel bed, during a chance, an adulterous love affair”,¹⁷³ but to what point or effect? Hiroshima becomes a word on the lips of ‘the world’, but what about meaning and significance ‘now’ and for the future? The film’s approach to the proposition of ‘false documentary’ is to place a love story at the site of Hiroshima twelve years after the bombing, a chance affair between a Japanese man and a French woman, a story, which is itself overwhelmed by the female protagonist’s personal memory of love and death in her home town of Nevers in France, as this previously repressed memory is provoked by the new love affair. Formally it is a false documentary in that it is a film, which foregrounds its own apparatus with an elaborate montage of images from newsreels and reconstructions of the aftermath of the bombing and the exhibits in the Hiroshima museum with a voice-over dialogue which, contrary to the norms of documentary, disputes rather than confirms the relationship between what is seen and knowledge of the event. In addition, the female character is an actress visiting Hiroshima to make a film about peace, and the film elaborately shows the location sets and all the cinematic machinery involved in constructing this commemorative film.

The story, which comes to engulf the present of Hiroshima, is narrated via the conventions of flashback images, which echo or imitate scenes from the Hiroshima newsreels and Museum. This contributes to the complex ‘time’ of the film and the difficulties of distinguishing between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘imaginary’. On the one hand, the woman’s personal memory appears to be provoked by and continues to be imaged by her through the later images of Hiroshima, on the other hand her memory images serve as an artistic device through which the collective images of Hiroshima are re-thought and given a personal connection and a ‘truth’. It uses the devices of cinema, which can play upon the ambiguity between perception and knowledge, what is seen and what is imagined, what is believed to be real and ‘true’.

¹⁷² Duras, M., ‘Synopsis’, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Screenplay). (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 9.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9.

The story that is provoked by the French woman's chance encounter with the Japanese man, at the site of Hiroshima, is of her previous tragic love affair with a German soldier, who is shot dead during the Occupation of Nevers. Her fragmented recounting of her madness at his death and subsequent punishment, as her head is shaved for collaborating with the enemy, in images which, as noted above, borrow from and repeat those of Hiroshima's aftermath itself, disrupts and pervades and at the same time intensifies her love affair in the present, as the Japanese man is drawn by the threads of this story into identification with the dead German lover of the past. The affair in the present appears equally riven with separation and loss, as the lovers have met in the interrupted time of a chance encounter and have to 'kill time' before her imminent departure. Having told her story and in that sense 'forgotten' her German lover by identifying through and thereby consigning him to a narrative, the film appears to end with the separation that has been there all along. She admits to 'beginning to forget' the Japanese man. He is desperate for her to stay, yet treasures a 'memory of forgetting'. In the end,

'...*nothing* happens. Both are reduced to a terrifying mutual impotence...They simply call each other once again. What? Nevers, Hiroshima. For in fact, in each other's eyes, they are no one. They are names of places, names that are not names...' ¹⁷⁴

There are different versions of the reactions to the film on its first release and whether it was or was not withdrawn from the Cannes competition. But there is some agreement amongst historians of film that it caused a scandal.¹⁷⁵ The objections 'officially' raised concerned the anticipated displeasure from the Americans over images of Hiroshima, but the film intertwines a number of 'scandals'; the plight of the 'femmes tondues', women whose heads were shaved like sacrificial scapegoats for their sexual collaboration with the enemy during the Occupation; the subtle yet pointed reference to the Hollywood film *Casablanca*, which sets love and maverick American resistance against Vichy France at a time (1941) when America's attitude towards the Vichy was at best

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13

¹⁷⁵ See Higgins, L., *New Novel, new wave, new politics*. (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1996).

ambivalent; the association of harrowing images of death with an erotic encounter. The film still generates unease because of the apparent analogy it makes between the personal anguished memories of a woman's tragic love affair and subsequent punishment, and the collective commemoration of a nuclear devastation. Can these be commensurable? In Duras's terms the answer may be 'yes' and 'no', in the sense that in both cases the suffering can be deemed to be 'absolute' (and *thereby* incomparable). Yet this personal distress is inextricably bound to the world-historical events of World War Two, "To shave a girl's head because she has loved – really loved – an official enemy of her country, is the ultimate of horror and stupidity".¹⁷⁶

The discussion of the film in 1959 by *Cahiers du Cinema* critics, among them, filmmakers Godard, Rohmer and Rivette, hailed it as a modernist film, reconstituting reality out of a 'kind of splintering' and creating disequilibria for the spectator. "Tracking shots are a question of morality," says Godard.¹⁷⁷ This elliptical remark, which Godard borrowed from elsewhere, at the same time goes to the heart of the matter of the film's form in relation to its subject and Resnais's resistance to the familiar modes of documentary signification. This is taken up much later in film theory by Marie-Claire Ropars who would go on to term Resnais's approach as employing a highly self-conscious and self-reflexive film 'syntax', a film-*writing*, a style, which effects a form appropriate to its subject matter (atomic explosion) and which, in its simulated memory images and repetition of traces from one context to another, Hiroshima to Nevers, demonstrates the necessity whilst inadequacy of reference to the event by way of the distinctive conjuncture of a disruptive literary mode with a disruptive cinematic mode.

¹⁷⁶ Duras, M., 'Synopsis', 12. The film, in Duras' hands, is a positioned 'anti-war' text, which refuses to disconnect the atrocity of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima with the atrocious behaviour of some of those in France at the time of the Liberation. The violence, conflict and shame of Liberation is a 'truer' picture than the nationalist fervour of celebration with De Gaulle as a national hero which went on to legitimise the government of De Gaulle in 1958 in the wake of the war against Algerian independence.

¹⁷⁷ Hiller, J., (ed). 'Hiroshima, notre amour'. In *The 1950's: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave. Cahiers du Cinema*, 59-70. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press 1985: 62

Crossing the cinematic-literature frontier, conflating the reality-fiction distinction, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* points, more obliquely, to the new division which has opened up in the field of representation between the referring of the real to the writerly urge and the reduction of the real to a referentializable narrative. The fact that the event of Hiroshima is at the centre of this division gives the film its specifically historical dimension, whereby history recognizes itself as tributary to a discourse whose narrative growth is no longer self-evident.¹⁷⁸

The *Cahiers* group referred variously to its use of abstraction and the juxtaposition of abstracted shots out of which a ‘unity’ emerges or to a rhythm to the film, which effects simultaneously extreme opposition and profound harmony. Godard was keen to note how far the film’s approach was from that of Rossellini (despite some inter-textual references to *Rome, Open City*). “That’s the exact opposite of Rossellini’s procedure – he [Rossellini] was outraged because abstract art had become official art. So, Resnais’ tenderness is metaphysical, it isn’t Christian. There is no notion of charity in his films.”¹⁷⁹

All this indicates, at the time of the film’s first reception, a debate around issues of style, aesthetics, ethics and politics¹⁸⁰; suggesting that in Resnais we encounter an aesthetic which, in being ‘abstract’, if we take the *Cahiers* view, is resisting any kind of redemption for an historical experience which has itself become ‘unrepresentable’ or, more exactly, ‘unmeaningful’ by straightforwardly realist means. Resnais’s interest in problematising the relationship between seeing and knowing, and his preoccupation with *how* we come to know and remember, produces a particular kind of aesthetic text, which, both in terms of its form and its content refuses any clear appropriation, easy possession or identification with the characters in action by the viewing subject.

...even the narrative, with its pauses and ellipses, its vagaries and its open ending, declared the coming of a new narrative convention which would project the subjectivity of the characters through the representation of objects and places...characters appear...

¹⁷⁸ Ropars-Wuilleumier, M-C., ‘How history begets meaning: Alain Resnais’ *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959)’ in Hayward, S. and Vincendeau, G., eds *French Film: Texts and Contexts* 173-186 London Routledge 1997:178-179

¹⁷⁹ Hiller, J., *Cahiers du Cinema*, 68.

¹⁸⁰ This included a somewhat inconclusive discussion as to whether Resnais was ‘on the right’ or ‘on the left’, which surprised me, but everything has its resonance.

constructed but they divide into two interweaving networks; the remorseless diffraction of the editing breaches the film open to an audial and visual space which the action cannot saturate.¹⁸¹

For Resnais, any precipitous appropriation would collapse the *question* between seeing and knowing; a collapse upon which cinema usually relies. Resnais's re-marking of images, appearing similarly yet differently across time and space; the 'abstraction' of content into a 'form' of viewing, (atomic/erotic, for instance); the disturbing rhythm which problematises both the flow of images or their closure; the, at times, incompatibility between visual and verbal cues; the moments of spatial distance and temporal 'weariness' between the protagonists despite their attraction to each other, all serve to produce something like a loss of mastery and 'mutual impotence' between film and viewing subject, which echoes that of the protagonists, caught up in a hypnotic world of discontinuous memory images sustained by the power of cinematic time.

The film's considerable impact is found in its opening sequence (Indeed it was this section which, more than any other, provoked objections from the actual survivors of the bombing).¹⁸² Rather than straightforwardly documenting the effects of the atomic bomb, the opening 'figures' the bomb's effects by way of the oscillation between two sweat-drenched, fragmented bodies (we only see torsos, arms and hands) in erotic embrace and these same bodies desiccating under showers of atomic dust. These 'abstracted' eroticised forms, which strike the viewer with their smooth silk-like quality whilst turning to dust, thus first evoke the horror. This is followed by the 'disputed' testimony of the woman's voice over the archive images of flayed skin, burnt flesh and disfigured limbs, combined with images of the Hiroshima Museum, which continue to be interrupted by these smooth erotic bodies, which finally 'dematerialise' into a sexually charged movement of tracking shots through modern Hiroshima. Thus in the move from horror to love, the *public* testimony to Hiroshima appears to be abandoned.

¹⁸¹ Ropars, M-C., 'How history begets...' 173

¹⁸² Wood, N., 'Memory by Analogy: *Hiroshima Mon Amour*' in *The Liberation of France: Image and Event*. Eds. Kedward, H.R. and Wood, N. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995), 318.

With this montage of images the male voice-over contends that despite the woman's voice-over affirmation of the archive footage, she has *seen* 'nothing' at Hiroshima. Seeing/looking at the representations of the aftermath of the bombing is refuted both thematically and operationally. The cinematic camera lens and projection screen 'plays' between technological devices and emotional/corporeal states; the camera movement and editing producing an erotic or atomic charge, ending with the orgasmic declaration of love voiced over the 'Universal banality'¹⁸³ of scenes of modern Hiroshima. The viewer is invited to understand the focus on the skin of these bodies and the disturbance of the senses it provokes, as a critique of the usual form of visual representation as a means by which a collective response to mass death is instituted. If the erotic touch upon skin disturbs vision as part of a critique of visual representation's dissimulation of the truth, this is accompanied by an orchestration of cinematic effects designed to disorient the spectator. As suggested previously, the idea of testimony is put into question as the woman's voice-over declarations of the truth of what she has seen are denied by the man's voice-over.

What she is testifying to, of course, are the images and museum exhibits, already remains, 'empty' cadavers of the event. It is here that the film does all it can to foreground the application of the temporal and spatial dynamics of cinema and its apparatus to these objectifications. Tracking and panning violently collide with close-ups of Museum exhibits; charred remains, hair damaged and lost by radiation, bodies stopped in their tracks by the conflagration, 'shadows cast in stone' and inter-textual reference to Resnais' own famed tracking shots in *Night and Fog*, and the walking feet of the Museum visitors which are, perhaps, deliberately reminiscent of Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*. There is deliberate confusion between the 'captured' instant and the flux, when the spectator is lured to confuse a photograph with an 'actual' body, a 'charred landscape' with a scale-model, and the theatrical with the literal in the inability to distinguish between 'actualities' and reconstructions. All set within the sharp, clean, 'relentless' ultra modernist architectural space of the 'new' Museum. This foregrounding of the cinematic apparatus is reinforced later by the woman's role

¹⁸³ Duras, M., Screenplay, 24.

as a film actress and the scenes on the set for the film about peace, with their emphasis on the machinery and artifice of filmmaking.

But this is not just a critique of museums and reconstructions as institutional forms of commemoration, because the form and idiom of these images is repeated in the woman's personal testimony and narration-by-images of her past, a fragmented account of her encounter with death and her incarceration and mutilation, presented via the cinematic convention of flashbacks, which interrupt the scenes of her affair with the Japanese man. In fact what is disturbing, in retrospect, is the extent to which the voice-over dialogue and the skew of some of the images from Hiroshima, appear as *her* 'vision' and testimony. The viewer is reminded that we are always spectators and not witnesses as recipients of cinema through both this inauthentic appropriation of the received images of Hiroshima as 'her' memory and the difficulty of assimilating these images in the way of 'made to order' documentary. But neither can the viewer assume that *this* Japanese man has a more authentic account, privileging national identity as the singular possessor of its past, assimilating it to this one point of view as 'truth'. Indeed, the Japanese man is cast 'without a memory'. His refutations of her knowledge of Hiroshima are wholly negative and spoken in "an unbearable, impersonal way",¹⁸⁴ reinforcing the inaccessibility and unknowability of the past of Hiroshima in the present. This is underscored in the fiction by the fact that he was absent from Hiroshima, fighting in the war, at the time of the bombing. He is an architect concerned with designing the present Hiroshima, to move on from its past, and most significantly, he apparently willingly forgoes his memory for hers.

Her fragmented narrative is one, which, as she remembers her past as if in the idiom of 'images' of another past 'recollected' in the present combination of reconstructions and a new (love) life in Hiroshima, thus questions the possibility of a 'true' memory; one that is interiorised and introjected as a process of mourning. For the images of Nevers appear to be both a memory emerging from a deeply interiorised (traumatised) event *and* the interminable exteriorised

¹⁸⁴ Duras, M., Screenplay, 8.

repetitions of death at Hiroshima. And yet it is here that the Japanese man appears to seek a meaning for memory, somewhere else, in the French woman and her desire to forge a link with the experience of Hiroshima.

“It was there that I seem to have understood, that you were so young...so young you still don’t belong to anyone in particular. I like that.”...

(or:)

“It was there, I seem to have understood, that I almost...lost you...and that I risked never knowing you.”...

(or else:)

“It was there, I seem to have understood, that you must have begun to be what you are today”.¹⁸⁵

Thus, inversely, it is the memory of Nevers and the “overlapping of Nevers and love, of Hiroshima and love”¹⁸⁶ that will “probe the lesson of Hiroshima more deeply,”¹⁸⁷ because it is this intertwining of events which is ‘out of time’ with the ‘what happened’ at Hiroshima that enables the Japanese man to make a memory, one based on love and eroticism with the French woman.

It is this characteristic of the film that became significant for “testimony” studies and the importance given to a re-alignment of testimony with trauma and the impossibility as well as possibility of testimony and the recognition of the mode of reconstruction enabled via the encounter with the ‘other’.

He listens to her, that is, out of his own not knowing, out of the impossibility of confrontation with his own past and out of a lack of self that is spoken in his question. And it is precisely because he speaks from an impossible place, and asks a question that he himself does not fully own, that he can also enter her story, that he makes the answer to her story speak more than it can possibly tell. Not because he knows her truth but because he does not know his own, he can discover, even as she tells him of the impossibility of her own life, the survival of another for whom she unwittingly speaks in the double testimony of her response.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Duras, M., Screenplay, 51.

¹⁸⁶ Duras, M., ‘Synopsis’, 12.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸⁸ Caruth, C., ‘Duras, Resnais, *Hiroshima mon amour*’ in Caruth, C., *Unclaimed Experience: trauma, narrative and history* 25-56, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press 1996 40-41

Hiroshima present, as the time and place of the new lovers, is made as elusive as the past, despite the clear references to chronological time, the hours passing and remaining, a time that in the end the lovers have to 'kill', and the identified meeting places, hotel, his house, tea-room, Casablanca bar. This is not only because of the dissolving of the present into the past and the past returning to the present in those moments of remembering, or is it forgetting, to which the Japanese man bears witness or at which he might appear as both a 'spectator' and 'performer', as he is compelled by and drawn into identifying with the story. It is also because of the distancing and spacing between the lovers, a distance, which increases as their intimacy, and at the same time their departing, intensifies. The lovers seem not wholly part of the historical present of Hiroshima. Intimate scenes are played against the background noise of the city's traffic or nightlife, to which they are, or become, increasingly oblivious once the story of Nevers 'overlays' that of Hiroshima. As they meet, then depart, at different transitory sites within the modern city, the distance between them is augmented by wide-angle shots in street scenes and cut-away shots to wide angles within interior space. As the film proceeds, the viewer is more and more deprived of the shot-reverse-shot, so that the lovers look at each other less in an intimate way and increasingly into a distance. The present external reality already appears 'somewhere' else, indicative of leave-taking and their acceptance that they are 'in between time' and 'killing time'. The relationship appears enacted in *its own time*, staged at these different points of (non) contact and re-enacted. She is an actress, re-enacting her Nevers' love affair with a stranger and foreigner at the site of Hiroshima's re-enactment, and her meeting with the Japanese man is ironically re-enacted, when she is alone at the Casablanca bar. It is as if, in their intimacy, touching turns to the memory of touch; bodies that emerged from darkness into day turn to the grey of memory; time passing turns to killing time; the space of Hiroshima recedes to that of Nevers.

What are we to make of this cinematic representation, as readers talk about the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima? The film does and does not talk about Hiroshima, or perhaps it is talking about Hiroshima all the time, as in talking about Hiroshima you are always going to be talking about it from somewhere

else, its memory being 'impossible' and yet, as Duras states, "Hiroshima will be the common ground (perhaps the only one in the world?), where the universal factors of eroticism, love and unhappiness will appear in an implacable light."¹⁸⁹

I want to suggest that Duras draws upon eroticism as a disturbance to the sense of sight. This eroticism, however, comes to present, through the woman, the unfulfillable desire for a 'truth' of memory, which the film critiques. My question is whether by way of this, by displacing vision as a dissimulation of truth, the film pursues a greater truth, taking memory as exteriorisation in images to its limits, in order to present the truth of impossibility; the truth of Nothing, the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima? This 'impossibility of talking about Hiroshima', is the impossibility of sublating death, of overcoming it by assimilating it in a way that could re-present it 'truthfully'. Woman, as it is in the woman protagonist that the force of the film coheres, becomes thus the figure of the ultimate truth of non-truth, true memory's impossibility; nihilism, truth only by fiction. But the question remains, to what end?

Having set up this dichotomy of truth/appearance, the film *appears* to pursue the greater truth of the non-truth of fiction and a fictional time manifest in the work of art. Duras states in the synopsis to the film, that one of its "principal goals" is,

to have done with the description of horror by horror, for that has been done by the Japanese themselves, but to make *this horror rise again from its ashes* by incorporating it in a love that will necessarily be special and 'wonderful', one that will be more credible than if it has occurred anywhere else in the world, a place that death had not *preserved*.¹⁹⁰

Duras further suggests that this incorporation of the descriptive memory of Hiroshima into a literary 'work', a love story, which takes the event beyond the given 'fact' of Hiroshima, may well be deemed 'sacrilege'. But such profane treatment may point to a resistance to that other sacrilege evoked by those images of horrific events, which seek to 'preserve' while at the same time sublimate the deaths that they announce in a realism, which assumes a

¹⁸⁹ Duras, M., 'Synopsis', 10.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

possible relation to and knowledge of these deaths of the other through visual representation.

Duras appears to be eschewing the kind of logic that is implied in a visualisation, which seeks to determine the complicity of the spectator in a 'truth' through the direct visual representation of the event. This is of course to separate 'truth' from appearance in a Platonic sense, suggesting that Duras and Resnais are positing a more essential, originary truth, behind appearance posing as fact. It also accords with Resnais's distrust of documentary for its power to fix events in the past, as *past* and determine memory, disallowing the *question* of memory and a memory in the present which can allow for the moment when the past becomes past. But it also, as suggested above, brings the entire issue of testimony into question. Instead, the film is to take the event into the time and space of the aesthetic in which: "Nothing is 'given' at Hiroshima. Every gesture, every word, takes on an aura of meaning that transcends its literal meaning."¹⁹¹ Thus it seems the film seeks a greater 'truth', in the work of art, and we are perhaps caught in the oscillation from the politicisation of the aesthetic to the aestheticisation of the political,¹⁹² inasmuch as Duras wants to question the relativisation of the aesthetic to the assumptions about the political that the realist repetition of horror by horror makes; that this repetition *in itself* contains a moral imperative of 'never again' and speaks to an assumed collective world that has already been

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹² This is an enormous question of course. Put simply here, we may understand this distinction as that between art being given its value and meaning relative to the political, thus the meaning/value of the work is judged by a combination of the politics of its subject-matter and the way the aesthetic serves the wider political project of emancipation, that is to say politics is the 'truth' by which the value of the aesthetic is judged, as against the aesthetic giving truth and shape to the political, as the source of the value of the political. The phrase is from Walter Benjamin's 'Art Work' essay, Benjamin, W., 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Benjamin, W., *Illuminations* (London, Fontana 1973) 219-253, where Benjamin discusses the political, and indeed revolutionary, possibilities of photography in destroying alienating aesthetic aura and providing the means by which the working class can articulate its consciousness of itself (and we might add here the means by which a class testifies for itself), whilst also pointing out how that very same technology can be mobilised by a fascist regime to give shape to its political project of massification. Adorno thought Benjamin had given up too much in his 'destruction of aura' thesis and had failed to appreciate the critical potential of art to intervene between technology and the mass audience. A succinct insight into this debate occurs in an exchange of letters between Adorno and Benjamin in Jameson, F., (ed). *Aesthetics and Politics*. (London: New Left Books, 1979): 110-134. For a detailed explication of this distinction in relation to the work of Jean-Luc Nancy see Librett, J., 'Translator's Forward' in Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World*, vii-ix.

cast as the *age of Hiroshima*, but instead wants to put an aestheticised 'world' of the cinematic time of memory and narration in its place.

Duras's desire that the horror "rise again from its ashes", appears to address, but also to 'repeat' to the point of the dislocation of meaning, the cinematic ordering of vision in a dramatic narrative. The voice-over comments, which punctuate the archive footage early in the film, are termed by Duras, "an operatic exchange". But this voice-over principle remains, as the conventions of flashback are accompanied by the lugubrious speech of the woman over the scenes from Nevers, and the images emerge from the past, but hold the lovers more and more apart in their increasing intimacy, at the various sites of *re-enactment* of the woman's previous encounter with love and parting. The 'now' of Hiroshima is split between a past and an imminent future, which neither fixes the past, nor relinquishes its affect. It is as if the horror might rise again from its ashes, but again and again, reminiscent but different and perhaps 'not yet'. This *implies* a history, and a memory, that is never simply consigned to the past and that 'exceeds', or is 'outside', the borders between past, present and future, the structures of chronological time and continuity. But my question is whether this excess of time ultimately becomes contained, as the duration of *this* love affair appears as a mirror image of the duration of the death and forgetting of the German soldier.

Duras makes it clear that if desire and death are co-mingled in this 'excess' or repetition of memory, they are so as *impossible* relations. To think that one can *know* the horror of Hiroshima by the repetition of it in images upon which one fixates is an illusion. To consider that one can somehow die with the other, at the very same time, is also an illusion. If the erotic bears with it the fantasy of ecstatic *fusion* with the other, its fulfilment would be the end of desire; that is death, but the fantasy that drives erotic desire in effect underscores the impossible relation of the erotic, the *impossibility* of dying with the other. The film appears to bring eroticism into proximity with death and the dis-order of memory both to show the *desire* for a relation between self and other, which would realise a kind of ultimate 'truth' *and* the very impossibility of this. What emerges from this is the greater truth of survival.

Of the German lover's death, the woman states,

I stayed near his body all that day and then all the next night. The next morning they came to pick him up and they put him in a truck. It was the night Nevers was liberated. The bells of St. Etienne were ringing; ringing...Little by little he grew cold beneath me. Oh! How long it took him to die! When? I'm not quite sure. I was lying on top of him...yes...the moment of his death actually escaped me, because...because even at that very moment, yes, even afterward, I can say that I couldn't feel the slightest difference between his dead body and mine. All I could find between this body and mine were obvious similarities, do you understand?¹⁹³

At this moment we might think of the mythic 'suicide of lovers' or of the possibility of dying with the other, but Duras, in her notes to the script, entitled 'Nocturnal Notations', qualifies this scene,

One might believe her dead, so completely has his death drained all life from her. He tries to caress her hips, as he had caressed her while making love, but he cannot. It is as though she were helping him to die. She doesn't think of herself, only of him. And he consoles her, almost apologises for having to make her suffer, for having to die. When she is alone, in the same spot where a short while before they were together, pain had not yet taken hold of her life. She is simply utterly amazed to find herself alone.¹⁹⁴

This scenario, as it unfolds in the last sentence, is re-enacted at the end of the film. Duras's commentary, in italics, is here written into the screenplay.

They are standing in the room, facing each other, their arms at their sides, their bodies not touching...It is now full daylight...They say nothing. They look at each other...In the distance, Hiroshima is still sleeping...All of a sudden, she sits down. She buries her head in her hands, clenches her fist, closes her eyes and moans. A moan of utter sadness. The light of the city in her eyes...

¹⁹³ Duras, M., Screenplay, 65.

¹⁹⁴ Duras, M., Screenplay, appendix 'Nocturnal Notations', 87.

She: I'll forget you! I'm forgetting you already! Look how I'm forgetting you! Look at me!

*He takes her arms, she faces him, her head thrown back. She suddenly breaks away from him. He helps her by an effort of self-abstraction, as if she were in danger. He looks at her, she at him, as she would look at the city, and suddenly, very softly, she calls him. She calls him from afar, lost in wonder. She has succeeded in drowning him in universal oblivion. And it is a source of amazement to her.*¹⁹⁵

Thus one cannot know the death of the other and one cannot die with the other. The death or departing of the other brings the amazement of an utter solitude on the death of the German soldier and universal oblivion at the 'forgetting' of the Japanese man.

Duras had already qualified the first moment of death through the woman's non-chronological telling of her madness after her lover's death and her refusal to separate her body from his; her desire to taste his blood in hers; her desire to retain the pain of death above all else, whilst imprisoned in the cellar. It is at this point when 'her' story suggests a state of undecidability and incomprehensibility between living and dying that the Japanese man 'identifies' with the German lover and can take on and repeat Hiroshima through Nevers as she recounts her gradual emergence from this undecidable state into the distinction between life and death and her survival. Her trance-like state as she subsequently relates the moment of death is violently broken by the Japanese man slapping her face. This interruption appears to mark the point of the beginning of the lovers' memory of forgetting each other. Caruth marks it as the transition from traumatic narrative to history, suggestive of a work of mourning:

What takes place in the disruption of the slap, then, is precisely the beginning of a history...This marking of a difference [between the German soldier's death and the Japanese man's life] does not take place, indeed, in a corrected seeing or in the mere physical reality of a seen hand, but in the very way in which the hand, in its slap, surprises sight and interrupts the continuity of the face-to-face encounter of the lovers locked in a narrative-without-history. The slap indeed interrupts the pathos and the ahistorical sense

¹⁹⁵ Duras, M., 'Scenario', 83.

of “firstness” in the cry-“He was my first love”-and thus interrupts the isolated self-enclosure of the narrative of firsts...This interruption and this *shock of sight* thus establishes within the film the opening of a history that had not yet truly taken place. The possibility of history arises...as the interruption of understanding in a brutal shock of sight that ineluctably connects the history of Nevers with that of Hiroshima. The traumatic histories of the two lovers can emerge, that is, only in their relation to each other and only in the way in which the relation creates, precisely a break within the mutual understanding of their address.¹⁹⁶

Having given him a memory of Hiroshima by way of her journey through death, memory and survival, this subjective gift can objectify again into ‘Hiroshima’ and ‘Nevers’ for the future. This marks the eternal return of abandonment. Ropars will similarly identify a transition to history, memory, forgetting and mourning.

...the donation of story telling goes hand-in-hand with the abandonment of that which was narrated; and the narration, in separating life from death, completes the mourning work by severing the link between Eros and Thanatos. Once the story has been told, all there remains for Nevers is the cantata of oblivion, where the subject...expels the Nevers memory and exchanges it for views of modern Hiroshima.¹⁹⁷

Paradoxically it is through the journey to obliteration that Hiroshima is known and remembered. Both Caruth and Ropars from different perspectives suggest an albeit non-simple passage to mourning and memory that the film itself ‘remarks’.

Such as it is generated in the prologue, the explosion at Hiroshima eludes both the subject and the object, both the word and the direct figuration, only a trace remains. Projected on to the streets of Nevers, and linked to a narration that takes its place, the scar of Hiroshima enters in turn into the domain of oblivion whose exclusive memorableness the film guarantees. The process of obliteration is double-edged, and the itinerary which inscribes Hiroshima into a story remains reversible: although circumscribed, the fragmentation of the editing can always let filter through, under the known and named present, the resurgence of the unnamable that the writing has focused on the name Hiroshima, and where the film is dispersed. This then is the final paradox, whereby, the writing completes

¹⁹⁶ Caruth., C ‘Duras, Renais, *Hiroshima* 42

¹⁹⁷ Ropars, M-C., ‘How history begets’ 181

its task of ordering into signs or, in other words, its double task of signification and obliteration.¹⁹⁸

I want to suggest however and explore further in this chapter that there is something “mythic” in the sense that Nancy will critique “myth” and the sense of a Hegelian “overcoming” of death, in Duras’s protagonist’s *survival*. I want to consider this by way of considering in more detail the significance of the film’s treatment of the horror of Hiroshima in the context of a Deleuzian reading of the film.

Gregg Lambert, reads the film by way of Gilles Deleuze on the basis of Deleuze key philosophical appropriation of Nietzsche’s notion of the “true world become fable”.¹⁹⁹ Deleuze makes a connection between the time and memory of cinema, with Resnais as a certain representative, and his acknowledgement of Nietzsche’s nihilism. This, especially, in relation to the ‘power of the false’ and ‘the true world become fable’, opens up a different thought of art, beyond its metaphysical determinant as adequation to the ‘Truth’. From this basis I take issue with Duras’s interpretation of nihilism by way of the ‘community of lovers’, as a means of absolutising the relationship between the politics of history and memory and art as the ‘truth’ of nihilism, the eternal return of an oscillation between oblivion and survival, as a kind of inverse Hegelianism, whereby ‘survival’ becomes a possession of the subject, in-itself and for-itself, by *working through* the encounter with the ‘other’.

Lambert’s reading traces some key themes from Deleuze using *Hiroshima Mon Amour* as an exemplary ‘text’. Deleuze’s writing on cinema, in *Cinema Two: The Time Image*, is profoundly influenced by Nietzsche’s destruction of the pretension of philosophical metaphysics to know the truth.²⁰⁰ Deleuze sees

¹⁹⁸ Ropars, M-C., 181-182

¹⁹⁹ Lambert, G., ‘How the true world finally became fable.’ In *The Non-Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze* (London: Continuum, 2002), 102. In this chapter of his book on Deleuze, Lambert traces the genesis of Deleuze book on cinematic time from Nietzsche’s reflections upon the crisis of truth and the will to power.

²⁰⁰ Lambert summarises this thus: Philosophy and Christianity are exposed by Nietzsche as producing nothing but the history of error, in the guise of truth, by way of the different ways of thinking about the relationship between truth and appearance, which has been at the core of philosophical and Christian thought from Plato to modernity. “Truth is accessible to the sage, the virtuous and religious man; it lives in him, whose figure is identical to the true world qua

cinema as itself taking up the *problem* of truth, centrally concerned as it is, in its very technique, with 'the world of appearances' and its relation to the 'real world'.²⁰¹

What is cinema after all, but a world constructed by pure appearances? However it is precisely the relation between this world of pure appearance and the so-called 'real and true world' that recapitulates the philosophical problem recounted [from Nietzsche] in a striking way; each director and film-maker must therefore take up and resolve this problem in a singular manner...According to Deleuze, it is precisely at that moment in the history of cinematographic narration when the movement image is abandoned in favour of the time image that cinema resolves the problem of its dependence upon 'the real and true world'.

expressed: 'I, Plato, I am the truth'. This is followed by the several avatars who substitute for this original identification of truth [with]...the truthful man. In the second stage, represented by the Christian world...the 'true world' is inaccessible in the present, but is permitted to the sage and virtuous man through suffering and penance. In the third stage, the true world becomes both inaccessible and undemonstrable, it cannot be promised...although it can be imagined, and this in itself becomes a kind of consolation. [qua Kant's philosophy]. In the fourth stage, the inaccessibility of the 'true world' becomes itself open to question and philosophy finds itself offended by the idea that the source of obligation and truth would derive from an unknown and unconscious source [qua positivism]. Finally, in the fifth and sixth stages, the idea that was found offensive and contradictory in the fourth stage now appears useless and no longer bears any power of obligation; it is no longer worthy of belief or of faith. It is Nietzsche himself who represents both these moments under the name of Zarathustra, a moment, which bears a Janus-face that casts a glance both forward and backward, and encompassing the entire unfolding of 'truth as a history of error'. Thus, the character of Zarathustra represents the twilight of the concept of truth, the death of the truthful man and the collapse of every model of truth (that is, the entry into the long night of insomnia, pessimism and even nihilism); however on the other slope his appearance marks the dawn that breaks into the long night of insomnia and promises the return of good sense and a spirit of happiness and joy (that is the affirmation of this world which comprises the meaning of the Eternal Return)." Ibid., 92-93. The ambiguity between these two slopes of 'passive' and 'active' nihilism, summed up in Nietzsche's aphorism, that with the vanquishing of 'the true' world the world of appearances vanishes as well, marks the very character of a certain cinema and literature in Europe post-WW II, of which *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is a key example.

²⁰¹ Deleuze, G., *Cinema Two: The Time Image*. Trans. Tomlinson, H. and Galeta, R., (London: Althone Press, 1989. Resnais features amongst Deleuze's list of post-World War II filmmakers who represented an entire shift in cinema from the 'movement image; to the 'time image'. Pre-war cinema could orientate itself to the combination of percept, affect and action in the creation of a unity between movement/action and situation. The crisis in time and history brought about by the horrors of World War II precipitates a crisis in thought reflected in cinema as a critical engagement with time. Action gives way to the complexities of time and memory, which belie the straightforward notion of the image as reflecting the external world and the subject of consciousness. This puts into question the relationship between seeing and 'reality' and truth and fiction. and this question becomes central to cinema, along with its preoccupation with the internal relations of time within the cinematic event. This is clearly relevant to *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

That is, cinema no longer seeks to represent the latter through the movement-image, which 'is linked to (real) sensory-motor descriptions', or through truthful narration, which is 'developed organically, according to legal connections in space and chronological relations in time', but rather, 'moves from pure description to falsifying narration from the point of view of the direct time-image'. As Deleuze writes, "...the new regime of the image (the direct time-image) works with pure crystalline optical and sound descriptions, and falsifying, purely 'chronic' narration. Description stops presupposing a reality and narration stops referring to a form of the true at one and the same time...description becomes its own object and narration becomes temporal and falsifying...[inasmuch as] [T]he representation of a truth in itself is revealed as a purely conventional means of establishing a relation between terms or elements of a given narration...the formal perspective of an elsewhere which is posited as being exterior to the plane occupied by appearances and which sets all appearance qua appearance in movement around its position which is virtual...However in the absence of this elsewhere, cinema discovers a new means of producing description that, although it unfolds in the proximity of a 'world' or 'a subject', does not find itself organised or coordinated by the terms that are located there, as if cinema has found the means of disconnecting itself from the 'true world' and becomes immanent to itself, a world of pure appearances."²⁰²

The point to note from this reading of the 'falsifying' function of cinema and its power through the time-image is that it undermines and renders ineffective any distinction between 'true' and 'false' in a 'moral-juridical' sense. On the contrary, it demonstrates the extent to which that which is deemed 'true' is that which has hidden appearances "and provides them with an alibi".²⁰³ In the context of Hiroshima this is a crucial question in terms of the effectiveness of a representation of the event, 'the showing of horror by horror', as the means by which the event can be *known*. So, if memory becomes a function of purely cinematic time for Resnais, it provides the opportunity to 'forge' an articulation of memory that allows for the exploration of those ethical-political questions concerning exactly how, for whom and by whom memory is 'produced', where

²⁰² Lambert, G., op.cit p. 94. The quotes from Deleuze are from *Cinema Two: The Time Image*, 132-135.

²⁰³ Deleuze, G., *Cinema Two: The Time Image*, 146.

the lines are drawn between past, present and future and how we can go beyond or get 'inside' the mere repetition of 'what happened' in the past tense.

Lambert demonstrates how the 'power of the false' is put to effect in the film. He takes up much of Duras's reading, which sets the film against the 'impasse' of the representational image, as found in the 'made to order documentary'.

Different instances or 'types' of banality are interwoven. The 'universal banality' of Hiroshima²⁰⁴ is put in conjunction with the most banal of literary/cinematic themes; the 'brief encounter' or 'one-night stand', "a banal tale, one that happens a thousand times every day. The Japanese is married, has children. So is the French woman, who also has two children. Theirs is a one-night affair"²⁰⁵, which is itself inflected with the 'war-torn' lovers scenario, "...Silly little girl/Who dies of love at Nevers/...Three-penny story/As it was for him, oblivion will begin with your eyes/Just the same/...Then, as it was for him, it will encompass you completely/Little by little/You will become a song."²⁰⁶ This particular conjunction of 'banal repetition', as Lambert says, "implicates one level of banality in another, producing variations within each order of repetition and causing an entirely different series to unfold around the name of Hiroshima."²⁰⁷, which undercuts its characteristic "globalised or epochal representation."²⁰⁸

Then there is the voice-over dialogue/debate accompanying the 'recollection-images' of Hiroshima, which both confuses and refuses the status of the representations of the event.

HE: You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.

SHE: I saw *everything*. *Everything*.

...

SHE: I didn't make anything up

²⁰⁴ "Banality expresses the kind of repetition which occurs when something is repeated a thousand times a day all over the world in which what is repeated bears both a minimum of difference and a maximum of amplitude. Therefore banal repetition, or 'the description of horror by horror' sees nothing since it represents a kind of representation that is too general, vague and amorphous.", Lambert, G., op.cit, 97.

²⁰⁵ Duras, M., 'Synopsis', 9.

²⁰⁶ Duras, M., 'Screenplay', 80.

²⁰⁷ Lambert, G., op.cit, 97.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 97

HE: You made it *all* up.

...

SHE: Listen...I know. *I know everything.*

He: No. *You know nothing.*²⁰⁹

These exchanges question both the ‘authenticity’ of the constructed images of Hiroshima and the woman’s appropriation of them as ‘her’ memory. The dialogue also raises the issue of the ‘recollection-image’ as an effect of cinematic representation, which cannot claim to present that which gives cause to, but withdraws from the image. Lambert puts it thus:

If the past cannot be the object of representation, because it functions as its profound cause, then any attempt to construct a series of recollection-images in order to gain access to ‘what happened’ at Hiroshima, in short to ‘Remember Hiroshima’ necessarily leads to an impasse – Nothing is “‘given’ at Hiroshima”²¹⁰ – and actually projects a false image or a sterile double of the past that is evacuated of all its force (that is, the duration that connects it to the living body of the present), producing instead its corpse, or an empty and dead zone in time.²¹¹

However, it is precisely ‘her’ appropriation of these images for ‘her memory’ which is to provide Hiroshima with its connection to ‘the living body of the present’, and this theme becomes increasingly evident in Lambert’s argument. He produces, I suggest, an ultimately Hegelian argument of ‘overcoming’ death, through its ‘passage through’ the particular ‘body’ to the universal of ‘survival’ which becomes the ‘force’ of truth against the ‘falsity’ of recollection images. Whether Duras herself endorses such a reading will be part of the argument I develop further, but here I continue with Lambert.

The ‘crisis of representation’, which marks the inadequacy of the ‘recollection-image’ is further reinforced by the ‘mirroring’ of the documentary by the ‘film about peace’ within the film. The artifice constituting this venture is well marked in the film, but an additional element of fantasy is also introduced. The ‘eternal

²⁰⁹ Duras, M., ‘Screenplay’, 15-21.

²¹⁰ Duras, M., ‘Synopsis’, p.9.

²¹¹ Lambert, G., op.cit, 100.

nurse in the eternal war'²¹² herself a fantasy figure, appears to be playing in a film in which a significant element, the political protest, emerges like a 'baroque parade', a peculiar, dreamlike 'festival procession' of the world. The woman, sleeping on the set where construction is underway, resembles a resting figure in the corner of a painting and reinforces the dream-like quality. Of course, the collective protest staged in the film is rendered as banal as it is fanciful. *Its* repetitious nature, re-marking the empty repetition of 'Hiroshima', and Hiroshima as a moment to be eternally repeated, is so far away from the event itself, that the event becomes reduced to the time it takes to say or chant 'Hiroshima'. Thus foregrounding the protest as an artificial construction of cinema both renders it and refers to it as impotent. The fact that the lovers are outside of this empty time and against the tide of this political reductionism is made evident by their struggle against the crowd, which gathers in momentum and menace as it moves in the opposite direction, thus offering another love-story cliché.

Such is the power of the false and the film's intent to demonstrate the falsity of documentary narration and all it subtends. But it is necessary to look more closely at what documentary narration does subtend, what is wrong with it and what Duras and Resnais put in its place?

It has already been suggested that the woman's view and memory come to skew the film away from the 'documenting' of the horror of Hiroshima and, indeed between love and personal memory, Hiroshima appears abandoned. Lambert argues that the opposite is the case. It is the 'made to order' documentary images that abandon Hiroshima. Lambert suggests the realistic documentary images produce an impasse. They are in effect, "a convention that is made in order to avoid or turn away from the subjective condition of mutual past moments, all of which converge around an artificially constructed present"²¹³, but as realist repetition, they imply a logic and claim a moral force, which suggests that the repetition of horror by the representation of horror contains an imperative of 'never again', combining an informative with a prohibitive function. However,

²¹² Duras, M., 'Synopsis' 10

²¹³ Lambert, G., op.cit, 108.

such representation has become “naturalised by its moral purposiveness and prohibitive function”, [such that], “...although it intends to prevent the event it represents from being actualized, *it must nonetheless assert the ‘nullity’ (the horror) of the event by reducing it to information that can be endlessly repeated without touching the place where the past actually resides.*”²¹⁴

It is this “prohibitive and pedagogic function which it projects upon future actors”²¹⁵, that renders those actors both passive before the image and confronting a future which is vague and indeterminate, on the basis of this passivity. Rather, as Lambert sees it, such “tautological images”²¹⁶ might be seen as “‘a sheet of the past’ encapsulating a moment when things might have been different, ‘when time could have taken a different course.’”²¹⁷ But in order to do so, as Lambert argues such a “sheet of the past” has to be confronted by a living connection.

Here, Lambert’s insistent criticism of the documentary image leads to a certain set of *assumptions* concerning the function of the lovers’ encounter and the remembering of the death at Nevers. Lambert reads the encounter as a moment when the past can become past for each of the lovers by way of a ‘living connection’ and the creation of a ‘memory for two’.

Contrary to this [the impasse of the recollection-image] we might see in ‘her’ story, as well as in his, a certain ‘living connection’ that is established with the past.; the desire to seek out the memory of Hiroshima where it was – at Nevers – and to establish a living connection that is signalled by the transference of the past of Nevers onto the past of Hiroshima.²¹⁸

This produces, in my view, both an ultimately Hegelian view of the *overcoming* of death at Hiroshima (negation, preservation, supersession), thus following a Hegelian *logic*, even as it is eschewing a Hegelian account, and a somewhat ‘innocent’ view of Duras’ thoughts on love, death and community. Lambert’s

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

Deleuzian reading is Hegelian in its logic inasmuch as it is reading that, whilst it is at pains to qualify any notion of a subjective point of view or personal psychology as the driving force of the film, and in fact, makes the claim towards an 'impersonal' or more exactly 'pre-personal' and 'pure' cinema, nevertheless it makes a number of claims for the force of *particular* memory transcending its particularity by gathering universality to itself, by way of what can be construed as a dialectical engagement with the 'other'. This can be understood here as the 'other' of memory, which by virtue of this Deleuzian account is also the 'other' of cinema, the struggle with and crisis of the representational image.

It is as if the very falsity of the representational image is negated and 'taken up' by the particularity of the cinematic narrative of Nevers, such that the woman's desire for a memory both for itself and in itself *is* fulfilled by its very *reconciliation* with a higher goal. "It is as though, through them, *all of Hiroshima was in love with all of Nevers.*"²¹⁹

"Deleuze raises the possibility that in their each forgetting his or her own memory and making a memory together, memory itself was detached from their persons and was now becoming world memory."²²⁰

Indeed, in the true Hegelian fashion of particular or familial bodies, subsuming the individual 'death', they necessarily traverse the passage to find their highest form of consciousness and being in the State. Lambert ends thus:

...their personal identities undergo a transformation as well, as if through the transformation of nothing in common to the common memory of Hiroshima-Nevers, the Japanese are present to the French, the East to the West...since these people are no one it raises the chance of seeing film as the story-telling function of a new society, of a people to come...²²¹

²¹⁹ Duras, M., 'Synopsis', 9.

²²⁰ Lambert, G., op.cit, 112.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 113.

This is additionally underscored by Lambert's treatment, through Deleuze, of the erotic in the film, Duras's sacrilege in conveying continuing 'love for the dead' instead of mourning them in accordance with the morally-juridical-permitted rituals of repetition. Lambert relays Deleuze's account of transference:

Concerning this necessary presence of transference (i.e. the eroticization of memory) within any 'living relation' to the past, Deleuze writes that:
...it is necessary to seek out the memory where it was, to install oneself in the past to accomplish a living connection between the knowledge and resistance, the representation and the blockage...the more theatrical and dramatic operation by which healing takes place-or does not take place-has the name of transference. Now transference is still repetition...if repetition makes us ill, it also heals us; if it enchains and destroys us, it also frees us, terrifying in both cases by its 'demonic' power. All cure is a voyage to the bottom of repetition.²²²

The erotic becomes another vehicle for transference of memory from its abstract to its living dimensions, in order to dialectise the relationship between the two. It is the erotic that establishes the memory 'right where it was', where the living dwell, as opposed to the 'in-itself' of abstract repetition. Eroticised repetition, i.e. transference, will 'heal' the trauma which is occluded by abstract repetition by the process of working through, however 'demonic' or 'painful' these dimensions of the erotic may be. Such an interpretation of the erotic appropriates it in terms of a necessary immanent embodiment, of joy, pain, and suffering felt right on the body in order to transcend them, *transformed* in survival.

By passing through all these stages represented by the journey that is enacted from Riva's [the woman's] point of view, Hiroshima is thus transformed from the name of death to the proper name of love that survives the horror of its own past. Thus the story is that of a survivor, one who survives the end of the world and who must live after Hiroshima. In telling her story she offers a way out of Hiroshima by filling the place with a love that is 'wonderful' as Duras writes.²²³

²²² *Ibid.*, 111

²²³ Lambert, G., op.cit 110.

This reading of the erotic and its relation to embodiment and the sublation of death re-invokes Hegel's thought on Incarnation and the body as the 'site' for an ontology of being which philosophy assumes as having an inside and an outside. On the basis of this, its beauty or decay, or its sheer corporeality, can be transcended and, on the basis of this, it can be understood to convey a certain communication and communion, one body to another.

On the basis of this account by way of Deleuze and Duras we encounter the problem of the memory becoming the possession of the subject subsequently universalised, or in this instance globalised as Hiroshima and Nevers, East and West, in a further move of transference. What is at stake is precisely how the film is understood as an aesthetic object, that itself recognises the "crisis of representation" to which it has to respond and how its response relates to an aesthetics and politics of memory.

The ultimate return to the possession of the embodied subject subsequently universalised recalls Hegel's *onto-theology* involving the body of Christ as a prime mediator between existence and transcendence that Jean-Luc Nancy argues, Hegel presents as the ultimate 'immanentism', transcending the particularity of body-as-appearance in its resorption in the continuing (universally grasped) life beyond this particularity. Here the necessity of the death of Christ's body is also the necessity of the resurrection and passing of the individual body to the 'body' that is the community living on. In works such as 'Corpus'²²⁴, Nancy demonstrates the persistence of this ultimately Christian philosophic-theological economy of the body. Whilst the inside/outside divide was pre-eminent in Plato, with the body as the mutable cavern of projecting shadows obscuring the true light of the soul, the theme persists in Hegel, with the exception that the 'cavern' is turned inside out, as the soul/spirit/idea exteriorises itself in particular forms to return itself to itself. Incarnation persists in the consideration of community as a body whereby the individual achieves self-realisation through the community that both protects and absorbs individuality. Difference and concrete individuality are thus subsumed and assimilated under a

²²⁴ Nancy J-L., 'Corpus.' In *The Birth to Presence*. (Palo Alto:Stanford University Press, 1993), 189-207.

logic of (en)closure and embodiment, as the community is the collective Subject as a work of interiority, always drawing its horizons by a process of the self-negating self-appropriation of exteriorisations in order to interiorise, to return the Subject to itself, where difference, individuality and even loss are sublated.

Literature and art are entwined in this as works, as mimetic 'embodiments'. They are that *in* which sense is given or as that *out of* which sense emerges, as the form enclosing the Idea or the form of the Idea itself. Or they are as interactions with other bodies, especially insofar as they are thought of as inter-subjective communications on the basis of a Hegelian inspired notion of the subject as for-itself in the other, in-itself and especially if they are also thought as signifying that which ultimately transcends their own substance.

Hegel did not equate art (in its highest vocation) with *the* Incarnation, but, arguably, he saw art as prelude to it, inasmuch as he sustains an eidetic reading of art, even as he acknowledges the aesthetic. He shares with Kant the idea of art's internal consistency, its finality without purpose and distinctiveness from cognition or appetitive desire. He shares Kant's impression of aesthetic sense; sensuous presentation has nothing to do with representation, description or conceptual clarification and transparency, but where he differs from Kant is in the necessity for this sense to be overcome. Where Kant accords to the aesthetic the role of the free play between the imagination and understanding; the imagination and sensibility as a mode of suspension in contemplation in the mode of the withdrawal of the objectivity of being and the pure scintillation of appearing, such that there is no essence or presence in this offering of the imagination but the *appearing* as such, Hegel understands this 'shining' that is beauty as an ontological vision or horizon *in* which and *through* which there is spirit. The aesthetic, thus for Hegel, even if it does not and cannot represent, but presents, *expresses*. That is its limit and limitation and precisely because art is sensuous and particular this is both its opacity and its *end* as if it is always already passing away in the face of the clarity and transparency of conceptual thought. This thought of art is an integral part of Hegel's mastery of the negative, which is a mastery over the necessary passing away, the death of the immediate and sensuous in the attainment of self-consciousness. 'Death' for Hegel is the

ineluctable and necessary 'end' surpassed and contained within the progress of spirit. This is the death that Jean-Luc Nancy inveighs against in *The Inoperative Community*, precisely because in claiming a philosophically authentic relation to death, it both idealises and refuses death as existent. Such idealisation is premised on a subject of self-consciousness to whom all 'others', including the very sense of the world, are returned as to the self-same. This applies even when, or especially when, considering the relation to the other as one of reciprocity or inter-subjective recognition.²²⁵

The entire process of signification and here bodies as significations rests upon this, inasmuch as signification involves something *as* something and thus appropriates the thing for the subject of signification in the manner of its being-within, or being-elsewhere, as the signified. The signifier must be surpassed or in some way returned to an origin or an 'end', either by spectacularly reflecting upon itself, erasing itself, or collapsing itself into the signified; Hence, the implication of literature and art, in so far as they have been philosophically determined. As Nancy states in 'Corpus':

...literature therefore offers us one of three things; either fiction, which is by definition bodiless, with its author, whose body is absent (in fact, we are imprisoned in his cave, where he gives us the spectacle of bodies); or bodies covered with signs, bodies that are only treasuries of signs (the bodies of Balzac, Zola or Proust...); or else writing itself abandoned or erect like a signifying body-such as for Roland Barthes 'the beating (enjoying) body' of the writer, the body signifying to the point of non-significance. In this way, we do not leave the horizon of the sign, of sense and of *mimesis*. Literature mimes the body, or makes the body mime signification...or mimes itself a body.²²⁶

²²⁵ Elsewhere, Nancy captures it thus, this time, in an argument with and against Heidegger, "Negativity is the operation that wants to depose Being in order to make it be: sacrifice, the absent object of desire, the eclipse of consciousness, alienation – and, as a result, it is never death or birth, but only the assumption of an infinite supposition. As such then, Being is infinitely presupposed by itself, and its process is the reappropriation of this pre-supposition, always on this side of itself and always beyond itself." Nancy, J-L., 'Being Singular Plural' in *Being Singular Plural*, 91.

²²⁶ Nancy, J-L., 'Corpus', op.cit, 193.

Hegel's thoughts on signification go to the heart of this matter. For all that a signifier may be incorporeal, "[it] recaptures its subjectivity out of an object, out of something lifeless when we read," nevertheless, "The simile would be more striking if the written word *were read away*, if *by being understood it vanished as a thing...*" says Hegel. (Emphasis added) ²²⁷

My point is that the readings of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, by way of a return to the signification of the body and its transference echo this persistent problem of acceding to transcendental meaning even as they deny it. Do we always come back to the body and sense acceding to intelligible sense?

Nancy has argued with regard to Hegel that the separation of idea from sensuous presentation with the passage to the immanence of religion and then philosophy and the concomitant exposure of the aesthetic to sheer exteriorisation, *releases* the aesthetic as precisely, in Nancy's terms, a force of exposure.

Hegel's 'reading as communion' is something to which we are constantly drawn, but the aesthetic, as the materiality of the signifier, is not so easily dispensed with. Hegel's speculative philosophical system both depends on and is ruined by it. Neither can Hegel overcome this by subjecting the aesthetic to the 'science of art'. As Nancy points out in Hegel's reading of the end of art as spirit and its

²²⁷ Hegel, G., *Early Theological Writings*. Trans. Knox, T.M., Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948), 185, quoted in Barnett, S., 'Eating My God.' In *Hegel After Derrida*. Ed. Barnett, S., (London: Routledge, 1998), 143. Stuart Barnett brings this thought precisely into the context of Incarnation, with the move in Hegel's thought from Christ as particular body to Christ as sign, a 'written' body inscribing his absence and necessary vanishing, recognised as such by the most wayward of those in the community, that is Mary Magdalene, who performs the *aesthetic* act of anointing Christ's feet, presaging this death. "Not only did they [the disciples] fail to grasp the situation but they even did injury to the holy outpouring of a loving heart. "why do you trouble her," says Jesus, "she has wrought a beautiful work upon me," and this is the only thing in the whole story of Jesus which goes by the name of *beautiful*." [emphasis added] Hegel's dilemma is that he needs the aesthetic, as body-as-sign, with the signifier as the mark of finitude, the 'already' passing away, the transcendent, but he also needs *this* to pass away. Hence the key moment in religion is the Last Supper whereby the love for the finite being, Christ, passes into the love of Spirit, love *as such* in Hegel's terms, as the founding of true community, in the eating of 'His' essence, the bread and wine. But in order to grasp this thought he needs both reading as eating and eating as reading, "the simile would *be more striking*, if the written word were read away..."

"just as in the enjoyment of the bread and wine not only is a feeling, for these mystical objects aroused, not only is the spirit made alive, but the objects vanish as objects."

passing away into the human form, as Christ, we are left with what Hegel sees as the memory of art's spirit, but right on the surface, as it were, of art, *as art, as the aesthetic that cannot be spirited away, the material 'remainder' that cannot be sublated.*²²⁸

The works of the Muse [now in the 'Museum'] now lack the power of the Spirit, for the Spirit has gained its certainty of itself from the crushing of gods and men. They have become what they are for us now – beautiful fruit already picked from the tree, which a friendly Fate has offered us, as a girl might set fruit before us...So Fate does not restore their world to us along with the works of antique Art, it gives not the spring and summer of the ethical life in which they blossomed and ripened, but only the veiled recollection of that actual world. Our active enjoyment of them is therefore not an act of divine worship through which our consciousness might come to its perfect truth and fulfilment, it is an external activity – the wiping off of some drops of rain or specks of dust from these fruits, so to speak...And all this we do, not in order to enter into their very life but only to possess an idea of them in our imagination. But, just as the girl who offers us the plucked fruits is more than their nature – because she sums all this up in a higher mode – *in the gleam of her self-conscious eye and in the gesture of offering* [emphasis added here], so too, the Spirit of the Fate that presents us with those works of art is more than the ethical life and actual world of that nation, for it is the *inwardizing recollection* in us of the Spirit which was still *exalienated* in them.²²⁹

It is not here possible to consider in detail Nancy's discussion of this extract, but it is evident, as he suggests, that at the moment that Hegel wants to give us art's dissolution, as religion, he reincarnates it, as a plasticity which gives us 'more than' historical description or the 'prose of thought', to 'possess an idea in our imagination', and in so doing, draws our attention not to incarnate form, but to a moment that can only be that of the sensuous as art, as such, no matter how much Hegel wants to immediately spirit it away as an inwardizing recollection, the *gleam* and brilliance of the eye and the *gesture* of offering.

²²⁸ In Nancy's essay 'The Girls that succeeds the Muses' he

²²⁹ Hegel, G., *The Phenomenology of the Spirit/Phenemonologie de l'esprit*. (Paris: Aubier, 1991), 455-456, quoted in Nancy, J-L., 'The Girl Who Succeeds the Muses.' In *The Muses*. Trans. Kamuf, P., (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 45-46.

It has not been said, it has been kept secret, that the girl has her provenance in art: she behaves like the concrete and contingent individuality of the son of man who would be God, pure spirit. But everything points to the fact that her silhouette is in effect copied from an album; it is an engraving whose line, quickly effaced, traverses or pierces for an instant the page of writing. She is herself a technique of writing whereby one is made to touch the fruits that no discourse can touch.²³⁰

These fruits are nothing but art as such, made brilliant by the painted eye.

The eye of the girl – and the gesture it lights up, by which it is lit up in its turn – this presented eye of presentation is nothing less than *entirely expose interiority*, but at the point at which it no longer even refers to itself as to some content or some latent presence, having become on the contrary *the patency of its very latency* and thus irreconcilable with any interiority.²³¹

The girl presents the Muses, and in that very presentation which is not a representation but an offering, a gesture ‘she’, as ‘figure of presentation’, suspends the *sense* of the dialectic, which would spirit her away, the dialectic of sense over sense. In Nancy’s essay *The Sublime Offering*, the *gesture* is brought into incisive contact with limit.

At the limit, one does not *pass* on. But it is there that *everything* comes to pass, it is there that the totality of the unlimited plays itself out, as *that which throws into relief the two borders, external and internal, of all figures*, adjoining them and separating them, *delimiting and unlimiting the limit thus in a single gesture*... The union with which one has to do in the sublime does not consist in coupling absolute greatness with finite limits; for *there is nothing beyond the limit*, nothing either presentable or nonpresentable. It is indeed this affirmation, ‘there is nothing beyond the limit’, that properly distinguishes the sublime (and art) from dialectical thought (and the end of art as its completion)... But, there is only limit, insofar as the latter sets itself off, sets itself up, and

²³⁰ Nancy, J-L., ‘The Girl Who Succeeds the Muses.’ op.cit, 53.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

upsets itself incessantly on its border, and consequently insofar as the limit, the unity divides itself infinitely in its own presentation.²³²

It is the thought of the reverberation of limit, the gesture, the offering, the sense that is always divided from itself, singular but immediately exposed in/as a plurality, that runs through Nancy's reading of art and politics and resists a thought of closure into a formal whole or the sublation of this plurality into a substantive essence or the assimilation of this sense into a figure that *completes itself*. The point is whether there is a way of reading *Hiroshima Mon Amour* that can engage with this limit and resist closing it as another "work of mourning".

I want to attend to Duras's reading of the film and suggest that her account of it presents an *inverse* Hegelianism, by way of a nihilism turned '*absolute*'. In acknowledging the impossibility of "knowing" Hiroshima, it takes this impossibility to the extremes of nihilism, in what can be thought as an apocalyptic desire, culminating in survival. This is the eternal return of the ecstasy of oblivion, as anything else would foreclose upon the 'other', both in terms of the memory of Hiroshima and the sort of community that it is (im)possible to think after Hiroshima.

The entire question of the way *Hiroshima Mon Amour* may be understood as a work of *art*²³³ may rest on the limit, as argued by Nancy, between art and the political in the time of nihilism. How *does* one address mass death, injustice, through *art*, after its 'death', after the gods have flown?

²³² Nancy J-L., 'The Sublime Offering', op.cit., .41-42.

²³³ I am begging the question here as to what falls under the 'name' of art, cinema as an 'art' form, its relationship to literature and the entire question of the 'false documentary', as named by Duras and more, and will return to this point. For the moment, from Derrida, here speaking of literature, which has had a different history of institution and dissemination, but perhaps the argument can apply 'elsewhere', "No exposition, no discursive form is intrinsically or essentially *literary* before and outside of the function it is assigned or recognized by a right, that is, a specific intentionality inscribed directly on the social body...Before coming to writing, literature depends on reading and the right conferred on it by an experience of reading. One can read the same text – which thus never exists 'in itself' – as - a testimony that is said to be serious and authentic, or as an archive, or as a document, or as a symptom – or as a work of a literary fiction that simulates all of the oppositions that we have just enumerated." Derrida, J., *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*. (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2000), 28-29.

It might be argued that the aesthetic can no longer address death in a way that can thematise it, and thus encapsulate it in a truth, in a system of values, which would pronounce the profundity of life and death and give shape to our sense of the world and community. Also, as Nancy has argued, an aesthetic freed from its role in presenting the absolute or the ideal existing elsewhere and thus an 'autonomous aesthetics' such as we understand by modernism, may yet reconstitute another form of absolute nihilism become myth.²³⁴

With regard to *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is Duras's 'nothing' of representation ultimately a negative Hegelianism, which encloses the otherness of death, history and memory in the finishing of art, "in its proper – and (this time) empty concept",²³⁵ supported by the figuring of woman as the truth of this 'nothing' of truth? Is the oscillation between death and love, love and death, inscribed upon the very skin of the protagonists at the beginning of the film and operating throughout, as each touch is at the same time a loss and separation and a kind of death and 'impossible' relation to the other a sign of an aesthetic *interiorisation*, self-reflectively critiquing representation and bound up with its own 'truth'; that is to say as a literary/cinematic *poetics* leading to its poetic absolutisation? Alternatively, is this a literary/aesthetic *exteriorisation* which presents the impossibility of any meaning and sense or retrievability in the wake of loss, as the 'truth' of truth's annihilation, a nihilism, bent on revealing the *lack* in the image, which *stands for* (represents) a lack of resolution or of any 'compensation' for these historical conflicts or prospect of change? Or, does the film utilise this cinematic narrative and images of the 'disappearing' love to expose us to a different thinking of the relation to the other, which escapes the aesthetic alienation possibly implied in the two alternatives just mentioned? Does the film avoid the aestheticised pathos of a 'truth' of pain, suffering and unhappiness, of loss and lack, inscribed in the figure of woman? That is to say, is there a sense in which this story and its central female protagonist can lead us,

²³⁴ In *The Sense of the World*, Nancy argues that the aesthetics of fragmentation, which is to say that of artworks no longer bound to the absolute totality, pace Hegel, precisely because it has taken on its own 'wholeness' and completeness, as autonomous fragment, and has, in turn become absolute and thus mythic, contributing to the myth of nihilism, the absence of sense, which is the myth of our time. Nancy, J-L., 'Art, a fragment.' In Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 123-139.

²³⁵ See Nancy, J-L., 'The Vestige of Art.' In *The Muses*, op.cit., 91.

not to something like mere pathos, but to a re-examination of an ethical and political relation to the other, which resists the assumption that we can master the death of the other *and* resists a sheer nihilism of unmasterability, instead posing another question of memory, survival and responsibility at/on the limit?

I approach this by following a distinct closeness, yet critical difference, between the thought of Derrida and Maurice Blanchot. It seems to me that Duras's reading has strong associations with Blanchot's approach to the impossibility of representation and the understanding of literature's relation to death as refusing any thought of a dialectical overcoming or sublation of death through the 'literary' *work*, with any attendant mythicisation or claim to catharsis. I contend however, that Duras does not avoid the latter.

Given that *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is a visual work of art, the attention to Derrida and Blanchot focuses upon the 'force' of the image. In his meditations on photography and mourning and the force of 'the image' in mourning, Derrida has argued that any inscription of the other, as a phenomenon, requires a structure of inscribed absence in its presence, and the peculiar power of photography is that the referent adheres as an absent presence producing in and of itself a spectral quality like the return of the dead. As such, the image, and particularly the photographic one, can indeed look back at us, but also 'come back', in memoriam, in us. This 'in us' is not an interiorisation. What 'is' in us is that which remains 'without', as image, as the dynamic or 'force' of the image, as the absolute other, the immemorial, so that the photograph or image, in its 'force' is a metonym for 'our' finitude, and in memoriam for the irretrievable deaths of all others, a singular plurality.

It would indicate an *absolute* excess and dissymmetry in the space of what relates us to ourselves and constitutes the 'being-in-us' the 'being-us', in something completely other than a mere subjective interiority: in a place open to an infinite transcendence. The one who looks at us, in us – and *for whom* we are – is no longer; he is completely other, infinitely other, as he has always been, and death has more than ever entrusted him, given him over, distanced him, in this infinite alterity. However narcissistic it may be, our subjective speculation can no longer seize and

appropriate this gaze before which we appear at the moment when, bearing it along with every movement of our bearing or comportment, we can get over the mourning *of him* only by getting over *our* mourning, by getting over, by ourselves, the mourning of ourselves, I mean our autonomy, of everything that would make us the measure of ourselves. That is the excess we bear in *ourselves*...Far away in us. In us, there where this power of the image comes to open the being-far-away. This excess also brings about the limitless enlargement of the image. Its power of dilation gives its greatest force in the mourning of the absolute of 'force'.²³⁶

This is the power, a certain passive power, a weak force, indeed a passion of the image, a coming into presence which is at the same time a withdrawal, a spectrality, which precisely does not return us to ourselves and as such, as Benjamin well knew, requires a certain *vigilance* of reading; hence the holding in tension, without dialectic, the phenomenality of the photograph and its apparatus, the 'physis' from the 'techne', and its internal (dis)articulation, its 'force' as such.

It becomes then a matter of how we read the images of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* in their refusal of dialectical resolution, their force which appears to resist any easy transference between viewer and text; leaving the viewer 'impotent' in relation to the deferral and distance, the 'nothing' that happens. Is it a question of whether this refusal amounts to a perpetual irresolvable melancholy or a certain resistant vigilance against the overcoming of the other, its force being in its very withdrawal from spectacle?

As previously discussed, in Derrida's meditation on the image, he articulates the (de)structuring of the subject, in as much as it is always crossed by the other, the absolute other of (im) possible interiorisation, the trace which 'is' in its very effacement, which he demonstrates in *Memoirs of the Blind* by way of the paradigm of the self-portrait in ruins and the dynamic of blindness and vision in

²³⁶ Derrida, J., 'By Force of Mourning.' In *The Work of Mourning*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 161.

bearing witness to the other.²³⁷ The 'other in me' is an event lost to sight, which is also the condition of any testimony and which, necessarily, requires an affirmation and a promise, as a *just* response to this anachronic, absolutely singular other 'to come'.

In *Memoirs*, Derrida considers this event of the 'other' to be so singular as to be withdrawn from and anterior to the presence required of 'seeing'. If so singular and anterior how can it be witnessed? How to testify? Faced with an anterior blindness to the singularity of the event, seeing and witnessing must be posed as 'hypothetical'. There can be no measure of the adequacy of its being seen and no ground upon which it can be based. The response is always already, 'anteriorly' blinded. Derrida's focus on drawing in *Memoirs* might suggest thinking of the trace as the appearance of the empirical mark in drawing, but the *trace* as always already re-mark, does not appear. It is the condition of the (im) possibility for the phenomenological and it is not phenomenalisable. Thus drawing of the event, in its possibility, is at the same time the drawing of the not seeing by the not seeing. This is where the self-portrait comes into play, but this is the self-portrait as ruin, the writing of its own 'blindness' into its seeing. The event's (as self-crossed-by-other) withdrawal cannot be separated from the self-appropriative act of drawing. The exteriority of the event necessarily passes into or through the self-consciousness of the one who draws. That self-consciousness meets its limit and its ruin in that both the anterior alterity of the event and the withdrawal of the event in the act of inscription which precede the subject makes full closure or interiorisation of the event/seeing impossible.²³⁸ Bearing witness to the event is effaced by the withdrawal of the trace, which at the same time makes it possible. All witnessing is 'blind'.

Witnessing substitutes narrative for perception. The witness cannot see, show and speak at the same time...No authentication can show in the present what the most reliable of witnesses sees, or rather, has seen and now keeps in memory – provided he has not been borne away by fire...²³⁹

²³⁷ Derrida, J., *Memoirs of the Blind*, op.cit.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, especially 57-69.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

But in this very effacement lies the *necessity* to counter-sign, to bear witness to the witness in the tracing of the trace, a response to that which *withdraws* from the narration and makes it possible. This is where the *finitude* of the other is at stake. For in ‘blindly’ (not) witnessing the retrace of the trace, in the *blink* of the eye, we receive and mourn the death of the other and the witness whose witnessing has disappeared; the trace of the other of whom next-to-nothing remains, the *ash* (for those who have perished in the fire), neither pure absence, nor pure presence. Derrida connects this finitude of the other, as ash, to the relation to the other in the gift and the ‘radical forgetting’, the destruction of ‘memory’ in ‘impossible’ mourning. The gift is the interruption of the economy of exchange; that which is received by not being returned, which cannot be calculated or pre-determined; that which also interrupts the economy of sacrifice, the giving of life and death.²⁴⁰ It is this gift, which requires the promissory ‘hesitation’ of double affirmation: the anterior ‘blindness in’ affirmation, and the pledge to affirm again. But there is a need to say more about the eroticism in this; to answer the question of *Hiroshima* not only as work of art or testimony, or art as testimony, but also as a story of love.

“...universal oblivion”

It is here that I take one further step (not) beyond *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a greater distance to bring a greater proximity, which will return again to the film. This step is to bring Derrida’s dynamic of blindness and vision into proximity with that of Maurice Blanchot, to attend more evidently to a certain *desire* to see. Michael Newman, in comparing this dynamic in Derrida and Blanchot, draws attention to Derrida’s concern to interrupt or break with the dialectic between transcendence and sacrifice, (the great Hegelian theme and all that has been suggested up to now about art, politics and community); the *sacrifice* of vision and its desire, for the sake of the transcendental law, which Derrida refers to as the necessary blinding in order to transcend to a higher vision,²⁴¹ (the mythology of the blind ‘seer’, but also the logic of transcendence as immanence in Hegel

²⁴⁰ For extended meditations on the gift and sacrifice see Derrida, J., *The Gift of Death*. Trans. Wills, D., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²⁴¹ Newman, M., ‘The Trace of Trauma: blindness, testimony and the gaze in Blanchot and Derrida.’ In *Maurice Blanchot, the demand of writing*. Ed. Bailey-Gill, C., (London: Routledge, 1996), 153-173.

and the logic of the signified, the 'truth' within, or over, the externality of the signifier). Derrida shows in *Memoirs* that there is no sacrifice without an undialectisable, an unsacrificable remainder. It is precisely the undialectisable absence/presence of the (de)structuring trace that breaks the sacrificial logic and, which, Derrida metonymically materialises in 'tears', the exorbitant ex-position of the eye, as affirmation of the other, desire crossed by fidelity as '*differance*', justice 'before' the law.²⁴²

Newman compares this with Blanchot's similar yet different articulation of blindness and vision, which suggests something other than the affirmation to which Derrida commits.²⁴³ Rather than Derrida's ethical *differance*, which deconstructs the dialectic of transcendence and sacrifice and involves an affirmation of the other as the trace, Blanchot's concern is located in the desire for the source of vision vis-à-vis seeing, in the terms of Lacan, the 'Real' vis-à-vis the 'gaze', the desire to see and not to see, the dynamic between *desire and its prohibition*,

The motif of vision and blindness in Blanchot is fundamentally concerned with the relation to desire and enjoyment. We shall find that in its absolute character, enjoyment (or *jouissance*) is connected on the one hand with death, and on the other with the indeterminate, the 'there is...' that is un-negatable being...this enjoyment would infect the ethical purity of any witness to the relation of the other as absolutely, irreducibly other. In other words...we need to supplement the philosophical account – whether transcendental or ethical or both – with one nuanced by the distinction between vision and gaze.²⁴⁴

Newman tracks the ways in which Blanchot returns in his writing and *as* his writing to this dynamic, the desire for the truth of seeing, which is necessarily

²⁴² See Derrida, J., *Memoirs of the Blind* op.cit, 127. Derrida calls this the 'abocular' hypothesis, "The revelatory or apocalyptic blindness, the blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes, would be the gaze veiled by tears...Between seeing and weeping, he sees between and catches a glimpse of the difference, he keeps it, looks after it in memory – and this is the veil of tears – until finally, and from or with the 'same eyes', the tears see."

²⁴³ What needs to be kept in view here is that this 'affirmation' takes place in the most hypothetical and aporetic of circumstances. I wonder if Newman gives that which is affirmed too much presence?

²⁴⁴ Newman, M., op.cit, 155.

‘lost’ in the telling. He refers to two episodes from Blanchot’s writing, each of which relates to Blanchot’s re-interpretation of myth (and his preoccupation with the relationship between myth, writing and the ‘mythic’, in the sense in which Nancy has defined it, is also pertinent here). In the fragments, which make up *The Writing of Disaster*,²⁴⁵ Blanchot reinterprets the Narcissus myth. Other interpretations miss the fact that Narcissus does not fall in love with himself, as he has no self, but instead falls in love with an *image* “and because the similitude of an image is not likeness to anyone or anything: the image characteristically resembles nothing.”²⁴⁶

Narcissus falls in love with the ‘nothing’ that is an image, but why?

“...because the image as such – because every image – is attractive: the image exerts the attraction of the void and of death in its falsity”²⁴⁷

Narcissus is attracted to the source, the void at the heart of vision, and transgresses the ‘law’ of desire, the distancing of the symbolic and the screen of the gaze, in favour of the immediacy of the Real. Narcissus does not die, as such, as he never really ‘lived’, but his ‘fate’ presages that of a ‘man’ who, in too much desiring the truth is consigned to the repetition of a ‘dying’ language in the interminable ‘last words’ of the echo. This myth is recast in Blanchot’s version of “(A primal scene?)”,²⁴⁸ where the child looks out of the window and at first sees the everyday reality of the garden and then ‘the same sky’,

suddenly open, absolutely black and absolutely empty, revealing (as though the pane had broken) such an absence that all since always and forevermore been lost therein – so lost that therein is affirmed and dissolved the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond.²⁴⁹

This (pre-symbolic) child sees beyond the gaze into the void, and it is a source of “the feeling of happiness...the ravaging joy to which he can bear witness only by

²⁴⁵ Blanchot, M., *The Writing of Disaster*. Tran. Smock, A., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72: As titled in Blanchot’s fragment, in brackets, with a question mark.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

tears, an endless flood of tears.”²⁵⁰ If the child sees the void of the origin and end, the glimpse of finitude, the absolute other of death, which is an overwhelming darkness of nothing, a blinding, it provokes an elation (and Newman worries about this ecstasy in the face of death) but one which is *witnessed* in tears, the ineluctable stuff of existence. But *if* this is affirmation of the other in the blinding, fleeting recognition of finitude, of the ability to die, it is immediately lost, “He says nothing. He will henceforth live in the secret. He will weep no more”.²⁵¹ The secret is that there is no secret that can be told, no affirmation, which could put an end to the irremissibility of dying, or speak the “other of death” which is absolutely “with-out” relation (nowhere and everywhere), to any language of testimony (unpronounceable, unavowable) or dialectical law of transcendence.

So where might this leave an ethical relation, *if* the immemorial other, which Derrida affirms, but as a matter of a call to believe (Do you believe this...Tears that see...Do you believe? I don’t know, one has to believe...) in the retrait of the trace, is for Blanchot forever ‘outside’, without relation?²⁵² What happens to testimony and art?

If the child becomes adult, keeps the secret of the other night, art, writing, the artist and writer are perhaps consigned to *The Madness of the Day*. In this recit,

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁵² *Memoirs of the Blind* begins with an epigraph quotation from Diderot, “*I write without seeing. I came. I wanted to kiss your hand...This is the first time I have ever written in the dark...not knowing whether I am indeed forming letters. Wherever there will be nothing, read that I love you*” Diderot, Letter to Sophie Volland, June 10, 1759 and there follows the question, “Do you believe this?” in the context of skepticism. “But skepticism is precisely what I’ve been talking to you about; the difference between believing and seeing, between believing one sees and seeing between, catching a glimpse – or not. Before doubt ever becomes a system, *skepsis* has to do with the eyes. The word refers to a visual perception, to the observation, vigilance, and attention of the gaze [*regard*] during an examination. One is on the look out, one reflects upon what one sees, reflects what one sees by delaying the moment of conclusion”. The translators point out that “Do you believe this?” repeated again in the next to last line of the work can be read in a number of ways, from the every day “Do you think so?” to the more literal “Do you believe?” to the more incredulous “Do you really believe this?” and that the opening phrase of the substantive text can refer, be a response to, both to the epigraph (as an outside inside the text) and the conversation which makes up the text. The matter of response, vigilance, attentiveness, reflection as delay are all matters of appeal to the reader, the receiver of testimony, affirmation (or not) as the countersignature. See *Memoirs of the Blind*, op.cit, 1. I am not sure that the difference between Derrida and Blanchot is quite as Newman suggests. It may be a matter of how one reads and an infinitesimal point of translation within the same thought, which nevertheless may be a great deal.

there is another connection with the recasting of myth, that of Orpheus and Eurydice. The “*law*” of desire that would circumscribe the artist to the bringing of darkness into light, is transgressed by Orpheus, who chooses to look back upon Eurydice and therefore loses her forever. The paradoxical demand of writing is that it compels the law of the gaze *and* that which it prohibits, the ‘other night’ and, as such compels, the measureless desire for Eurydice-*as-lost*, the impossible mediation of the absolute other. The ‘work’ which ‘unworks’ at the same time is thus “consecrated in impossibility”.²⁵³ Such a scene is played out again in *The Madness of Day*, in which the ‘man’ is *almost* blinded by the shards of glass crushed in his eyes. Seeking the condition of possibility of seeing, the gaze, as such, it implodes in his eyes, as the *pas au dela*, the step (not) beyond, desire and punishment in one, the *passion* (desire/suffering) of writing. Blanchot ends this recit, in which the man, or more exactly *justice* in the man (...one of *her* aims was to make me “see justice done”), is caught between desire (for) the “feminine element...insatiably intent upon my glory (jouissance)” and the ‘law’ intent upon his telling the story, “Tell us, just exactly what happened”, followed by the non-affirmative injunction (or is it an appeal?) “A story? No. No stories, never again.”²⁵⁴ The irony, of course, is that he has ‘just’ told the story which is the story we are reading and which is ‘out-of-time’ with the ‘law’ of chronology, “That was the beginning...Now get down to the facts.” But the moment, the event, has already happened and *yet is expected still to come*. And the double irony is that “No stories, never again” is already uttered in a story.

Newman suggests this self-cancelling gesture marks an abyssal never-present which, absorbs the entirety of text, cancelling both the narration, which is an inevitable betrayal of the unrepresentable other, always too late and ‘missing the point of time’ *and* cancelling the possibility of the *moment* of blindness as the retrait, the alterity of the trace, the blinding blink of the eye, as the resistance to closure, the reference to an always already absent presence in Derrida.

²⁵³ Blanchot, M., ‘Orpheus’s Gaze.’ In *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Smock, A., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 174. “The work is everything to Orpheus except that desired look where it is lost. Thus it is only in that look that the work can surpass itself, be united with its origin and consecrated in impossibility.”

²⁵⁴ Blanchot, M., ‘The Madness of the Day.’ in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*. Trans Davis, L., Auster, P., Lamberton, R., (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1999), 199.

Derrida insists upon a remainder or residue as a reminder of the non-present *in the very presencing of the present*. In the act of transcendence – as is stressed over and over again by Derrida – sacrifice does not join, make possible a certain economy, without an excluded, forgotten remainder, even if that remainder is less than nothing, ash, cinders...It is the other who comes to ruin – and makes possible – the self-relation of the self-portrait, at once ruined [no return to the self-same] and made possible by the other person and by the alterity of the law, and beyond the law, the *pleurantes* – a ruin which in turn makes possible the exposure to the other, the pledge of faith, the witness given and the avowal, *aveu*. In witness as avowal and response, Derrida moves towards an affirmation that Blanchot does not allow himself, except in the form of enjoyment, in tears, of the ‘primal scene’, always already lost since it occurs even the first time as an absence, to be remembered in an Orphic art which, by a paradoxical double movement seeks to grasp the lost object in its very withdrawal.²⁵⁵

Newman’s argument is that rather than move to an ‘outside’ the law, brought inside as the remainder which ruins the dialectic of transcendence and sacrifice, Blanchot moves to another form of ‘transcendence’. This is an *absolute*, by seeking the condition of the possibility of seeing, which can never be seen, a transcendental blinding driven by desire, blind writing which can only be a blind vigilance, “No stories, never again” as the refusal to testify by way of a narrative mediation, or an empirical present, to that which has never been present.

...a refusal precisely to give up an enjoyment which would have to be sacrificed for the sake of the writing of the recit; the deferment of immediate enjoyment would be the condition of writing. The refusal to testify coupled with the fantasy of the law being personified as a lover, suggests an unwillingness to take up a place as a subject of the law and, indeed the necessity of transgression...If there is affirmation, it can only be of loss, of absence, of the ‘nothing’ that circumscribes a void that is not itself nothing but rather something unspeakable...the traumatic moment is where the work encounters the impossibility of its origin in the absence of any present. This must be, for Blanchot, the sense of Judaic prohibition of images, which is the very condition of vigilance without expectation, living on in a vigilant blindness or blind

²⁵⁵ Newman, M., ‘The trace of Trauma’, op.cit, 166-7.

vigilance...*expecting nothing... Consequently, waiting and watching, for suddenly awakened and, knowing this full well henceforth, never wakeful enough.*²⁵⁶

Newman's argument perhaps puts too much emphasis on the refusal of the present and refusal to testify, neglecting the structure of time in the recit, as an 'impossible' combination of the *already past* and the *imminent*. It is no simple refusal, but a much more enigmatic resistance to a certain 'law' of presence and testimony, complicated by the *narrated* rejection of narrative, "No stories, never again".

In taking a different tack, I refer to the responses of both Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida to Blanchot's later text, *The Instant of My Death*.²⁵⁷ Without going into detail, as I only wish to draw upon certain key elements in this recit, this is a story (possibly autobiographical) narrated by (possibly) Blanchot, of an incident in the Second World War in which a young man of noble birth is ordered from his Chateau by a Nazi Lieutenant and set before a firing squad. The narrator attempts to articulate the feelings of the young man at this instant, facing a firing squad:

I know – Do I know it – that the one at whom the Germans were already aiming, awaiting but the final order, experienced then a feeling of extraordinary lightness, a sort of beatitude (nothing happy however) – ssovereign elation? The encounter of death with death?

In his place, I will not try to analyze. He was perhaps suddenly invincible. Dead-immortal. Perhaps ecstasy. Rather the feeling of compassion for suffering humanity, the happiness of not being immortal or eternal. Henceforth, he was bound to death by a surreptitious friendship.²⁵⁸

At the moment he is to be shot, "Comrades from the maqui" create a disturbance. The firing squad, which turns out to be made up of Russian collaborators, let him

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁵⁷ Blanchot, M., *The Instant of my Death*. Trans. Rottenberg, E., (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988), page numbers?

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

escape. Three young farmers are killed instead, their farms burned to the ground, in a conflagration. The Chateau is left intact save for the loss of a manuscript. Feeling “the torment of injustice” at this situation, there remained still for the young man, as the narrator attempts to testify:

the feeling of lightness that I would not know how to translate: freed from life? the infinite opening up? Neither happiness nor unhappiness. Nor the absence of fear and perhaps already the step beyond. I know, I imagine that this unanalyzable feeling changed what there remained for him of existence. As if the death outside him could only henceforth collide with the death in him. “I am alive.” No, you are dead.²⁵⁹

Later, marked by a blank in the page and a change of ‘voice’, ‘he’ returns to Paris and the hub of French intellectuals at the end of the war and meets Malraux. He, too, had been captured and lost his writings. But “It was only reflections on art, easy to reconstitute, whereas a manuscript would not be.” The story ends with a change to the first person, recalling “the instant of my death”.

“What does it matter? All that remains is the feeling of lightness that is death itself or, to put it more precisely, the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance.”²⁶⁰

In responding to this text, Lacoue-Labarthe points to “two matrices or two ‘primal scenes’ [which] dominate the West and its literature, or the West as literature. Both of them have their origin in works by Homer: the scene of anger, which the *Iliad* inaugurates, and the scene of experience...whose truth is illuminated at the very centre of the *Odyssey*, the famous *nekuia*, Ulysses’ descent into hell, his crossing of death.” The primal scene of myth cannot be so easily cancelled out or avoided; indeed, the dread is that experience and its testimony may only be accounted through an ‘imitatio’ of myth.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11

²⁶¹ Lacoue-Labarthe, P., ‘Fidelities.’ *Oxford Literary Review* 22 (2001). Lacoue-Labarthe recalls Thomas Mann, writing in 1936 “...I am feeble or naïve enough to believe in the accuracy of Thomas Mann’s remarkable analysis that he presented for Freud for his eightieth birthday in 1936 (a key date in the Fascist era of our time), on ‘life in myth’ as a ‘life in quotation marks’ –

Lacoue-Labarthe identifies these two 'primal scenes' in Blanchot, "...neither is it so difficult to see how precisely these two scenes are conjoined in *L'Instant de ma mort* where a protest against injustice...is combined with the astounding joyfulness of the infinitely paradoxical experience of death."²⁶² But Blanchot makes a discrete turn away from myth in his very reference to its 'primal scenes', connecting with the question of testimony. The very *conjunction* of these two primal scenes disturbs the 'literary' order, but if we examine this conjunction and its recurrence in the story, *each time* it is expressed, whilst it may first follow the mystical 'language', the rhythm or the tone of a 'mythic' description of a near death experience, we cannot help but recognise the passion of Christ the first time it occurs, it says something very different from out of this vocabulary, it puts it in doubt and into question, and gradually effaces its 'mythic' connotations by the final 'erasure' of the 'as if' of representation, without of course erasing it, as we are reading, in the mode of the "as if" and are still drawn to the narrative voice.

The greatest hesitation and doubt is cast by the "I know – Do I know" of the first passage, followed by a series of questionings, then the 'perhaps' and the "I will not try to analyze" until the shift of ground and tone, the assertive "Henceforth, he was bound to death by a surreptitious friendship." Again, the same movement in the second passage, from "I would not know how to translate", then a series of question marks, "I know, I imagine" then "perhaps", the "unanalyzable", the "as if", until the impossible affirmation, the affirmation of the impossible, "I am alive. No you are dead"; then the third time, no question, affirmation and even precision and in the first person, "the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance".

an *imitatio*, if you like, and a sacred repetition, a religion in the sense of *re-legere*, is nothing less than repetition itself...According to Mann, our historical attitude, as well as our so-called daily existence, just as much as literature, are bound by this compulsive law (to say nothing precisely of the unconscious)." One must recall here Walter Benjamin, another writer writing in 1936 about the mythic power of technological representation as that which gives the masses not their right, "but instead a chance the express themselves".

²⁶² Lacoue-Labarthe, P., 'Fidelities.', op.cit., 138.

This appears to be a move from myth to 'truth', the truth of a testimony which would reject the mythic, 'life as imitation' and the 'mythic' experience of 'near death' as a sharp "deliverance from this world" or an immortality in being inured of death. And these latter 'experiences', the stuff of myth, Blanchot both borrows from *and* resists.

What Blanchot demonstrates is the extent to which testimony, too, is qualified by speculations, hesitations, questions, these gestures towards grasping the ungraspable, with which Blanchot seeks to undermine myth, in favour of the anachronic distance between the absolutely anterior and the imminent, which is also beyond the 'norms' of testimony.

This is to neither give in to myth nor to suggest that testimony is inevitably mythic, (although it is necessarily something of a representation, whereby the absolute singularity of the event has to enter into the general structure that is language), but instead, this is to hold myth and testimony, fiction and truth at a discreet distance, without collapsing one into the other, without dialectising, in order to think the 'other' of testimony, just as the instant is divided from the instance, but nevertheless *abides* in the trace, both the insistent imminence and the "always already past" trace of testimony.²⁶³ That is why there is no present, which is not to say that there is *simply* absence or a void, but a *distance*, ever to be held open between the "neither...nor". This is the distance out of which the 'other' can be thought and indeed the absolutely other from/for whom there can be no testimony, except the trace of testimony.

²⁶³ Derrida's response to Blanchot's text is a constant meditation on the matter of testimony. On the 'instant' he says, "When I commit myself to speaking the truth, I commit myself to speaking the same thing, an instant later...But this repetition carries the instant outside of itself. Consequently the instant is instantaneously, at this very instant, divided, destroyed by what it nevertheless makes possible – testimony", and refers to Blanchot's statement concerning, "The imminence of what has always already come to pass" thus, "...an *unbelievable* tense... [but unbelievable in the context of the *belief* which *normally* conditions *testimony*]It seems to deport what has always, from all time, already taken place toward the coming of the to-come. Indeed one must say *unbelievable*, for insofar as all testimony essentially appeals to a certain system of belief, to faith without proof, to the act of faith summoned by a kind of transcendental oath, well, faith, faith in the temporal order, in a certain commonsense ordering of time, is what guarantees the everyday concept, especially the juridical concept and the dominant concept of attestation in European culture, that in which literature has been established, thus confirming or disturbing the very order that conveys it." Derrida, J., *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, op.cit., 49 and *passim*.

The Neuter, the gentle prohibition against dying, there where, from threshold to threshold, eye without gaze, silence carries us into the proximity of the distant. Word still to be spoken beyond the living and the dead, *testifying for the absence of attestation*.²⁶⁴

Certainly here is a resistance to myth, but to affirm the other as *the* negative of myth in its place runs the danger of signifying the other, as myth's 'vital negation', and we are back with Hegel, metaphysics and eschatology all over again. Unable to escape myth entirely, Blanchot writes from the 'outside' *inside* the mythic, *to* exact the reserve, the *distance*, out of the mythic, which is the enigmatic remaining and itself dying, "I am alive. No, you are dead".²⁶⁵ Desire, the erotic, its *jouissance* and the 'innocence' of that which is before language (hence the child in the 'primal scene') conjoin with the ungraspability, the impossible necessary instant of death, in the anachronic moment of the anterior and the instant always in abeyance, the *abiding* instant of death, to exact the difference, which is to refuse the ecstasy of *survival*, the punctual view of death as the 'final' end, or any other view of death, which would in a sacrificial way, give *meaning* to life. Lacoue-Labarthe puts it thus:

If we deliver *deliverance* from its metaphysical and eschatological excess (the liberation from this world), if we refrain from dreaming in death, of the hope of living on – what we have is an innocence, this happy state before language-...before *muthos*... 'A Primal Scene' states perhaps nothing other than this hope for in-nocence (a completely different hope from that of a survival) and perhaps offers us nothing

²⁶⁴ Blanchot, M., *The Step Not Beyond*. Trans. Nelson, L., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 76. Blanchot has referred to the question of the neuter, the other and 'distance' variously throughout his work, for instance: "The other is neither one nor the other, and the neutral that indicates it withdraws it from both...always establishing it outside the term, the act or the subject through which it claims to offer itself." Blanchot, M., *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Hanson, S., (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 385. "The Other does not let itself (to?) be thought either in terms of transcendence or in terms of immanence; an experience which one must not be content to say that language only expresses it or reflects it, *for it only arises in the space and time of language*." *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁶⁵ This reserve is articulated in Blanchot again in reference to the neuter, thus: "withdrawing from [the work] every privileged point of interest (even afocal)...not allowing it to exist as a completed whole...to speak at a distance, preserving this distance without *mediation* and without *community*, and even in sustaining the infinite distancing of distance – its irreciprocity, its irrectitude or dissymmetry." Blanchot, M., *The Infinite Conversation*, op.cit., 386.

other than, at the edge of silence, the discreet effacement of myth.

Which is to say of evil?²⁶⁶

If Lacoue-Labarthe's reading moves towards hope (a completely different hope) as against Newman's less hopeful movement, perhaps there is a need to make more of the *ambiguity* at stake in Blanchot, which brings me closer to *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. This ambiguity, cryptically expressed in the negative of "neither...nor" to differentiate it from the positive ambiguity of meaning, modulates, I think, even Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of a prior 'in-nocence'.

In Blanchot's texts there is an *equivocation* between the word and its 'shadow', the 'otherness of sense'. It is as if in order to overcome that punctual duality between life and death, sense is suspended, not in the way the Nancy argues that the 'essence' of sense is suspended in favour of *existence* (which does not mean the erasure of the non-existent), but that sense is suspended, is rendered equivocal, ambiguous, nothing but the resemblance of distance, some what *in favour of* non-existence (here I am aware of swinging back to Newman's argument). Yes, it is the desire for the 'memory', which cannot be memory in the 'usual' sense, with all that implies in terms of time, but instead, the insistent anachrony of anteriority and imminence of the non-existence, which must be acknowledged as 'in us'. How does that helps us, not to 'end', no final end or teleology intended, not to dialecticise, no 'end' in the absolute fulfilment of the idea even as the idea of nothing ?

It is perhaps a fine line between evoking justice for the dead, an ethics of remembering and the other, which does not reduce the other to the same and *desiring this* as something *abyssal*. Blanchot knows this only too well and says as much with, direct reference to Marguerite Duras, in a footnote no less, (thus refusing to end), a footnote to 'The Narrative Voice', in which Blanchot describes the equivocation in language, that resistance to affirmation that is there, if we listen for it, where,

²⁶⁶ Lacoue-Labarthe, P., 'Fidelities', op.cit., 149.

...it could be that telling (writing) is drawing language into a possibility of saying that would say without saying being and still without denying it either...establishing the centre of gravity of speech elsewhere, where speaking is not a matter of affirming being nor needing negation in order to suspend the work of being... the narrative voice...the most critical one that can communicate unheard...that is why we tend, as we listen to it, to confuse it with the oblique voice of unhappiness or the oblique voice of madness.²⁶⁷

Then the footnote. It is worth quoting in full, as it perhaps sums up *Hiroshima Mon Amour* in one tentatively written paragraph,

This voice – the narrative voice – is the one I hear, perhaps, rashly perhaps, rightly, in the tale by Marguerite Duras that I mentioned a short while ago. The night forever without any dawn – that ballroom in which the indescribable event occurred that cannot be recalled and cannot be forgotten, but that one's forgetting retains – the nocturnal desire to turn around in order to see what belongs neither to the visible nor the invisible, that is to stay for a moment, through one's gaze, as close as possible to strangeness, where the rhythm of reveal-oneself-conceal-oneself has lost its guiding force – then the need (the eternal human desire) to bring about acceptance in another person, to live once again in another person, a third person, the dual relationship fascinated, indifferent, irreducible to any mediation: a neuter relationship, even if it implies the infinite void of desire – finally, the imminent certainty that what has happened once will always begin again, will always betray itself and reject itself: these really are, it seems to me, the 'co-ordinates' of narrative space, the circle where, as we enter it, we incessantly enter the outside. But who is telling the story here? Not the reporter, the one who formally – and also a little shamefacedly – does the speaking, and actually takes over, so much so that he seems to us to be an intruder, but rather that which cannot tell a story because it bears – this is its wisdom, this is its madness – the torment of impossible narration, knowing (with a closed knowledge anterior to the reason-unreason split) that it is the measure of this outside, where, as we reach it, we are in danger of

²⁶⁷ Blanchot M., 'The Narrative Voice.' in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, M., Trans. Davis, L., Auster, P., Lamberton, R., , (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1999), 468.

falling under the attraction of a completely exterior speech: pure
extravagance.²⁶⁸

This is a primal scene of literature again, the Orphic myth, writing itself, art itself, testimony to the 'outside', but if Blanchot stays on the brink of the void, does Duras succeed by falling?

*"She has succeeded in drowning him in universal oblivion. And it is a source of amazement to her...They look at each other without seeing each other. Forever."*²⁶⁹

If the *Hiroshima Mon Amour* ends by returning us to the beginning, the universal oblivion that the bombing of Hiroshima is, if the film shows this, where does it leave us? Is the image, as Blanchot says, 'intimate' because,

"...it makes our intimacy an exterior power that we passively submit to: outside of us, in the backward motion of the world that the image provokes, the depth of our passion trails along, astray, brilliant."²⁷⁰

Is it always a *backward* motion of the world? Is it not also, as Nancy says a matter of a 'stance', an 'attitude' and a 'deportment'?²⁷¹ What way is she facing, how does she stand vis-à-vis the world? Arguably the woman in the film is driven by a desire, which is not an openness or exposure to the happenstance of the world as it 'is' with all its pain and suffering. Despite the 'chance' encounter, her desire is premised upon that which has *already* constituted her 'being', as one who touched death, as one who lost the opportunity to die for love and gives

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 469.

²⁶⁹ Duras, M., 'Screenplay', op.cit., 83.

²⁷⁰ Blanchot, M., 'Two versions of the Imaginary.' In *The Gaze of Orpheus*. Ed. Adams Sitney, P., Trans. Davis, L., (Barrytown: Station Hil Press, 1981), 82-85.

²⁷¹ See Nancy, J-L., 'Pain, Suffering and Unhappiness.' In *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 148. Although Nancy quotes Blanchot, I think he takes a slightly different stance, "Neither happiness nor unhappiness [the Blanchot quote] but another *happenstance*, neither negative sense nor negation of sense, giving their due to both resistance and suffering...and for this reason ceasing to sublimate the evil in the good, taking a break from all theodicy or logodicy, and calling finally for another *stance* of sense or for another *stance* in the face of sense. For the whole question can be summarised like this: what *attitude* to adopt before, or in, self-differing and self-deferring sense.... it is always a question of maintaining oneself in the face of the eclipse, fainting, syncopation, or collapse of sense...It is always a matter of this. But all modes of deportment have been altered...it is necessary to invent how to give some kind of deportment to existence – to nothing but existence...The structure of existing is...the *toward*. Neither toward happiness nor toward unhappiness without being, first of all toward the *happenstance* that the world is".

to the Japanese man her survival as a *possession*. Her encounter with death, touched by the outside, is enclosed within the horizon of being that she is, her survived 'self'.

...What she tells the Japanese is this lost opportunity which has made her what she is. The story she tells of this lost opportunity literally transports her outside herself and carries her toward this new man.

To give oneself, body and soul, that's it.

That is the equivalent not only of amorous possession, but also of a *marriage*.

She gives this Japanese – *at Hiroshima* – her most precious possession; herself as she now is, her *survival* after the death of her love – *at Nevers*.²⁷²

There is something mythic about this. Her desiring body and its skin, to recall the motif introduced earlier, already circumscribes within its horizon, her body, as survived self, the death that she has borne within, "indescribable event...that one's forgetting retains...impossible narration", until the moment when that 'already-given' can be given again, sacrificed to the abyssal 'void of desire'. If that anachronic moment is already the possession of one who would give it, then it is already circumscribed within the horizon of a self, and she becomes the *embodiment* of truth. Her desiring body, her skin undergoes a Christ-like passion.

As Nancy has argued, we can arrive at a mythic absolutisation from the point of view of an extreme relativism, an absence of all value which we can understand as nihilism. The relativism of nihilism becomes the absolute myth of our time.²⁷³ Because of this there is no reason to be convinced that we have moved beyond the Hegelian problematic and the sensible presentation of the idea, which haunts visual representation and this is why, if we read the film with Duras, the skin and bodies which provoke the viewers sense of touch in *Hiroshima mon Amour* do not displace or evade the problem of visual representation. In the beginning of the film the viewer is touched by the skin of bodies as they positioned in time, space, movement and appearance in relation to the viewer and as the viewer views these bodies they turn to ash before the viewer's eyes. I have begun to

²⁷² Duras, M., 'Appendices: Portrait of the French Woman' in 'Screenplay', op.cit., 112.

²⁷³ Librett, J., Translator's foreword Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1997 x

consider this a metonym for the whole film from Duras's perspective. The ash relates to Hiroshima and the "nothing" and "mutual impotence"²⁷⁴ that befalls the lovers, the memory of love and our historical memory; the nothing that Duras pursues as an "Idea" in the work of art. Touching turns to the memory of touch; bodies that emerged from darkness into day turn to the grey of memory; time passing turns to killing time; the space of Hiroshima recedes to that of Nevers, until "*she has succeeded in drowning him in universal oblivion.*"²⁷⁵

The lover and the room disappear as she enters 'the world' and the survival that she will "give". Duras appears to present the sacrifice of love, the historical singularity of Hiroshima and Nevers, time, space, light and darkness to a higher implacable light of truth; the truth of: "Impossible to talk about Hiroshima. All one can do is talk about the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima".²⁷⁶ Skin and body are here sacrificial (the Christ-like passion) but is this to the 'void'? This does not escape the metaphysical assumption of art and the presentation of the Idea for here we have nihilism become absolute in the quest for the presentation of the Idea of "nothing" as the gift of survival.

People want to signify- world, filth, technics and silence , subject and its absence, body, spectacle, insignificance, and pure will-to-signify... Thus the demand or the postulation of the idea lets itself be grasped in its nakedness, in the flesh. All the more naked and laid bare in that these demands and postulations are the more deprived of both referents and codes for those referents (which in the past were religion, myth, history, heroism, nature, feeling...sensation itself...right up to self-referential form). Where this demand for the Idea is displayed...art exhausts and consumes itself; all that remains is its metaphysical desire...the gaping hole stretched towards its *end* ...A nihilism, therefore, but as the simple reversal of idealism, If for Hegel art is finite because the Idea comes round to presenting itself in its proper element, in the philosophical concept, for the nihilist art finishes itself by presenting itself in its proper- and empty- concept.²⁷⁷

But as Nancy has said, skin is neither the source of the full presence of sense (mythicism) nor the source of the full absence of sense (nihilism). Skin is the organ of touch and *exposure*. It is, Nancy states, "continually passing from one to the other, always coming back to itself without either a locus or a place where

²⁷⁴ Duras, M., 'Synopsis' 13

²⁷⁵ Duras, M., 'Scenario' 83

²⁷⁶ Duras, M., 'Synopsis' 9

²⁷⁷ Nancy, J-L., *The Muses* 91

it can establish a self, and so always coming back to the world, to other bodies to which it is exposed, in the same gesture that exposes them to itself.” And “the minutest look is a touching that brushes against it, and exposes it once more.”²⁷⁸ Skin does not in this sense belong to a subject. It is detached attachment. It is ‘attachment by its detachment’ (exposed to the outside) and touching is the gesture at the limit. Touching/being touched is self-touching and its interruption, but there is no subject/self prior to touching. The ‘subject’ comes to his/herself at the moment s/he is touched, as we might say, from Nancy, in a singular/plural being-in-the-world. That is what exposure (to, as) world is. This is existence without any call or nostalgia for a founding or grounding essence or presumed subject. Neither is it a veiled nihilism. It is not gesture towards something to dissimulate a nothing, the abyss. It is the ineluctable ‘happenstance’ of being *toward* the world with others.²⁷⁹

In that sense, skin, body and soul as signifiers of an impossibility, are not ‘hers’ to give, other than insofar as she appropriates exposure as ‘her survival’ and turns it, in a metaphysical gesture into a gift of desire, *but within an economy of possession and exchange*, the gift against which Nancy argues, in favour of the *offering*.

The appropriation of giving and the giving of the inappropriable configure the originary chiasmus of philosophy – and of sense...Thus neither the desire nor gift but, rather the following: that the desire of the gift should desire essentially not to appropriate its ‘object’ and that the gift of desire should give that which cannot be given and should give no ‘subject’ of an ‘object’. The one *offered* to the other...left to the discretion of a chance and/or decision whose agent or actor, neither desires nor gives but merely *exists*.²⁸⁰

There is a need to think the non-knowledge, the out-of-time moment, that *unbelievable* extremity between an absolutely anterior and an imminent, outside of any circumscription or horizon of body or destiny, or desire. Yet “people want

²⁷⁸ Nancy J-L., ‘Corpus’, op.cit., 205.

²⁷⁹ Nancy, J-L., ‘Pain, Suffering, Unhappiness.’ In *The Sense of the World* op.cit., 152.

²⁸⁰ Nancy, J-L., ‘Gift, Desire, “Agathon.”’ In *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 52.

to signify”²⁸¹ and are drawn to the metaphysical gesture of ‘redemption’ even via an absolutisation of nihilism. However:

We do not know if expectation prepares the coming of the to-come or if it recalls the repetition of the same, of the thing itself as ghost...This non-knowledge is not a lacuna. No progress of knowledge could saturate an opening, which must have nothing to do with knowledge. And therefore not with ignorance either. This opening must preserve this heterogeneity as the only chance of a future affirmed or rather re-affirmed. It is the future itself, it comes from the future. The future is its memory...the to-come can only be announced as such and in its purity from a *past end*: beyond, *if it is possible*, the last extremity. If it is possible, *if there is any*, future, but how to suspend such a question or deprive oneself of such a reserve without *concluding in advance*, without reducing in advance, the future and its chance? Is there not a messianic extremity, an *eskhaton* whose ultimate event (immediate rupture, unheard-of interruption, untimeliness of infinite surprise, and heterogeneity without accomplishment) can exceed, *at each moment*, the final term of a *physis*, and the labour, production and *telos* of any history?²⁸²

To paraphrase from a comment on Derrida by Geoff Bennington; that means a here and now (of the ‘singularity’ that is Hiroshima) that requires thinking a moment, which is not only not present, in the presence of the present, but is not recoverable (to rise again from its ashes) as the *telos* of any process, including that of love (incorporating it in a love that will necessarily be special and ‘wonderful’, one that will be more credible than if it had occurred anywhere else in the world...), an *eskhaton* without salvation or redemption.²⁸³

And yet – it should not be forgotten that what I am trying to explore here in everything said up till now, is an ethical and political moment of art that is a question of *reading* as well as writing. If Duras reads the film as ultimately akin to a survival that can be possessed and given again as a form of redemption, it can be read otherwise, in fact the very structure of reading is that which both has

²⁸¹ Nancy, J-L., *The Muses* 91

²⁸² Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, op.cit., 36-7.

²⁸³ See Bennington, G., ‘Is it time?’ In *Interrupting Derrida*. (London: Routledge, 2000), 137.

to be presupposed and yet necessarily undermines the reading of possession and redemption. For the structure of reading *is* that anachronic moment and temporal dislocation (the always anterior with the imminent), which a teleology may seek to contain, but will always be exceeded by it.

As Bennington suggests, a reading is at all times going to be 'out-of-time' with a text,

...reading is necessarily in a relation of *delay* with respect to the text read; however minimal that delay, reading always *comes after* the writing it reads. But that irreducible belatedness goes along with a sort of internal dislocation, whereby reading is always remembering and anticipating on reading in order to function...If this is so then teleology cannot ever quite reduce the moment we are calling...messianic, and to that extent can never quite be teleological, so that the programmed ends do not quite come out at the appointed time, so that it is never quite time.²⁸⁴

We have seen that Hegel would that the word was read away, that he could reduce reading altogether. Blanchot would write reading into his texts to the point of the abyssal beyond or prior to any reading of writing altogether. Duras ultimately gathers up the complicated temporal structure of past, present and future that is reading and impossibly bearing witness, as a possession to be given, *one more time*, but this is never time enough.

The past always remains before us as an endless task.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

In Derrida's *Specters of Marx* there are two strongly interconnected themes. One is the necessity to re-think Marx's *ontology*, a reflection upon being, consciousness, the socio-economic premised on a metaphysics of the 'living present', past present or future present, in favour of a *hauntology*, a deconstructed time, figured by the 'ghost', which produces an anachronistic crossing of time opening a space for the 'living on' of an absolute past and an open future. The other is the necessity to re-think the hegemonic power of another ghosting, this time as the *apparent* present, in the virtual domain of tele-technologies. Derrida is certain that the question of technology is a political question requiring a reconsideration of the *inheritance* of Marxism. This interconnecting of themes is pertinent to this thesis, considering the inter-relationship between the thinking of technology and the thinking of art both historically and contemporaneously; how that relationship has tended to pit the one against the other, and what we might say the pervasiveness of technology *now* demands in terms of modes of (re) thinking aesthetics and politics.

There is first of all the culture called more or less properly political (the official discourses of parties and politicians in power in the world, virtually everywhere Western models prevail, the speech or the rhetoric of what in France is called the 'class politique'.

There is also what is rather confusedly qualified as mass-media culture: 'communications' and interpretations, selective and hierarchised production of 'information' through channels whose power has grown in an absolutely unheard of fashion at a rhythm that coincides precisely, no doubt not fortuitously, with that of the fall of regimes on the Marxist model, a fall to which it contributed mightily but...in forms and modes of apparition and at a speed that also affect in an essential fashion the very concept of public space in so-called liberal democracies...the question of media tele-technology, economy and power, in their irreducibly spectral dimension should cut across all our discussions. What can one do with the Marxist schema in order to deal with this today – theoretically and practically – and thus in order to change it?

These schemas appear both indispensable and insufficient in their present form.

There is finally scholarly or academic culture...whose discourse is itself relayed by the academic and commercial press, but also by the media in general. For no one will have failed to notice that the three places, forms and powers of culture that I have just identified...are more than ever welded together by the same apparatuses or by ones that are indissociable from them. These apparatuses...communicate and cooperate at every moment toward producing the greatest force with which to ensure the hegemony or imperialism in question...As it has never done before, either to such a degree or in these forms, the politico-economic hegemony, like the intellectual or discursive domination passes by way of techno-mediatic power, this power cannot be analysed or potentially combated, supported here, attacked there, without taking into account so many spectral effects, the new speed of the *apparition* (we understand this word in its ghostly sense) of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, and the virtual event, cyberspace and surveillance, the control, appropriations and speculations that today deploy unheard-of powers. Have Marx and his heirs helped us to think and to treat this phenomenon? If we say that the answer to this question is at once *yes* and *no*, *yes* in one respect, *no* in another and that one must filter, select, differentiate, restructure the questions, it is only in order to announce, in too preliminary a fashion, the tone and general form of our conclusions: namely that one must assume the inheritance of Marxism, assume its most living part...that which continues to put back on the drawing board the question of life, spirit, or the spectral, of life-death beyond the opposition of life and death.²⁸⁵

As Simon Critchley points out in his reading of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, "Derrida (mis) understands hegemony negatively in its traditional sense as domination."²⁸⁶ Rather than taking on board the political dynamics of the concept between, "how certain relations became fixed... [as] the product of contingency, antagonism and power" but on the other hand "leaves the future radically open and indeterminate, which means nothing is guaranteed, but neither is anything

²⁸⁵ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, op.cit., 52-54.

²⁸⁶ Critchley, S., 'On Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*', op.cit., 22.

lost, at least not yet,” Derrida appears to opt for a straightforward domination thesis.²⁸⁷

It is perhaps surprising; the ineluctable link Derrida casts between domination and tele-technologies. However, as Richard Luckhurst suggests, it is as if Derrida is at pains to drive home two forms of the spectral that we need to *think* as defining by way of “*haunting*” contemporary experience and politics; a double spectre at play; two modes of being and time in the tele (sending) of technology.²⁸⁸ On the one hand there is “the spectral of life and death beyond the opposition of life and death”, the untimely arrival of the unexpected, the coming of the ‘other’ (although hardly an ‘other’ as that which one can pit against a constituted ‘self’) to disrupt the ‘network’ and rupture the self-identity of the present, instituting a differential temporality, ‘time out of joint’, making possible, yet impossible, the ‘unfolding’ of time. In Derrida’s thinking, this is the other who will brook no return, no exchange, no dialectic of subject and object, the other of insistent obligation and ethical demand constitutive of the subject in a terrifying unpredictability and exposure; the other as always out of place as well as time, irrecoupable under any ideality or materiality, spirit or matter, unassignable to any category or space, unhomely and uneconomic. This is the other demanding justice as opposed to the law, and the law of the ‘tele’ coming from an immemorial past or an incalculable future. Who knows from whence or where a spectre may come, or whether it comes as a promise or a threat? But this is an ‘other’ which *must not* be chased down or chased away; Hence Derrida’s critique of Marx’s rootedness in an ontology *and* Derrida’s valuation of the heritage of Marx in terms of ‘the *messianic*’, the coming of the other, the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant -as justice*’

The other spectre is the unanalysable ‘speed of the apparition’, the tele-technique of the simulacrum, actuvirtuality, the irrefutable timeliness of the tele in technology today. As Luckhurst states: “Spectral tele-technology transforms and

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸⁸ Luckhurst, R., ‘(Touching on) Tele-technology.’ In *Applying: to Derrida*. Eds. Brannigan, J., Robbins, R., Wolfreys, J., , (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 171-183.

in part pre-programmes the event, while the other spectre is the unforeseeable and ungraspable trembling of the event itself.”²⁸⁹

What is more, Derrida affirms this divide by distinguishing between “the singular ‘who’ of the ghost and the general ‘what’ of the simulacrum”.

But also at stake is the differential deployment of *teckhne*, of techno-science or tele-technology....It obliges us to think...another space for democracy; for democracy to come and thus for justice. We have suggested that the event we are prowling around here hesitates between the singular ‘who’ of the ghost and the general ‘what’ of the simulacrum. ...in the general dis-location to which our time is destined...the messianic trembles on the edge of this event itself. It is this hesitation, it has no other vibration, it does not ‘live’ otherwise, but it would no longer be messianic if it stopped hesitating; how to give rise to and to give place...without killing the future in the name of old frontiers?

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The ‘time out of joint’ of the messianic (messianicity without messianism), the entirely open ‘to come’ of justice, is Derrida’s key political concept.

The kind of justice I am referring to here is paradoxical enough, impossible enough not to reassure every moralist. I am not being unfaithful to the tradition of materialist critique by the likes of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche by invoking an appeal to justice. What I mean by this...is that there is in Marx what I call a Messianic appeal to justice but not one with a religious content. There is a Messianism in the idea of democracy. ‘To come’ is a Messianic gesture, it’s an appeal to justice. Promising is Messianic; a very simple promise implies that the other will come. There is a Messianism of some sort, of different kinds, in the critiques by Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx and I see no break with them when mentioning the appeal to justice.²⁹¹

This thesis has sought to articulate a reading of art in contiguity with this concept. The question here now, is whether it is possible to think the ‘to come’ of justice, which Derrida characterises as a spectrality; a hauntology in *Specters*

²⁸⁹ Luckhurst, R., ‘(Touching on) Tele-technology’, op.cit., 174.

²⁹⁰ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, op.cit., 169.

²⁹¹ Derrida, J., ‘On Responsibility: an interview with Jacques Derrida (1993).’ In *Responsibilities of Deconstruction*. Eds. Dronsfield, J., Midgely, N., and Wilding, A., May 1993 in Dronsfield, J., and Midgely, N., eds., *Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 6 Summer (1997): 27.

of *Marx*, together with that other apparition, the ‘unanalysable’ tele-technique of the simulacrum that is contemporary technology, without resorting to a division and oscillation between the “overvaluation and denigration”²⁹² which has characterised the discourse on technology. Is it possible to think the ‘on time’ of technology as always potentially crossed by the ‘out of time’? Can we consider the speed of space-time compression as other than the collapse of the differential temporality and forgetting of the other?

These are important questions for history, politics and art, given the extent to which tele-technologies pervade and ‘spectrally’ shape culture, putting to the test art history, its disciplinary contexts and its relation to the need to ‘select, differentiate, restructure (its) questions’.

I want to explore these issues in this chapter from the point of view of thinking of ‘art’ and art history today. In *Farewell to an Idea*, T.J. Clark broaches the question of ‘modernity’, ‘information technology’ and capitalism thus:

Everything about the forces and relations of symbolic production under capitalism encourages the fantasy that meanings are the product of a self-enclosed circuit or system, opening nowhere onto the realm of necessity. Pure presence wars with pure absence, the latter winning hands down. Signification is imagined always under the sign of money, or nowadays of similar action (conversion) at a distance, happening in the ether of information.²⁹³

In the end he summarises modern art’s response to the then entrenchments of capital, of which information technology is now a part:

For partly [this book] has been about modernism’s continual two-facedness – its inward-turning and outward-reaching, its purism and opportunism, its centripetal and centrifugal force. I think this

²⁹² Overvaluation and denigration are terms used by Freud to characterise the connected but divided cathetic investments which he analyses in ‘On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (1912)’, I In *On Sexuality*. Ed. Richards, A., Penguin, Freud Library, Vol. 7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 243-341. See Luckhurst, R., ‘(Touching on) Tele-technology’, *op.cit.*, 171.

²⁹³ Clark, T.J., *Farewell to an Idea*, *op.cit.*, 260.

doubleness has to do with the fact that art, in our culture, finds itself more and more at the limits, on the verge of emptiness and silence. So that practitioners have continually been forced to recognize how little space, or representational substance they are given to work with in the all-consuming world of goods.²⁹⁴

In a later article for *October* journal, Clark updates his position:

I want to talk about the nature of modernism with the following question always in mind: 'If this was modernism, then what would escaping from it to another paradigm of artistic production look like? Are we in the process of such an escape? Would I not agree that modernity has been reconfigured in the last thirty or forty years? Reconfigured to the point of becoming something else...And is not part of that reconfiguration a new form of visuality spreading like a virus through the culture at large – a new machinery of visualisation, a tipping of the social balance from a previous regime of the word to a present regime of the image?...Will the closeness of *visual* art to the actual present instrumentation of power – the current means of production of subjects – turn out to be not closeness but identity?...Modernism's motto was the great phrase from the young Marx's critique of Hegel: Modernists believed that it was necessary for any art, any Realism to take the forms of the present deeply inside itself; at the risk of mimicry, almost ventriloquism; but that out of that might come the possibility of critique, of true destabilization – they would 'teach the petrified forms how to dance by singing them their own song.'...The question...is whether such a possibility is still open to art? What is the difference between dead mimicry and live (uncanny) 'giving voice'?²⁹⁵

I do not profess to providing an answer to this situation, but I am interested in considering ways of gaining a critical purchase on the issue and its impact upon art history and criticism.

Before returning to the two 'spectralities' identified by Derrida, it is necessary to consider the difficulties encountered in thinking on technology and art. One

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 407.

²⁹⁵ Clark T.J., 'Modernism, Postmodernism and Steam.' *October* 100, Spring (2002): 160-162.

reason why it is difficult to consider these together lies in the difficulty in thinking outside of the metaphysical division and ordering of the root of technology; the Greek word *techne*. The division of this word into *poiesis*, as a bringing forth, a product into being and *techne* as the activity of production sets in train through various inflections, the well known distinction between the 'bringing into being of a work' and 'technique'.²⁹⁶ Philosophically speaking, we arrive at the differentiation of the unique work of art as against the continual differentiation and variation of techniques; the singular divided from the plural of art. Both share the mimetic relation to nature, but art becomes 'separated' from technique and is given its sense elsewhere. For instance, where Plato thought the craftsman carpenter, with quantifiable measures and a model of the whole, closer to the idea of truth than the painter with a mere reflection of a point of view – just surface and colours and dissimulation, Michelangelo would insist that the painter had '*disegno*' as an intellectual skill and was able to invent from '*fantasia*' and produce "what has never been found".²⁹⁷

Aristotle had introduced the idea of *techne* as the supplementary perfection to *physis*, perfection understood here as a 'finishing', and he produced the distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*, understood as willed activity rooted in biological necessity.²⁹⁸ In the crossings over of this *praxis* between production and technical production we get the willed activity of the creative genius and the willed sensuous activity of the self-production of man. Art is thought as the unicity of 'Art' as the sensible presentation of the idea in the finite finished operations of art and its aesthetic repose. The still persisting 'religion' of art and the notion of the creative will of genius dissolve the 'technique' from art. 'Techne' is the unity of the infinite operation of technological processes of production. Technology is thought as a means to an end, but as a means it now appears without end, endless.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ See Nancy, J-L., 'Why are there several arts and not just one?', *The Muses*, op.cit., .6.

²⁹⁷ Summers, D., *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 261.

²⁹⁸ See Agamben, G., 'Poiesis and Praxis.' In *The Man Without Content*. Trans. Albert, G., (this name may be reversed?), (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991), 71-72.

²⁹⁹ See Nancy, J-L., 'Why are there Several Arts?' in Nancy, J-L, *The Muses* op.cit 1-39

To gain an historical purchase in the first instance, I turn to two very different, but seminal, thinkers on the relationship between history, art and technology: Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin. I turn first to Heidegger's mediation on art, specifically his 'The Origin of the Work of Art', recognising its intimate connection with the overall 'project' of his thought and, in particular, his later meditations on technology.

Heidegger's lecture presents a meditation on truth and art and the conditions by which art can 'originate' and reveal a truth, in contradistinction to Plato's concern that art is confined to the reflection of mere appearance, as opposed to the craftsperson's making of an object from an originating 'Idea', which is thus closer to the ideal form and requires greater knowledge.³⁰⁰ The notion of the work of art as origin will play a key part in Heidegger's interventions concerning technology.

If Plato's example is a bed, Heidegger chooses a Van Gogh painting of shoes to make his point:

The equipmental quality of equipment was discovered. But how? Not by a description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present; not by a report about the process of making shoes; and also not by the observation of the actual use of shoes occurring here and there, but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh's painting. This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be. The artwork let us know what shoes are in truth.³⁰¹

Towards the end of his lecture, Heidegger reflects:

In such knowledge, which can only grow slowly, the question is decided whether art can be an origin and then must be a head start, or whether it

³⁰⁰ Plato, *The Republic* (Part Ten, Book Ten). Trans. Lee, D., (London: Penguin, 1974), 362-364.

³⁰¹ Heidegger, M., 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' In *Poetry Language Thought*. Trans. Hofstadter, A., (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 35.

is to remain a mere appendix and then can only be carried along as a routine cultural phenomenon.³⁰²

Heidegger's text ends with something between a question remaining open and a call to a decision at some point. I shall return to this. For Heidegger the question and the decision, in the context of his writings in the Thirties relates to the question and decision of history and historical destiny. Heidegger's concern for history and historical destiny is sharpened at this time, in response to historical and political events, but also in the sense of his understanding of metaphysics in terms of the 'oblivion' of being, to which the historical destiny of the West has been bound. Inasmuch as the 'origin' essay both retraces and seeks a non-metaphysical conception of art in which aesthetics is radically put into question, it is part of the 'turn' in Heidegger's thought from the 'meaning' of being, for *Dasein*, to the essence or truth of being. That turn marks a recognition in Heidegger's own thought, not only that the truth of being cannot be read simply from *Dasein* as the locus of the understanding of being, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, that the event is not simply the event of being as the event of truth as disclosure, but that such 'disclosure' involves simultaneously the concealing of being. The history of metaphysics as an enquiry into the truth of being has been, at the same time, a history of the oblivion of being.

For Heidegger the task is the 'destruction' of the history of metaphysics, by way of a renewed thinking of being, especially as it was articulated in early Greek thinking. This is by no means an entirely philosophical question. For Heidegger the historical trajectory of the Western world is the consequence of the way being reveals itself. What is at stake in the question of being is "to restore man's historical existence – and that always includes our own future existence in the totality of the history allotted to us – to the domain of being."³⁰³ What is at stake in art is not merely a question of aesthetics, but the understanding of the part art plays in the comprehension of a people and the setting-forth of their historical fulfilment. Implied in his conclusion is a continuing struggle or polemos between

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁰³ Heidegger, M., *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 34.

art as a 'thrust' entering history, understood as "the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's historical endowment"³⁰⁴, and art as a supplementary phenomenon and product of metaphysical aesthetics.

The setting into a work of truth, which 'is' the artwork, takes place in the struggle between earth and world for the 'un-concealing', *aletheia*, of truth. This is a constant conflict between the 'thingliness' of the earth, its self-subsisting, sheltering, hiding, its ungraspable, non-sense and the worlding of the world. Out of this struggle, with the thrusting and jutting of the earth up into the worlding world and back again, the 'rift' design, the figuring of this strife, is established, which is the setting of truth in the work and its movement of un-concealing, the taking-place of unconcealing/concealing, opening into a world/withdrawing, lighting/sheltering underneath, in the 'eventing' of truth. *Techne* the work of the work struggles with the thingliness of the earth to open up a world. In the great work of art (and as Heidegger says, it is great art we are talking about here), truth and history *happen* in the event of the work of art.³⁰⁵

For Heidegger the work of art has a place in demonstrating the way in which Being is an issue for human being, in both an historical and ultimately political/communal sense. The work of art can open up, make a space for and establish, install the difference between Being and being, the ontological and the ontic, which is 'covered up' in the history of the sending of Being. If history, for Heidegger, is the effect of the sending of Being and its liable 'fall', its 'decline' into ontic being, it is also always an inseparable relation, a relation of strife and polemos between that into which Dasein is thrown, that which is 'given' as 'handed down' and its future possibilities.

In earlier works Heidegger has understood the historicity of Being in terms of the decision taken in relation to the handing down of tradition, in terms of future possibilities and the authentic being of the subject, recognised 'authentically' in terms of being-towards-death in one's 'own-most'. *Here* the 'site' of tradition is understood in terms of Art. Art is the presenting of the space in that 'polemos',

³⁰⁴ ³⁰⁴ Heidegger, M., 'The Origin of the Work of Art', op.cit., 77.

³⁰⁵ Heidegger, M., 'The Origin of the Work of Art.', op.cit., 15-88.

the struggle or conflict between lighting and concealing in the opposition of world and earth, figured in the 'rift design', takes place and can be *authentically* grasped. It is an originating 'event', a historical taking place, in which 'a people' can grasp its historical endowment, that which is bestowed upon it, *and* its future possibilities, such that an 'epochal' disclosure of Being occurs. Heidegger's title refers not to the beginning of art, but to art as 'origin'. Beauty and the pleasure derived from art are, for Heidegger, a function of its 'originating' power, rather than an aesthetic experience of a subject encountering an object. Heidegger is with Hegel, insofar as Hegel recognises that (great) art is at odds with, indeed 'at an end', or a thing of the past, with the rise of 'the science of art', or aesthetics. Heidegger uses the example of the Greek Temple, standing resolute on the earth whilst lighting its dark, obscurity in the course of 'worlding' a world.

The temple-work, standing there, opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth, which itself only thus emerges as native ground...The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves.³⁰⁶

Such an example perhaps makes sense in the terms in which he is speaking of art, as a communal 'site' emerging in the strife between the earth upon which it is grounded and the 'cosmos' to which it opens, but Heidegger has already prepared the ground in the earlier part of the essay on a smaller scale, and he goes on in the essay to discuss poetry in the same terms, naming it as the greatest art.

The ground laid in the earlier part of the essay, distinguishes between things, being-products and works. He develops this precisely to get away from, to get underneath and go somewhere else other than the 'matter/form', or 'informed-matter' mode of thinking, which derives from equipment and being-products for use, which has also dominated the thinking of things as unformed matter, and works as useless products. This is the human-subject/object representational thinking from the 'late' Greek thinking of Plato and Aristotle onwards, and the beginning of the epoch whereby everything is 'set before' 'us' and the human

³⁰⁶ See *ibid*, p.42-43.

cogito for ‘our’ exploitation and use, which figures in his reading of technology.³⁰⁷

Heidegger uses Van Gogh’s shoe picture to perform a double-take on equipment and works, to destabilise the dominance of the matter/form ‘equipmental’ thinking, and to demonstrate how artworks work to break us from that thinking, revealing a truth which is ‘there’ but obscured by the matter-form paradigm or frame. He wants to show that the matter-form frame of reference is in fact derived from a more primordial ‘truth’ of Being which falls into the ‘secondary’ mode of ontic being which the matter-form distinction characterises.

Following Hegel’s dictum, however, Heidegger makes an unusual move with the shoe picture. From “A painting, e.g. the one by Van Gogh that represents a pair of shoes [and] travels from one exhibition to another”, in accordance with Hegel’s view that as art, as “we have known it is a thing of the past”, it is indeed consigned to the “exhibition” value(s) of the museum, he then wants to make it a world, endowing it both with a ‘worlding’ of equipmentality and reliability in the world of the peasant woman that he assumes wears the shoes, and an authenticity, such that:

The equipmental quality of equipment was discovered. But how? Not by a description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present; not by a report about the process of making shoes; and also not by the observation of the actual use of shoes occurring here and there; but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh’s painting. This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be.³⁰⁸

Insofar as Heidegger wishes to depart from any matter/form reading of the ‘shoe picture’ or any empirical investigation of the shoes as equipment as such, he is already certain that these shoes are a *pair* of shoes and that they belong to a peasant woman.

³⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 20-39.

³⁰⁸ Heidegger, M., ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, *op.cit.*, p.35.

It is perhaps not incidental that Heidegger is sure that they are a pair of shoes belonging to a peasant woman and not only does the picture establish the truth of the equipmentality of the shoes *and* the ‘truth’, the source of which is more ‘distant’ than that underneath the soles of these shoes, which is the relationship of *reliability* between the shoes and the ‘world’ or ‘life’ bestowed upon this peasant woman, but he also, by intimating that the ‘woman’ is ‘with child’ points to another thinking of origin.

“And yet” says Heidegger, and breaks into a tone full of pathos to describe the ‘earth-world’ strife of the peasant woman, pregnant in her shoes.

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by the raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, *the* trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.³⁰⁹

In a little known text by Heidegger, ‘unconcealed’ in an article by Werner Hamacher, woman and child appear again. It is the Sistine Madonna, mentioned in a text by Heidegger in which he addresses, not only the Raphael painting, but also the history of the museum, as the history of Being, *as* the history of art. “The proper historical course of Occidental art since the Renaissance is concealed in the fact that the Sistine Madonna became a panel painting suited to

³⁰⁹ *ibid.* p. 34 (my emphasis)

the museum.”³¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the Van Gogh painting was seen by Heidegger in a museum and was subject to a debate concerning a series of pictures he might have seen, as evidences in his correspondence with Meyer Schapiro, which I mention later. Given his commentary on the Temple in the ‘Origin’ essay, we can expect Heidegger to be critical of the museum as the place where works of art lose their ‘site’, lose the pleasure and beauty which is their truth in their ‘original’ installing and setting. “Wherever a picture might be displayed in the future, there it has lost its site.”³¹¹ At the same time for Heidegger, the museum marks the course of history of Being, precisely because history is the ‘fall’, the ‘decline’ or ‘withdrawal’ of Being into the being of its errancy and foreignness, obscuring its ‘proper’ course. As Werner Hamacher puts it, “Transformed in its essence as artwork, the picture errs, abroad in its foreignness.”³¹² Heidegger can uncover *this* history and chart its course, because he reserves the privilege of thinking an originary sending of being, as *alethia*. It is the pairing of the Madonna and child, which is this origin and ‘birth’ of ontological difference. It is on this basis that Heidegger can consider the exposition as the putting-out-of-position of the originary positioning of truth. Heidegger can think, with its implied loss, the errancy, the wandering-at-a-loss of the museum and the Madonna and child, at-a-loss within it, because of his, as Hamacher argues, assumed primary and prior existence of an ‘untransposed’ world, figured in the mother.³¹³ The figure of the figuration of truth is the mother. But a mother ‘is’ a mother on account of the child. It is the mother that is also herself ‘born of’ the (Christ) child. She ‘is’ insofar as she is ‘born of’, or brought forth, as mother by the child. They are a pair, at origin, but the mother gives and sends ‘being’ only insofar as she is ‘covered over’ by the being that she sends. They, mother and child, are held together in their necessary difference, like a pair of shoes.

³¹⁰ See Hamacher, W., ‘Expositions of the Mother’, pp. 81-134 in (eds) Handhardt, J.G., and Keenan, T., *The End(s) of the Museum/Els limits del museu*, 1996, Barcelona: Fundacio Antoni Tapies, p. 89

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 89

³¹² *Ibid.*, 89

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 90

If this holding together were not to take place, if the mother were not “ensheathed” by the child, “the pair would be in pieces”.³¹⁴ There would be no ontological difference, no birth, no advent, and no ‘coming to’ presence. There would *only* be the errancy and foreignness.

Derrida takes up Heidegger’s certainty with regard to the pair of shoes. Although this may seem tangential to the main debate concerning this chapter, with regard to art and technology, it is actually part of an ongoing intervention on Derrida’s part concerning the metaphysics of presence and the political consequences of this metaphysical alignment with presence.

That there has been errancy on Heidegger’s part is the contention of the art historian Meyer Schapiro, in his *correspondence* with Heidegger concerning his attribution of the shoes to a peasant woman. It is this correspondence, which Derrida takes up and plays upon in ‘Restitutions of the truth in pointing’.³¹⁵ Derrida draws out the correspondence between these two professors, who had indeed written to one another concerning the ‘belongingness’ and the ‘origin’ of the shoes. Schapiro’s argument took little note of the fact that Heidegger had ‘restored’ the shoes to a peasant *woman*, but he was adamant that the shoes did not belong to a peasant, as implied in Heidegger’s ‘pathetic’ reading (in), his sheer “projection on to” the Van Gogh picture. Schapiro was certain, and it was evident from Heidegger’s reference to the museum in which he saw the painting, that the picture depicted shoes belonging to Van Gogh himself, who was moreover, “by then a city dweller”. These are urban shoes that amount to a ‘self-portrait’ of the artist as an expression of *his* world.

Derrida makes much play of the correspondence between these two professors in their fetishisation of the shoes, their having to look up and find a substitute for the threatened loss, the castration at origin, which they bear. The very form of the shoes begs such castration anxiety, suggests Derrida, gaping open, whilst at the same time phallic. Both professors have fallen into the trap, ensnared by the

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 92

³¹⁵ Derrida, J., ‘Restitutions of the truth in pointing’, in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 257-382

laces of the shoes, sharing the need to fill these empty and abandoned shoes again. Thus both 'point' with their pens and prick the canvas to get at the 'real' shoes underneath. Truth is always punctual. Both *have to* make these shoes a pair. For different reasons, of course, there being more to the reasons than meets the eye (or eyelet) of the painting. Derrida suggests, or interweaves another lace, that these reasons 'point to' their different understandings of history, as well as a debate about correct interpretation between a historian and a philosopher.

For Schapiro, history is something to which one owes the truth, as a debt repaid to the past. Empirically, as Derrida hints, this is a debt to his friend, Kurt Goldstein, an emigrant to America in 1933, who first told him of Heidegger's essay. It is also, as Derrida extrapolates from these laces, a debt of return on behalf of all those abandoned shoes, left lying in piles after the mass deaths of the Holocaust, from which Goldstein had fled. History is a debt repaid to restitute the truth in the face of the *ideological*, such as Heidegger's ideological reading of the belongingness of the shoes to a peasant. This is not only the ideology of the country versus the town, but also that of the *blood* and soil of Nazism. If history is an advent for Heidegger, for Schapiro it is a debt of truth and respect and a facing down of those ideological ghosts. The face of the artist Schapiro sees in these shoes is a testament to historical *truth*. The truth of an artist who himself greatly respected the past and honoured his debt to the rural and urban oppressed, as is further supported by testimony. Derrida is teasing out the difference here between the painting and its referent. Does the painting 'correspond' to its written testimony, which in turn corresponds to an event? Are we at this third remove again, as in Plato? If the museum is the loss of authentic site, the displacement of originary *advent* to foreignness and errancy for Heidegger, it is an archive of the truth of the past for Schapiro. Yet both need a pair. Both need shoes that fit their owners, one to underscore that which *is* the world of the peasant woman, the other to 'embody' the subjective view, indeed the 'epiphany' visualised by the artist.³¹⁶ But what is there to say these shoes *are*

³¹⁶ See Schapiro, M., 'The Still-life as Personal Object: A note on Heidegger and Van Gogh', 139-140 and 'Further Notes on Heidegger and Van Gogh', 146-7 in Schapiro, M., *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist and Society* (Georges Braziller, 1994). Schapiro, through recourse to diary notes from Paul Gauguin, connects the Shoe picture to Van Gogh's assistance to

a pair, Derrida constantly asks, and even if there was the slightest doubt cast upon their pairing, the path towards an originary truth these professors were stumbling along would fall away beneath their feet.

The 'point' for Derrida in his playful intervention is that the very identification of the shoes as a referent (as a pair and to the world of the peasant woman) re-introduces a form of *representation* at this new site of the 'authentic'. In Heidegger's case it is the authentic 'worlding' of the world of the peasant woman that the work discloses in the work's setting-to-work of 'truth'. But, as Derrida is suggesting this 'originating' power of the work is already dependent upon a representational 'figure', a pair of shoes.

On another point, however, this very figuring of truth more distant, "In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be"³¹⁷ and we might say, allied to the 'figure' of the Madonna, who 'hands over' the 'truth' in her very withdrawal, is as Howard Caygill suggests, to return art to the 'site' of ritual and 'cult' value.

"This ability to distance its viewer marks the authenticity of the work of art, and is what Benjamin described *critically* as its 'cult value'."³¹⁸

However, there are qualifications to this if one thinks of both the 'Origin of the Work of Art', in relation to Heidegger's stance on technology, and recognises the *dynamic* in play in relation to the 'rift' as the site of art. Thus, first it is important to understand Heidegger's meditation on the Greek word *techne* in the section 'Truth and Art' in the 'Origin' essay in relation to the later 'The Age of the World Picture'³¹⁹ and 'The Question Concerning Technology'.³²⁰

an injured miner, whom Van Gogh envisioned as a 'Christ-like' figure, whose sacred status is 'symbolised' by the yellow background to the shoes in the painting.

³¹⁷ Heidegger, M., 'The Origin of the Work of Art', op.cit, p.35.

³¹⁸ Caygill, H., 'Benjamin, Heidegger and Tradition' in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Benjamin, A. and Osborne, P., (London: Clinamen Press, Second Edition, 2000), 24

³¹⁹ Heidegger, M., 'The Age of the World Picture' in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, tran. Lovitt, W., (New York, Harper and Row, Ltd., 1977), 115-154

³²⁰ Heidegger, M., 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, tran. Lovitt, W., New York, Harper and Row Ltd., 1977), 3-35

In the section 'Truth and Art' of the 'Origin' essay, Heidegger returns to the 'original' meaning of the Greek word *techne*, which defines neither craft nor art, as such, but a mode of "knowing or seeing", which both "brings forth" and "lets happen" and is distinct from and indeed "not at all the technical in our present day sense."³²¹ Heidegger will go on describe how *techne* connects to a more 'originary' unconcealing/withdrawal or 'bringing forth of truth' via the work of the work of art:

The works becoming work is a way in which truth becomes and happens...Truth is untruth insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-uncovered, the yet uncovered in the sense of concealment...Truth occurs in the opposition of clearing and double concealing. Truth is the primal conflict which, always in some particular way the Open is won within which everything stands and from which everything withholds itself that shows itself and withdraws itself as being...Truth is present only as the conflict between lighting and concealing in the opposition of world and earth...In the strife the unity of world and earth is won...As the world opens itself the earth comes to rise up...World demands its decisiveness and its measure and lets beings attain to the Open of their paths. Earth, bearing and jutting strives to keep itself closed and to entrust everything to its law. The conflict is not a rift as a mere cleft that is ripped open; rather it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other...The rift does not let opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure and boundary into their common outline.³²²

Important here, and continually threading through the 'Origin' essay, is the dynamic of the 'work' as fore-grounded in this coming into presence of 'truth' and its articulation of the dynamic between 'creators' and 'preservers'. As Caygill says:

The configuration of the rift design does not only gather together world and earth, but also configures tradition and politics. The origin of the

³²¹ Heidegger, M., *The Origin of the Work of Art*, op.cit., 59

³²² Heidegger, M., *The Origin of the Work of Art*, op.cit., 60, 62-63

work of art is 'the origin of both the creators and preservers', which is to say of a people's historical existence.³²³

In Heidegger's sense the 'originating' of a work of art would always already be 'prior to' any act of ritual. The commentary on the 'Origin' essay by William McNeill is indicative:

The great work of art opens up the being of beings as a whole; it first opens up a world for human beings. The openness of beings as such is first brought to a stand, as this or that historical world and indeed needs to be brought to such a stand 'in order to be what it is, namely, this openness'...the work not only opens up a world but grants it a singular time and space, grants it a place, grants it a stay...³²⁴

The instituting and originating of the work of art, essentially both an opening and a holding of the open in a strife between the unconcealing (worlding) and concealing (earth) is understood as founding and not pre-supposing a 'people' or community. However in its 'play' of 'opening' it could be construed as 'auratic' in Benjamin's sense³²⁵, as McNeill has it:

Yet the work of art, in accomplishing this disclosure of being manifests not only the 'that it is' of this work, but in so doing discloses also the nothing, the fact that such a work is rather than is not...in the presence of the work of art we are held in 'unrelenting' fashion by the power of this play of being and non being...an opening that announces the concealed approach of something yet to come...the constancy of the works resting in itself of its self-withdrawal in its approach...The improbable unforeseeable event of the work's coming into its own presencing precisely in withholding such presencing as always yet to

³²³ Caygill, H., 'Benjamin, Heidegger and Tradition' in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience* Benjamin, A., and Osborne, P., eds. (London: Clinamen Press, Second Edition, 2000), 26

³²⁴ McNeill, W., *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle and the Ends of Theory* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 286

³²⁵ In 'A Small History of Photography' Benjamin characterises aura as "A strange weave of space and time; the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be." Put very schematically here, in one sense the significance of aura lies in the relationship established between the work or object and the viewer and the potentially hierarchical relationship the work creates vis-à-vis the viewer by means of its "unique distance". Benjamin, W., 'A Small History of Photography' in Benjamin, W., *One Way Street and other writings* trans. Jephcott, E. & Shorter, K., (London, New Left Books 1979) 250

come...first occurs as something that has already occurred. Its first happening is thus also something that has already happened...that is ecstatic, an always already that 'is' (presences) as a 'not yet'...The event that the work casts before it and had always already cast around itself is the singular and enigmatic presencing of the work itself...Heidegger's analysis makes visible this 'aura' not as a property of an already existing thing, but as an event of being, an event of presencing that shrouds the work itself in its promise and its refusal.³²⁶

Heidegger would not connect this with ritual as such, as his 'originating' nature of art and its effective opening 'with' creating and preserving is prior to any articulation with ritualising 'presence'.

The work of art does not (re) present anything; it is neither representation of something else nor presentation of something absent. It has in fact no relationship at all to presence, but, on the contrary, it has a relationship to the becoming and happening of truth, to the coming into presence of everything.³²⁷

Furthermore, the creating and preserving of the work of art is a matter of 'to things their look', rather the inverse, which Heidegger would associate with a ritualistic 'standing before' in terms symptomatic of the Platonic 'eidos' and adequation of art to the Idea, in the fundamentally representational sense against which Heidegger is arguing.

If Benjamin is right to identify aura and ritual in terms of his starting point for thinking the relationship between modes of technology and sense perception, Heidegger is not making an argument about art in this sense of sense, although his starting point is problematic in fundamental ways, as identified by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida. I take Lacoue-Larbarthe first and approach Derrida later, having also dealt with Heidegger's 'questioning' of technology.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 291-293

³²⁷ Dastur, F., 'Heidegger's Freiburg Version of the Origin of the Work of Art' in *Heidegger Towards the Turn: Essays on the work of the 1930s*, ed. Risser, J., (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 138

Lacoue-Labarthe points to a difficulty for Heidegger in maintaining two possibly incompatible apprehensions of the origin of the artwork and how, in so doing, he falls unwittingly into a Platonic mimetology, which identifies *techne* with fiction. This reading may be selective, but it makes a significant point, which I follow up differently below:

On the one hand it is initially in respect of the work of art that Heidegger seizes upon the word *Gestell* [Heidegger uses *Ge-stell* in connection with ‘the challenging forth that gathers man’, which is modern technology (see below)] to make it mean the gathering together of all the modes of *stellen*-chief among them in relation to art, being *Herstellen* (produce), *Darstellen* (present) and *Feststellen* (institute, constitute [Dastur has *Aufstellen* (setting forth) and *Herstellen* as setting up – as two modes of ‘placing’ essential to the work of art³²⁸] – through which he seeks to ground the work in its essence as truth’s being fixed in place in the figure (*Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt*). The semantic chain of *Stellen* does admittedly come into competition in this passage...with the chain – quite different in scope – of *reissen* (*Riss*, *Aufriss*, *Grundriss*, *Durchriss*, *Umriss* etc) in which one sees the outlines of a thinking of *techne* and, as a consequence, of difference, on the basis of the incision, the trait or the ‘inaugural’ tracing of the breaching/broaching or the inscription, in short of something not unrelated to the *archi*-trace or *archi*-writing in Derrida’s sense. The work is none the less *Gestalt* or in other words *figura* of the truth and this determination is consistent with the onto-typological theme of the Rectoral Address and distributes the roles of creators and guardians of the work, that is to say the division of roles constitutive of the ‘mission’ of art...it was not until ten years after the collapse of the Third Reich that Heidegger had the definitive revelation that National Socialism was the truth of the inversion of Platonism or of the restoration of what Plato had fought against – though not without yielding to the tyranny himself – in other words the thinking of the technical or the political as fiction: the last attempt at ‘mythizing’ the West.³²⁹

³²⁸ Dastur, F., ‘Heidegger’s Freiburg Version of the Origin of the Work of Art’ in *Heidegger Towards the Turn: Essays on the work of the 1930s*, ed. Risser, J., (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 127

³²⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe, P., *Heidegger Art and Politics*, trans. Turner, C., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 85-86

Lacoue-Labarthe acknowledges his debt to Jean-Luc Nancy with regard to the reference to mythizing. Nancy is an attentive reader of Heidegger and would wish to avoid any sense of reductionism in interpretation but there is something of the mythic in Heidegger's approach and myth is not far from ritual.

We know the scene: there is a gathering, and someone is telling a story...It is a speech live from the origin, live because it is original and original because it is live. In its first declamation there arises the dawn, simultaneously of the world, of gods, of men. Myth is therefore much more than a kind of first culture. Because it is an original culture it is infinitely more than culture: it is transcendence...presented immediately, immediately immanent to the very thing it transcends and that illuminates or consigns to destiny. Myth is the opening of a mouth immediately adequate to the closure of the universe...Myth is very precisely the incantation that gives rise to a world and brings forth a language, that gives rise to a world in the advent of a language. It is therefore indissociable from a rite or a cult. Indeed its enunciation or recital is itself already a ritual. Mythic ritual is the communitarian articulation of mythic speech.³³⁰

For Nancy, 'mythicization' goes beyond what may still appear as an empirical description of myth; it connects with the striving for 'sense' as 'given' and 'absolute' in a world of apparent loss of sense-i.e.nihilism. It is precisely the point of 'end' or limit that Heidegger will go on to characterise as the epoch of nihilistic technology. For Nancy, as I have discussed in other chapters, this demands a rethinking of the interdependency between what Nancy terms the absolute and relative of sense: between the absolute given of sense, as myth, as the 'origin' of meaning or sense, and the relative desire for sense, not yet attained, deferred meaning, nihilistic loss of sense, endless means. This latter of course appears as the absolute nihilism of the abyss and thus, in turn becomes myth, as the null and void of the relative erected as 'truth'. Here one can see how 'nihilistic technology' indeed erects its own truth concealing any other 'truth' as Heidegger argues. But for Nancy, it is the oscillation between the figuring of satisfaction or 'truth', in which desire (for truth) is resolved in the given, as

³³⁰ Nancy J-L., 'Myth Interrupted' in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Connor, P., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 43-50

myth, or the possibility of satisfaction is negated in the endlessly self-undoing of desire as the truth of nihilistic dissolution that has to be addressed right on the edge of sense.³³¹

It is a matter then of when Heidegger is caught in the oscillation that Nancy describes and how that may be the case and thereby how he is compelled to turn to his conception of art as a way to 'defuse' the nihilism of technology. It is here that Heidegger's very concepts or thinking of historicity and the 'sending' of being are at issue. Even as Heidegger has a concept of history and tradition as the 'having been' for its future possibilities and a recognition of the socio-political dimensions of the 'being-with', it remains in question whether he has a concept of 'an other' or, in Nancy's terms, certainly not 'the other' but the 'sharing/dividing' or 'partage' or 'aleatory' of sense that 'anachronistically' crosses the time and space of 'community'.³³² Heidegger will want to separate truth and sense in terms of Being and being, even as that truth can only be by way of being as its ungrounded grounding, 'in action', 'coming toward' or 'being toward' of being. In addition, Heidegger will persist in particularly 'punctuating' the signification(s) of being in a 'gathering'.

Heidegger declares that we need this impossible transitivity of 'being': being is Being. In this instance 'is' speaks transitively and means approximately 'gathered together' 'collected'. Being gathers being together insofar as it is being. Being is gathering together – Logos. But it is clear that the equivalence with 'gather' is no more tenable than any other equivalence; we still do not know what Logos means...the

³³¹ See Nancy J-L., 'Sense and Truth' and 'Gift, Desire, Agathon' in *The Sense of the World*, trans. Librett, J.S., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 12-15 and 50-53

³³² The fact that Nancy's thought is still an attentive and sophisticated response to Heidegger is evident in both Nancy texts so far cited here. This will come up again. Here, in broad terms, Heidegger will want to separate truth and sense, with truth as the transcendent condition of the possibility of sense whereas Nancy will think truth and sense a co-'belonging' in the particular way that truth is always already crossed by (or even contaminated with sense) such that 'sense is the difference of truth itself'. Insofar as 'truth' punctuates and is 'without spatial or temporal' dimensions which Heidegger's 'epochal' sending still wants to sustain, at the same time argues Nancy, sense 'enchains' - "Enchaining opens up the dimensional, spaces out punctuations [as] an originary spatiality or spaciousness before any distinction between space and time...[if] truth is semantic, sense is syntactic, that syntax enchains, enchains itself, involves itself and carries itself away *across* semantic punctuations...[there is] one sole sense presencing (itself), or pre-sensing (itself), that is deferring in its very truth. Differing/deferring signifyingness." Nancy J-L., 'Sense and Truth' in *The Sense of the World*, trans. Librett, J.S., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 14-15

transitive sense of being is determined only as vicious circle and/or absolute limit of signification in general. (Heidegger comes at times very close to such a formulation, but his poeticoetymologizing will to appropriate significations makes him resistant).³³³

I delineate Heidegger's thinking of technology to explore these issues but will take up Derrida's critique of Heidegger's thinking of 'representation', which will lead on to wider considerations of Heidegger's thinking of temporality and history.

In the 'Technology' essay, Heidegger maintains that technology, too, is part of a mode of revealing of being, but:

...The revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing forth in the sense of poiesis. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging...a setting upon in the sense of a challenging forth...What kind of unconcealment is it then that is peculiar to that which comes to stand forth through the setting-upon that challenges? Everything everywhere is ordered to stand-by...What ever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve Bestand.³³⁴

Heidegger characterises this challenging forth whereby the real everywhere, more or less distinctly, becomes a standing-reserve for the purposes of man's 'ordering' the calculable, and perpetual production of the 'new' as 'Enframing', Gestell.

Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e. challenges him for, to reveal the real in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological...The assembly [of technological parts for example] falls within the sphere of technological activity and this

³³³ 'The sense of the world' note 15 in *The Sense of the World* op.cit174

³³⁴ Heidegger, M., 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, tran. Lovitt, W., (New York, Harper and Row Ltd., 1977), 14-17

activity always merely responds to the challenge of Enframing, but it never comprises Enframing itself.³³⁵

For Heidegger, 'Enframing' as a mode of being, as technological is the mode of the destining of Being in the modern epoch, and as such is nothing technological in the narrow or familiar sense of technological science, apparatus or means. As significantly neither is it a consequence of the 'activity' of 'man'. As with his view of art and the 'artwork', that is not to be narrowly defined by a 'creation' or 'handiwork' of an artist, so technology is not to be thought essentially in terms of the anthropological.

The word *stellen* to set upon in the name *Ge-stell* [Enframing] not only means challenging. At the same time it should preserve the suggestion of another *stellen* from which it stems, namely, that of producing and presenting which in the sense of *poiesis* lets what presences come forth into unconcealment. This producing that brings forth e.g. the erecting of statue in the temple precinct – and the challenging ordering now under consideration are indeed fundamentally different and yet remain related in their essence. Both are ways of revealing, of *aletheia*. In Enframing that unconcealment comes to pass in conformity with which the work of modern technology reveals the real as standing reserve. This work is therefore neither only a human activity nor a mere means within such activity. The merely instrumental, merely anthropological definition of technology is therefore in principle untenable. And it cannot be rounded out by being referenced back to some metaphysical or religious explanation that under girds it.³³⁶

As suggested above there is a strange sense in which Heidegger wants to think *aletheia*, the disclosing, as various forms of installing or establishing, (here erecting a statue) that seem to work against his thesis of 'pro-ducing', bringing forth in some dynamic tension/release vis-à-vis world and earth, as if he cannot let go of some form of pre-figured 'figure' through which to think being. This

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-21

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21

has consequences for his political stance concerning the modes of 'gathering' or 'configuring' a people,³³⁷ which I take up later.

Here however, because Heidegger understands technology as another mode of the destining of Being, or unconcealment/disclosure, and firmly not to be construed in instrumentalist, anthropological, or metaphysical representational terms, his is not a simple 'denigration' thesis. Whilst technology is the supreme 'danger' of the modern age, its threat lies firstly in enframing, potentially pushing mankind to the brink of falling into the standing reserve (him) self and his self-exultation in resistance to this threat, pretending that everything exists only in terms of human self-production; and secondly that it is a mode of disclosure that has a tendency to "eliminate or eradicate every other mode of disclosure", i.e. its revealing obscures that related revealing as poiesis and its dynamic between past, present and future.

Heidegger's response to this cannot be characterised as wholly pessimistic. The holding sway of enframing is "never a fate or destiny that compels; for Dasein becomes truly free only insofar as it belongs to the realm of sending and thus becomes a listener to that sending although not one who simply submits. The danger is that man fails to recognise that he 'ek-sists' in response to the sending and revealing of being and thus "can never encounter only himself."³³⁸ As Fred Dallmayr states "In terms of the [Technology]essay, freedom does not merely reside in the exercise of will power or the initiation of causal chains, it means attending to the happening of disclosure in its various forms."³³⁹

On the one hand, Heidegger appears to offer the thesis that it is through an understanding of technological enframing as a mode of being that we can be freed from its danger,

³³⁷ As above, this is a theme running through Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's readings of Heidegger's works and Heidegger's 'forgetting' of the 'doubling' or 'movement' in his case for an origin that is counter to Plato's 'adequation' to the Idea. See in addition Lacoue-Labarthe, P., 'Typography' in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 67-72

³³⁸ Heidegger, M., 'The Question Concerning Technology', op.cit., 27

³³⁹ Dallmayr, F., *The Other Heidegger* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993), 67

Precisely the essence of technology must harbour in itself the growth of the rescuing or saving power...Precisely in this extreme danger there arises also the innermost, indestructible bond of Dasein and the grant (of being) – provided that we, for our part, begin to heed the essence of technology.³⁴⁰

On the other hand, in the end he feels compelled to invoke Art.

Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation within it must happen in the realm that is, on the one hand akin to the essence of technology and on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art. But certainly, only if reflection on art, for its part does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are questioning.³⁴¹

What can this turn to art and the “constellation of truth” signify? The reference to art may seem superfluous, given Heidegger’s argument in the lecture accompanying the ‘Technology’ lecture, published as ‘The Turning’.³⁴² It is in ‘The Turning’ that he makes clear the necessity for recognising technology as a mode of sending being that will come from within the epoch of technology itself. In so far as technological nihilism reaches its extremis, if we can ever say it does, and presents what Heidegger thinks of as the ‘refusal of the world’ it is still a claim on ‘us’.

The refusal of the happening of the world is not nothing but rather is itself ‘the highest mystery of being within the domination of Gestell’....This claim of the event of un-concealment itself addresses us; it turns towards us in and through technology.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Heidegger, M., ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, op.cit., 33

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 35

³⁴² Heidegger, M., ‘The Turning’ in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, op.cit., 36-49

³⁴³ McNeill, W., *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle and the Ends of Theory*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 211

Receptiveness towards this ‘turn’, where “we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a claim that frees us”, requires thinking and questioning. Seeing the danger of technology as danger amounts to not just a “thoughtful attentiveness to what is refused in Ge-stell” as such, but “It would also be a transformation in the claim of being as presencing.”³⁴⁴ Thinking the un-thought in Ge-stell marks the receptivity to what Dreyfus calls a “gestalt switch”.³⁴⁵ McNeill elaborates on the scope Heidegger wants to give to this turning.

Such transformation would occur as a knowing relation to concealment as a thoughtful relating to the appropriative event (Ereignis) of presencing itself, as finite in each case...the turning in question transpires as a kind of recovery but which, in each case occurs in the event of the arrival of another destiny...such a turning occurs without mediation...What is destined in each case proceeds intrinsically toward a distinctive Augenblick (instant; glance) that sends it into another destiny whereby however it does not simply become submerged and lost...the Augenblick locates, [‘sites’] the historical turnings of presencings as held open for the possibility of hearing and response for an event (Ereignis) of language...that site in which the emergence of a new openness to the world first occurs...in which historical human beings are called to respond in a new and unforeseeable way.³⁴⁶

The instant that ‘lightens’ opens onto the scope of ‘another destiny’ for Heidegger and we should not be surprised to find, and here the references to art in the ‘Technology’ lecture make their sense, that ‘destiny’ invokes the (re) turn towards the divine – and here I am taking this to be a signifier for a transcendence within the immanence of being as that by which humans come to be mortals; i.e. in their finitude.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 214

³⁴⁵ Dreyfus, H.L., ‘Heidegger on the connection between nihilism, art, technology, politics’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Guigon, C., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 308. Dreyfus uses the model of cultural paradigm shift to articulate Heidegger’s modes of the sending of being. This, in Heidegger’s terms, would be within the representational logic of science and technology that he is arguing against and would not convey the insistence of the clearing and unconcealment/concealment that the sending of being involves.

³⁴⁶ McNeill, W., *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle and the Ends of Theory*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 214

Only when human essence, as that which is looked upon in the insight of this event, renounces human self-will and projects itself away from itself toward that insight can the human being in his essence respond to the claim of this insight. In such responding the human being is gathered into his own (ge-eignet) in such a way that, within the safeguarded element of world, he may, as the mortal, look toward the divine.³⁴⁷

This chimes with Heidegger's reading of art as alethia, in respect of his working out of the worlding of the world and the concealment of the earth as our 'standing' under; at the "dispensation of" the divine and specifically, as gathered thereby. In the earlier Freiburg version of the 'Work of Art' essay, the stakes are clear. Both that as Dastur suggests:

"The world is immediately defined as the unity of relations into which the essential decisions of a people (victories, sacrifices, works) are articulated together...a world for specific people; a specific historical world."³⁴⁸

And:

We are submitted to the world in the sense that we are exposed to the dispensation of the favour or disfavour of the gods. The ekstastic character of human existence is now understood in relationship to the absence or presence of the gods, with reference to the dimension of holiness...world is both the locus of the historical dimension of a definite singular mankind and the reign of holiness or of the absence of holiness, as it is the case in the modern age, which is deprived of gods...We have therefore to think together, as a whole, the body dimension of the world, the opening of the world as the setting forth of the earth and the world as the locus of the historicity of a collective singular being. We could then consider that this conception of the world in the middle of the thirties is midway between the human Umwelt

³⁴⁷ Heidegger, M., 'The Turning' in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, trans Lovitt, W., (City?: Harper and Row Ltd., 1977), 47, quoted, slightly modified in McNeill, W., *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle and the Ends of Theory*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 217

³⁴⁸ Dastur, F., 'Heidegger's Freiburg Version of the Origin of the Work of Art' in *Heidegger Towards the Turn: Essays on the work of the 1930s* op.cit., 129-130

(habitual environment) from 1927 and the world as Geviert (the fourfold – earth, sky, divinities and mortals – in the fifties.³⁴⁹

If by the ‘Technology’ and ‘Turning’ lectures Heidegger had renounced an element of the specificity of ‘a people’ whose task it is, under the ‘dispensation’ of Being to heed ‘its’ call, one cannot help but think that Heidegger’s turning invokes something of a (re) turn to an originary sending of Being, a *Geschick* more original and still ‘retroactively’ outside of and beyond the rupture and ‘obscuring’ of the Being/being relation that technology puts into place.

This takes us back to Derrida and what I might call the ‘stelle’ versus the ‘riss’ and the sense in which Being is (not) gathered. Derrida tackles Heidegger twice on ‘the sending’ of Being. To start with, ‘Envoi’ (singular), translated as “Sending: On Representation”.³⁵⁰ Derrida’s concern here is to critically analyse Heidegger’s notion of the epoch of representation, presented in the ‘Age of the World Picture’ in 1938.³⁵¹ Heidegger examines the condition of modernity, whereby the essence of beings has undergone a radical change. All being is now as an object for representation arising not just from a change of form or approach in metaphysics, but as a result of a radical shift in the essence of metaphysics. The characteristics of modernity that Heidegger identifies accord with what he will later say in the technology lecture. Science and technology’s autonomous instrumentalist essence transform and ultimately coincide with the essence of modern metaphysics itself. Following this, art, religion and action are all thought in relation to subjective experience. Art becomes the subject of aesthetics insofar as art is now understood in terms of lived experience, religion as religious experience accords with Christianity becoming a ‘worldview’ as an effect of the world-become-picture, and human action is understood as a subjective striving towards the realisation of ‘human values’ defining a culture. These characteristics derive from the essence of science and technology as that which

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 130-131

³⁵⁰ Derrida, J., ‘Envoi’, translated as ‘Sending: On Representation’, trans. Caws, P. & M., in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, eds. Ormiston, G. & Schrift, A., (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 107-138

³⁵¹ Heidegger, M., ‘The Age of the World Picture’ in *The Question Concerning Technology* op.cit 115-154

renders beings calculable and objects of explanation. This is accomplished by a representing (Vor-stellen) that summons all beings before itself in such a way that calculating man can be certain of them.

Hence science is only possible only from the moment that truth becomes the certainty of representation, the moment of the Cartesian cogito...it is with Descartes that science and objectivity come together for the first time. What is at issue in passing from the Greek world and the Middle Ages to modernity is not some sort of progression but a radical change in the essence of beings. This change in the essence of beings, their becoming an object for representation is inseparable from a change in the essence of man; man becomes subject.³⁵²

From the Greek hypokeimenon to the Latin subjectum, we now have the ground that gathers everything around itself. This marks a genuine change in man's essence. Man becomes 'subject' at the very moment that beings become objects brought before 'him' (gegenstand) as representation. Importantly it is not a matter of deciding what picture of the world modernity presents, but that modernity *is the world become picture*, with man as thereby always already 'in' this picture.

Derrida's interest in this, which involves a play upon 're-presentation', is how Heidegger traces the epoch of modernity in relation to the 'sending' of Being. Heidegger is clear that the epoch of representation comes from the Greek world. But that world has no sense of representation being seen as the effect of a subject. Rather it is man who is gazed upon by presence (Anwesen). So how is it that from Anwesen the world as picture is already announced? Heidegger argues it is with Platonism and Plato's determination of being as eidos and appearance, aspect, view or figure as adequation to the Idea,

That which is does not come into being at all through the fact that man first looks upon it, in the sense of representing that has the character of subjective perception. Rather, man is the one who is looked upon by that which is; he is the one who is-in the company with itself-gathered

³⁵² Marrati, P., *Genesis and Trace: Derrida's Reading of Husserl and Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 89

towards presencing by that which opens itself...Greek man is the one who apprehends that which is and this is why in the age of the Greeks the world cannot become picture [Bild]. Yet on the other hand that the beingness of what is, is defined for Plato as *eidos* [aspect, view], is the presupposition, destined far in advance and long ruling indirectly in concealment for the world's [Welt] having to become picture.³⁵³

Derrida will pick up on the presupposition that it somehow started with Platonism, which indeed presupposes an 'already-but not yet' structure, with Platonism as the announcement of that which cannot yet be said to be. Critically, if Platonism destines the epoch of representation, there has to be a unifying presumption that originally steers the history of the metaphysical suppositions of being. "There has to be something like a still representational pre-interpretation of representation."³⁵⁴ This brings the entire notion of epoch and the *Geschick* (sending, destining) of being into question, inasmuch as what remains unthought in Heidegger's thought is the liability that his historicity amounts to an unfolding of successive concealments from a single originary moment of (ontological) difference.

The historical or destinal interpretation of the epoch of representation (and this holds true for every epoch) orders and derives that epoch from an originary sending of being *Anwesenheit*...*Anwesenheit* translates itself into presence and thence into representation according to translations that are mutations within the same, within the being-together of the same sending...this being together of the originary sending in some way arrives or happens to itself...the origin arrives to itself, in proximity to itself, at the origin.³⁵⁵

Even as there is an originary dissension, this is itself secured and held together by the *legein/logos* (gathering). Insofar as *Anwesenheit* is concealed in the epoch of representation, nevertheless it is presence as *Anwesenheit* that has sent presence as representation. The 'logic' of Heidegger's thinking of the sending of being is that this being would necessarily divide itself, "it has to divide itself in

³⁵³ Heidegger, M., 'The Age of the World Picture' in *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, op.cit., 131, quoted in Marrati, P., op.cit., 92

³⁵⁴ Marrati, P., op.cit., 93

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94

order for there to be history”,³⁵⁶ thereby challenging the *legein*, and the very idea of destination as unitary destination. Being is always already ‘threatened’ not just by difference, but by dissemination. But for Heidegger it is evident that gathering is decisive and constitutive. The history of the “sending of being”, for Heidegger, is a one-time thing. It is “the history of *Anwesenheit*’s difference with itself, of the difference of presence, the history of difference as presence. Heidegger’s notion of historicity would be a history of the same, thought, certainly, in its difference from the identical, but in such a way that the difference between the identical and the same serves only to reinforce the value of the latter.”³⁵⁷

This ‘model’ of gathering and sending, origin and concealment, prevents the thinking of ‘sending’ as constitutively entailing the ‘address to’ the spatio-temporality of an ‘other’, sending as ‘destinerrance’. Derrida takes this up again in his second, doubled, and plural: *envois*. Early on in Derrida’s ‘Envois’, which marks a substantial part of his *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*,³⁵⁸ Derrida thinks Heidegger’s ‘model’ of historicity in accordance with the ‘logic’ of the ‘post’. Meditating on Heidegger’s epochal historicity of being, *Geben*, *Schicken*, *Geschick*, whereby being is nothing that ‘is’, but *is es gibt*, ‘there is’, sending in epochal withdrawal, Derrida argues that this ‘model’ of historicity is, contrary to Heidegger, not something that can stand outside of a thinking of the ‘postal’ but is necessarily inscribed within the conditions of postal ‘sending’.

[T]he very idea of the retreat (proper) to destination, the idea of the halt, a relay, a suspensive delay, the place of the mailman, the possibility of going astray and of forgetting (not of repression, which is a moment of keeping, but of forgetting). The *epokhe* and the *Ansichhalten* which essentially scan or set the beat of the ‘destiny’ of Being, or its ‘appropriation’ (*Ereignis*), is the place of the postal, this is where it comes to be and that it takes place (I would say *ereignet*), that it gives place and also lets come to be...This is serious because it upsets perhaps

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 95

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 95

³⁵⁸ Derrida, J., ‘Envois’ in *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Bass, A., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3-256

Heidegger's still 'derivative' schema (perhaps) upsets by giving one to think that technology, the position, let us say even metaphysics do not overtake, do not come to determine and to dissimulate an 'envoi' of Being (which would not yet be postal) but would belong to the first 'envoi'...if the post (technology, position, metaphysics) is announced as the first envoi, then there is no longer A metaphysics, etc...nor even an envoi but envois without destination... in a word as soon as there is, there is difference.³⁵⁹

What would be untenable for Heidegger – that the metaphysics of technology, which in his terms 'befalls' Being at a point in its history, should be there from the 'origin' or that all the 'sendings' cannot be gathered in "one central post-office" – is for Derrida the very condition of historicity. There would be no sending without the possibility of forgetting, the irreducible distance and interruption as the very inscribing of an address, the possibility of errancy and non-arrival. "If everything begins with sending, this sending has nonetheless always been divisible and plural; there is no single Sending but only sendings without assured destination, without destiny."³⁶⁰

Derrida suggests that Heidegger's ontological difference does not open history; rather it enacts a closure on the basis of its presumptive origin. If there is history, it cannot be gathered in a presumptive unifying that is embedded in Heidegger's *Geschichte*. It comes back to 'the shoes', who is to say that they can be gathered in advance as 'a pair'? Difference is that which interferes with a thinking of history as an origin, a 'pure' origin that 'originates' in proximity with itself – that sends only it-self, as per Heidegger's unitary origin. "Difference denies sending the possibility of functioning as an origin."³⁶¹ Difference is not another kind of origin. It is the denial of origin. There can be no origin to history because origin is not a historical term. At the same time, difference is not a mere empirical inscription within history. It is 'older' than the thinking of origin, anterior to this, "but not as an a-temporal and synchronic structure somehow commanding history. It is the dimension of historicity in general"³⁶² both

³⁵⁹ Derrida, J., 'Envois' in *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, op.cit., 65-66

³⁶⁰ Marrati, P., op.cit., 105

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 107

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 107

anterior' to any thought of origin and, at the same time, indeterminately future, 'to come'. Hence, returning to where I began, there is the importance of thinking this in the context of the 'determinations' of technology.

Nancy captures this somewhat differently and in a more tangential critique of Heideggerian difference. In terms of historicity:

The ontico-ontological difference puts the transitivity of being into play in the form of being-the-existent. From the heart of this difference, difference envisions a dehiscence of esse away from esse itself, a diastole, or fold of the same act (or entelechy); its ek-isting. In a sense, this very entelechy that differs (from itself), senses itself in accordance with the logic of the entelechy of the sensible that we have recalled above. Being senses itself deferring and differing. It senses itself or knows itself to be differing and different. But differance, 'the whole differance' if one may say so, is precisely that here there is neither 'sensing oneself' nor 'knowing oneself' in the sense of appropriation or revelation.³⁶³

And in terms of phenomenology:

It is only by beginning with a certain reservation of the sort I am evoking here that it be possible to do justice to aletheia...This concerns the degree to which truth as aletheia continues to operate in terms of presentation, placing in view, exhibition, manifestation. If sense is still manifest insofar as it is on the surface of the world and nowhere else, the opening that it is or makes is not frontal. It is a passage through a narrow pass, praes-entia...that which precedes us...that which comes to meet us and which thus opens the path but which nonetheless does not interrupt the road by the illumination of a revelation... phenomenology does not open us up to that which...infinitely precedes consciousness and the signifying appropriation of sense; that is to that which precedes and surprises the phenomenon in the phenomenon itself, its coming or its coming up...it still irresistibly convokes us to the pure presence of appearing, to seeing...there remains a proper, immanent/transcendent point of origin for sense, a point with which consequently all sense is

³⁶³ Nancy J-L., 'Differance' in *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 34-35

confounded...phenomenology or beyond-phenomenology do not open sufficiently to the coming of sense, to sense as a coming that is neither immanent nor transcendent. This coming is infinitely presupposed; one does not let oneself be taken in, carried away or put out of sorts by it.³⁶⁴

Hence, for Derrida and Nancy, the problem with Heidegger's historicity, premised upon the sending of being and its 'epoch', is that ultimately it falls prey to the same representational or 'immanentist' (which for Nancy is a mode of making the immanent as it were transcendent) logic in terms of reflecting back a 'figure' of origin or subject-centred ideality (even as that subject might be thought as a 'community'), or again, Nancy might say something like a sovereign gathering, that in other ways it had sought to 'destruct'.

So how might Walter Benjamin's thinking of technology come up against this 'whole differance' we have come to? To begin with, it seems to me we can describe Heidegger's notion of art as 'auratic' in the particular sense of originating. Heidegger's aletheia, as the originating power of the work of art looks toward another sending of being that 'preceded' or 'diverted' from the metaphysics of technology, technology as metaphysics. To go back to the beginning, this is borne out by Heidegger's consideration that it is a matter of questioning, attuning (paying heed to) and 'preparing' as to whether

...art is or is not an origin in our historical existence, whether and under what conditions it can and must be an origin...In such knowledge which can only grow slowly, the question is decided whether art can be an origin and then must be a head start, or whether it remains a mere appendix and then can only be carried along as a routine cultural phenomenon. Are we in our existence historically at the origin? Do we know, which means do we give heed to the nature of origin? Or in our relation to art, do we still merely make appeal to a cultivated acquaintance with the past?³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Nancy, J-L., 'Philosophical Style' in *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 16-17

³⁶⁵ Heidegger, M., 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Poetry Language Thought*, op.cit., 78

This is a political question in the context of a presumed 'gathering', arguably still modelled upon an 'authentic', 'collective' and 'gathered' self-reflexive subjectivity.

If Heidegger is too 'transcendent' when it comes down to it, then if anything, Benjamin is going to be too 'purely' immanent, from the ultimate perspective that he can and does invoke the 'Messiah'. Messianism in Benjamin's terms is 'outside' of temporality, such that there is no struggle between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' being. Being is inauthentic, tout court. That said, it begs the question as to whether Messianism might still operate as an atemporal transcendental signified, which I take up later with a return to Derrida and the messianic.

As Howard Caygill says, Benjamin's point, contra Heidegger, is that history understood from the point of view of tradition, the 'handing down' for future possibilities is profoundly inauthentic.

Heidegger keeps open the possibility that historical time may be a suitable vehicle for authenticity, an option Benjamin utterly refuses to entertain. For him, authentic, redeemed historical time is only possible at the end of history with the advent of the Messiah...It is the distinction between fulfilment in historical time and the fulfilment of historical time which marks the difference between Heidegger and Benjamin. Benjamin identifies Heidegger's understanding of historical time as tragic, one in which past, present and future can be gathered in time, whereas for him fulfilled time is Messianic, a gathering of time, not in time...In the absence of the Messianic fulfilment of time there can be none in time: all events in time are not only inauthentic, but they can never attain authenticity.³⁶⁶

This enables Benjamin to have an entirely different lever on the relationship between past, present and future. Whilst he may share with Heidegger the notion of 'origin' as *Ursprung*, a 'leap' which is nothing to do with genesis in terms of the objects to which it (the origin) gives rise, there is nothing of Heidegger's

³⁶⁶ Caygill, H., op.cit., 10 *Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, op.cit., 10

explicitness in view of which or in heed of which an *authentic* stance and struggle towards the disclosing of being is possible. If, following Caygill again, Benjamin understands origin and the ‘tradition’, the handing over to which it gives rise, as the basis for inauthenticity, and consequent destruction, “the price of becoming an object of tradition is inauthenticity, its emergence is always already its disappearance”³⁶⁷. Thus in the interplay of ‘restoration’ that is at the same time perpetually incomplete, ‘tradition’ is a site of mourning, ruination and sadness, with its cultural accomplishment never amounting to more than allegorical incompleteness. However this insight can potentially enable the use of the ‘ruin’ of tradition (double genitive) against itself, inasmuch as the ‘ideology’ of tradition obscures this destructiveness and lays claim to continuity or a melancholic nostalgia for the past. Thus when it comes to technology:

While previously [Benjamin] saw tradition as destructive of whatever it handed over, now he suggests that it may itself be destroyed by technology. Tradition worked by distancing its objects as past in order to bring them into presence in the present; technology however, destroys this distance...the reproduction of the object as neither distant nor unique does not for Benjamin entail its devaluation. It was tradition that destroyed the integrity of its object in its handing over; it was tradition that distanced the object from itself and its recipient. But with its destruction by technology the object is freed from tradition. The object is re-activated when the qualities of distance and uniqueness are removed from it; it becomes something different, something which need no longer be experienced in terms of presence and absence.³⁶⁸

Technology cannot do this by itself and as we shall see, for Benjamin, it is a matter of ‘reading’ technology and connecting it with other modes of ‘reading’ that provides a ‘flash’ of hope against the barbarism of tradition, freeing up its objects such that it can be understood as a potential site for a reconfiguration of ‘tradition’ on the basis of politics in political struggle against the adverse potential for technology to forcefully re-enact the destructive powers of ‘tradition’. For Benjamin, this is also the historical and political means of ‘rescuing the dead’, put to death by the inhumanity of progressive history, within

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 24

the context of their afterlife in a transformed present. Although it should not be forgotten that it is only by the Messiah that history, as such, may be ultimately redeemed. It is in this sense that Benjamin understands the 'reading' of photography in his 'Small History of Photography', which enables him to say at the end,

Such are the questions in which the interval of ninety years that separate us from the age of the daguerreotype discharges its historical tension. It is in the illumination of these sparks that the first photographs emerge, beautiful and unapproachable, from the darkness of our grandfather's day.³⁶⁹

It is possible to read technology politically in this way, because of the remarkable coming together of the means of technological reproduction and the (potential) social relations of 'the masses'.

The abolition of distance and uniqueness through technology requires the perpetual redrawing of boundaries between human beings and the world. For this reason technology for Benjamin raises the necessity for politics: limits and boundaries have to be drawn on the basis of deliberation, not simply given through tradition...In the era of technology it is possible for the "mass" to configure not only the law but the site where it is received, the way in which it is given, and themselves.³⁷⁰

Before embarking upon a more detailed reading of Benjamin's reading of technology and the connections he makes with other modes of reading, it is useful to turn to another Caygill text and grasp the principles of Benjamin's 'speculative critique'.

Put very telegraphically, Benjamin's interest in Kantian philosophy was to disturb Kant's notion of transcendental apperception by way of which Kant kept the distinction between the idea of reason (inaccessible in itself) and the

³⁶⁹ Benjamin, W., 'A Small History of Photography' in *One Way Street* trans. Jephcott, E. & Shorter, K., (London: New Left Books, 1979), 256-257

³⁷⁰ Caygill, op.cit., 27

dimensions of experience. Benjamin understood Kant's schema to be both historical and thus subject to variation through time and restrictive. Benjamin, by incorporating or enfolding, the 'absolute' of speculative critique as the excess of Kant's schema into the very co-ordinates of that schema, conceived of the spatio-temporal dimensions of the Kantian 'frame' of experience differently. The 'absolute' of speculative critique as this excess disturbed and convoluted experience such that potential future possibilities of perceptual experience may be perceptible.

Benjamin extended this speculative critique as a philosophical and historical principle, recognising that perception in its historical frames of reference would disclose some things and obscure others, but that distorted and obscured forms could potentially be freed, at the same time transformed, in the after-life of different historical experience. Throughout his work, Benjamin, through his separation of *technik* from technology, was able to recognise 'forgotten' modes of experience and their transformed, or transforming, potentials heterogeneously folded into other modes.

...[A] transcendental account of infinite readings (or perceptions) possible within a given surface of legibility...is supplemented by the speculative claim that these conditions are themselves but one of an infinite set of possible surfaces or conditions of experience. The speculative configuration is both folded into and exceeds the particular surface of legibility, allowing Benjamin to conceive of a double infinity: the transcendental infinity of possible marks on a given surface and the speculative infinity of possible bounded but infinite surfaces or frameworks of experience. The transcendental infinity of possible legible marks on a given surface is framed and supplemented by the speculative infinity of possible surfaces of legibility. The exploration of the complex relationship between the two infinities provided the occasion and motivation for much of Benjamin's subsequent work.³⁷¹

It is in this sense that one can understand the ways in which Benjamin views experience as a constellation of discontinuous and heterogeneous elements of

³⁷¹ Caygill, H., *The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), 4

past and present, with resemblances existing as an ‘invisible’ or ‘non-representational’ memory, as a disruption or convolution of the continuities of time and space as they are thought in the concept of history as a continuous development and progression. The technologies of photography and cinema, together with the movement of the ‘masses’ are the features of contemporary experience that present “surfaces of legibility” in the complex and heterogeneous arrangement of historical and future possibilities of experience that can shatter the tradition of destructive and repressive continuity, thought as continuous development and progression.

To grasp the strength and subtlety of Benjamin’s motivations and thought in these respects, it is important to establish the connections between various writings, as articulations of ways of reading. Three themes are important here; Benjamin’s thought of non-sensuous similarity; the further elaboration upon his concept of tradition as a relation between ‘sadness’ and ‘hope’, and the distinction between the aesthetic and technology and their consequences for the thinking of history and politics; a distinction between ‘art’ and ‘image’.

In his ‘Doctrine of the Similar’³⁷², and its later version, ‘On the Mimetic Faculty’³⁷³, Benjamin signals the concept of non-sensuous similarity when he writes of the mimetic capacity, which worked in archaic times to bring into focus specific points of resonance in the cosmic order through forms of divination. These were acts of reading and direct perception of the mimetic character of objects of experience. In Benjamin’s terms, there is a historical movement from this more direct perception to experience involving the deciphering and apprehension of “non-sensuous similarity”; the correspondences that emerge through different patterns of the conditions of experience. Benjamin’s point is that any direct perception of similarity emerges from a particular context of constellation, through which other ‘perceptible’ elements remain invisible. However, once this perception is understood within a broader frame of reference

³⁷² Benjamin, W., ‘Doctrine of the Similar’ (1933) in *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, trans. , R.Livingstone et al., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 694-698

³⁷³ Benjamin, W., ‘On the Mimetic Faculty’ (1933) in *One Way Street*, op.cit., 160-163

of heterogeneous conditions of experience, an element of the dynamic between past, present and futurity can come into play. As Graham MacPhee states,

If what is visible in one structuring of consciousness may yet become visible in another, then visual experience cannot be restricted to subjective intention, but must be understood to include the ‘after-event’ of the becoming conscious of what is, as yet ‘unconscious’. The configured patterns involved in perception are therefore not static and self-identical, but are informed and inhabited by different possible futures, and so are subject to reconfiguration, change and decay.³⁷⁴

Some key elements are significant here in terms of the overall corpus and trajectory of Benjamin’s thinking, one of which is his introduction of the notion of the ‘unconscious’ of perception.

It can still be claimed of our contemporaries that the cases in which they consciously perceive similarities in everyday life make up a tiny proportion of those numberless cases unconsciously determined by similarity. The similarities perceived consciously – for instance in faces – are, compared to the countless similarities perceived unconsciously or not at all, like the enormous underwater mass of an iceberg in comparison to the small tip one sees rising out of the water.³⁷⁵

Benjamin will revisit this notion of ‘unconscious’ perception when considering the contemporary technologies of photography and film, but, importantly, in their transformed context of modern experience.

Thus Benjamin’s criticism is not redemptive in the sense of seeking to recover the past, as if unchanged. “The question is simply: are we dealing with a dying out of the mimetic faculty or rather perhaps with a transformation that has taken place within it?”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ MacPhee, G., *The Architecture of the Visible*, (London: Continuum, 2002), 187

³⁷⁵ Benjamin, W., ‘Doctrine of the Similar’, op.cit., 695

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 695

Benjamin will also make the connection between the archaic forms of non-sensuous perception of similarities with the technik of language and the later changed and 'charged' temporality of the technik of photography and film. On the basis of the means by which languages 'translate', such that "words meaning the same thing in different languages are arranged about that signified as their centre...while often possessing not the slightest similarity to one another"³⁷⁷, we retain some sense of non-sensuous similarity. We can make the connection between thought, language and image through other layers of the 'Doctrine' and 'Mimetic' essays, all within the context of Benjamin's critique of the Kantian from of perception and his critique of tradition, as referred to above.

Within both essays, Benjamin also makes the transition from spoken to written language, significantly in terms of language's visual aspect.

The most recent graphology has taught us to recognize, in handwriting, images – or more precisely, picture puzzles – that the unconscious of the writer conceals in his writing. It may be supposed that the mimetic process, which expresses itself in this way in the activity of the writer, was, in the very distant times in which script originated, of utmost importance for writing. Script has thus become, like language, an archive of non-sensuous similarities, of non-sensuous correspondences.³⁷⁸

That is not to say that Benjamin wants to suggest that either the visual element of language outweighs its discursive meaning, or that they are somehow equivalent. Instead, he is formulating a relationship between them, which is necessarily non-identical but convoluted. The 'sense' that Benjamin points to cannot be separated from, but is different to, 'meaning' precisely as an 'instant'.

But this, if you will, magical aspect of language, as well as of script, does not develop in isolation from its other, semiotic, aspect. Rather, everything mimetic in language is an intention, which can appear at all only in connection with something alien at its basis: precisely the semiotic or communicative element. Thus, the literal text of the script is the sole basis on which the picture puzzle can form itself. Thus, the

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 697

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 697

nexus of meaning which resides in the sounds of the sentence is the basis from which something similar can become apparent out of a sound, flashing up in an instant.³⁷⁹

Benjamin gives further focus to the temporality of the 'flicker' or 'flash' of the instant in the shorter version of the 'Doctrine' essay, 'On the Mimetic Faculty',

Rather, the mimetic element in language can, like a flame, manifest itself only through a kind of bearer. This bearer is the semiotic element. Thus the coherence of words or sentences is the bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears. For its production by man – like its perception by him – is in many cases and particularly the most important, limited to flashes. It flits past. It is not improbable that the rapidity of writing and reading heightens the fusion of the semiotic and the mimetic in the sphere of language.³⁸⁰

This temporal element is critical.

So tempo that swiftness in reading or writing which can scarcely be separated from this process, would then become as it were, the effort, or gift, or mind to participate in that measure of time in which similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things only in order to sink down once more. Thus even profane reading, if it is not to forsake understanding altogether shares this with magical reading; that it is subject to a necessary tempo, or rather a critical moment, which the reader must not forget at any cost lest he go away empty handed.³⁸¹

It is through the temporality of the 'flicker' or 'flash' that Benjamin's 'convoluted' experience shows itself. This is crucial for an understanding of Benjamin's approach to technology, tradition and history. We can sense the correspondence to both Benjamin's concept of *ursprung* (origin) and tradition in the intrinsic characteristics of the technologies of photography and film here, but it would be a mistake to identify Benjamin's thinking of technology with a 'progressivism' or contra-wise a straightforward mere retrieval of a 'buried' past.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 697

³⁸⁰ Benjamin, W., 'On the Mimetic Faculty' (1933), *op.cit.*, 162

³⁸¹ Benjamin, W., 'Doctrine of the Similar', *op.cit.*, 698

It is here that we need to turn to further consideration of Benjamin's ideas of sadness and hope as worked through his considerations of language and literature. Benjamin's essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* has much to connect it to his discussion of the origin of German Tragic drama, the *Trauerspiel*, where the notion of work as 'ruin' and site of 'mourning' is particularly articulated. In 'Elective Affinities', Benjamin develops the idea of the work's afterlife emerging from its site of ruination. He makes a distinction between the 'material' content and the 'truth' content of a work, indicating the former as the linguistic constraints which give rise to the form and content and the latter as that 'absolute' or 'potential' configuration of the work through the history of its reception.³⁸² Benjamin traces how the gap between the initial material configuration and the work's 'truth' widens over time, such that the original material content appears increasingly 'strange' to its readers. This connects with Benjamin's meditation on Baroque Allegory, where the initial meaningfulness of the text decays over time until its meaningfulness, as such, is in its ruin. This concurs precisely with Benjamin's concept of tradition as the handing over in order to disappear, leaving the 'objects' of tradition as estranged, 'empty' allegorical configurations that are intrinsically sites of sadness and mourning. More will be said about the allegorical element later, but here the point is to stress that this ruin, as such,

“[i]s precisely what reveals something of the terms that configure its own meaningfulness, an insight which is dependent on the element of non-identity or disfigurement in its transmission.”³⁸³

We might say that it is in this very concept of ruin and afterlife that Benjamin dispels the ideology of aesthetic completeness attached to the notion of the 'symbol'. When “all ephemeral beauty is stripped off and the work stands as ruin”³⁸⁴, elements of a text's futurity and potential for other modes of meaningfulness in an afterlife are glimpsed. There is an accord between

³⁸² Benjamin, W., 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*' in *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926*, eds. Bullock, M., & Jennings, M.W., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 297-298

³⁸³ MacPhee, G., *The Architecture of the Visible* (London: Continuum, 2002), 190

³⁸⁴ Benjamin, W., *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, tran. Osborne, J., (London: Verso, 1977), 182

Benjamin's view that "the history of works prepares for their critique"³⁸⁵ in 'Elective Affinities', and his notion of criticism as the "mortification of works" in the Trauerspiel study which is not, as it was for the Romantics, the "awakening of the consciousness of living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones."³⁸⁶ MacPhee will align this with "paradoxically the condition for their rebirth"³⁸⁷ but again, we must be cautious about an idea of progressive optimism here. As Caygill points out in discussing 'Elective Affinities', the seeking of an 'immortal' or, we might say, eternally returning 'reborn 'truth' in the mortification of works offers a strange kind of hope. 'Truth' as the "inexpressible presence of death in life" is always and remains veiled, as "marked by beauty"³⁸⁸ such that,

Instead of revealing the truth behind appearances, the task of critique is redefined as tracing the mark delineating truth and appearance, 'not to raise the veil, but rather, through the most precise knowledge of it as veil, to raise [critique] for the first time to a true intuition of the beautiful...not as a symbol for a remote eternal truth, but as a mark of the mutual dependence of death in life and life in death.'³⁸⁹

The 'hope' in which the absolute is located is for the hopeless, "only for the sake of the hopeless ones is hope given us"³⁹⁰ without dialectical overcoming.

This is a hope for the other, since 'the last hope is never for the one who cherishes it, but for those alone for whom it is cherished', a hope for the dead, which in an attenuated way becomes a hope for those who are not yet dead but will soon be dead.³⁹¹

³⁸⁵ Benjamin, W., 'Goethe's Elective Affinities' in *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926*, op.cit., 298

³⁸⁶ Benjamin, W *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op.cit., 182

³⁸⁷ MacPhee, G., *The Architecture of the Visible*, op.cit., 191

³⁸⁸ Caygill, H *The Colour of Experience* London Routledge 1998 p.50

³⁸⁹ ibid p.51

³⁹⁰ Benjamin, W "Goethe's Elective Affinities" in Benjamin W *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926* Bullock M and Jennings M.W eds Cambridge Massachusetts Belknap Harvard University Press 1996 p.356

³⁹¹ Caygill, H., *The Colour of Experience*, op.cit., 51

Such hope, always already in mourning, is signified by the contingency of the shooting star, “Hope shot across the sky above their heads like a falling star”³⁹² which, as Caygill points out is “an image remote from the necessity of the rising and setting sun”, such that,

The contingency of the work that nourishes critique is aligned with the speculative union of death in life, an experience which combines contingency with necessity...In this way Benjamin repeats the Hegelian critique of the finite character of Kantian critique – its narrow notion of experience that banished the absolute from thought – but without the collateral of a progressive philosophy of history. The absolute is folded into experience in complex and often inconspicuous ways, which it becomes the task of critique not at the outset to judge, but first to delineate and map.³⁹³

Benjamin had underscored this context of hope as a contingency always already in sadness and thereby under threat, in his thoughts on language in the essay ‘On Language As Such and the Language of Man’.³⁹⁴ Here he describes a prelapsarian state of nature and the coming of man by way of Adamic naming. On being named by Adam, nature ‘laments’. Such lamentation articulates the difference between the ‘speechlessness’ of appearances and human language, which nevertheless holds out some non-sensuous reciprocity by way of ‘translation’. However, nature will undergo a double mourning after the Fall with the institution of language, in accordance with a temporally restricted and non-reciprocal economy, on ‘over-naming’. Such over-naming on the basis of the sense-certainty of human subjects subordinates nature to a static conceptual frame, whereby language is instrumentalised and reduced to ‘prattle’.

In stepping outside the pure language of name, man makes language a means (that is, a knowledge inappropriate to him), and therefore also, in one part at any rate a mere sign, and this later results in the plurality of languages...This immediacy in the communication of abstraction

³⁹² Benjamin, W., ‘Goethe’s Elective Affinities’, op.cit., 355

³⁹³ Caygill, H., *The Colour of Experience*, op.cit., 51-52

³⁹⁴ Benjamin, W., ‘On Language As Such and the Language of Man’ in *One Way Street*, op.cit., 107-123

[through signs] came into being as judgement, when in the Fall, man abandoned immediacy in the communication of the concrete, name and fell into the abyss of the mediateness of communication, of the words as means, of the empty word, into the abyss of prattle...how much more melancholy to be named not from the one blessed, paradisiac language of names but from the hundred languages of man in which name has already withered...‘over-naming’ as the deepest reason for all melancholy and (from the point of view of the thing) of all deliberate muteness.³⁹⁵

There is no doubt that Benjamin considered the era of modern technology as one of destitution and sadness, and the limitations of experience, with the dissolution of ‘traditional’ experience, Erfahrung into the ‘lived’ experience, Erlebnis.

Whilst Benjamin recognised this as the consequence of the handing down and passing away of traditional experience as such, the attempt to ‘fix’ experience in the way of Kantian philosophy, as itself a product of the inauthentic of tradition, and its consequential aesthetic judgement had to be resisted. The point was to meet this destitution head on and re-negotiate or re-configure it in terms of the transforming potential inherent in the ‘shattering of tradition’. This is why demonstration of traditional experience as ‘emptied’ and ‘dead’ in Baroque allegory was of such importance for Benjamin.

Baroque allegory demonstrates the decay of Erfahrung into Erlebnis. It is a lament to the loss of divine meaningfulness in the modern world, and the decay of intrinsic connectivity between divine and human, such that the soul withdraws into the interiority characterised by Protestant religion. The consequence of divine withdrawal and interiority is a world reduced to the ‘objects of’ the subject’s gaze. The key ‘characters’ in the scene of allegory are the emblem and the corpse, inasmuch as,

The allegorical gaze is a projection of the subject, which reduces the appearance of things to its own co-ordinates; therefore what is turned and rebounded by ‘exteriority’ back to the subject is in fact only an image of itself. From this perspective, the pre-eminent emblematic

³⁹⁵ Benjamin, W., ‘On Language As Such and the Language of Man’, op.cit., 121-122

property, or allegorical object is the corpse, since what is seen in the world of things is simply an image of the human...But as a consequence, the 'human' is itself dismembered and hollowed out, so that the conventional, conscious physis of the integral human body is scattered and allegory images the absolute abandonment of traditional, organic conceptions of meaningfulness.³⁹⁶

For Benjamin, it is at the point of utmost destitution figured by allegory, "in allegory the observer is confronted with the facies hippocratica of history as a petrified, primordial landscape"³⁹⁷, that the very transitory nature, fragility and destructive character of tradition is revealed. Unlike the symbol, where "destruction is idealised and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption", in allegory, "Everything about history that from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful is expressed in the face-or rather the death's head"³⁹⁸.

In the confrontation with the "death's head" of allegory; "the German Trauerspiel is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition. Such redemption as it knows resides in the depth of this destiny rather than the fulfilment of a divine plan of salvation"³⁹⁹; not only is the transitory and destructive character of tradition revealed but, given this, also the possibility of historical transformation of the conditions of experience, as opposed to their aesthetic compensation, as suggested by the symbol, or as we shall see by Kant's 'reconciliatory aesthetic'. The very starkness of the landscape of allegory might by this reversal provide a way to a new form of 'near-sight', as opposed to the 'always at-distance' of subject-ruled perception and the aesthetic.

It is on this basis that Benjamin will approach modern technology. The experience of commodities, whereby appearances are set free from or adrift from 'tradition', and subjective interiority is increasingly under pressure from the weight and 'bombardment' of 'lived experience', which characterises modernity, provides a new kind of, but historically transformed, allegorical landscape. But

³⁹⁶ MacPhee, G., *The Architecture of the Visible*, op.cit., 204

³⁹⁷ Benjamin, W., *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op.cit., 166

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81

there are two ways one might go here. Either one intensifies the transformation of allegorical experience by way of technology, along the lines of the 'shattering of tradition, or one compensates for it by looking to technology as the vehicle to reconstitute the relationship between image and meaning on the basis of the 'auratic'.

Benjamin's writings in the later twenties and thirties trace the problematic between these two routes, the latter based upon the reconciliatory effects of Kantian aesthetic judgement, in the opposition between an aesthetics of harmony (the beautiful), characterised by the return of the subjective gaze, and an aesthetics of the sublime, striving for such a return which nevertheless evokes the power of subjective imagination, both of which are premised on the appearance of distance. Benjamin resists this Kantian dyad, consequent on the attempts to fix 'lived experience'. Some of his exemplary figures in demonstrating the necessity for this resistance are Baudelaire, Proust and the Surrealist movement, whilst he embraces the future of technology in the essays that directly address photography and film.⁴⁰⁰

Benjamin's concern for the relationship between the aesthetic, the historical and ultimately the political, goes far beyond the consideration of art works. However, the aesthetic is the site upon which one can trace both the 'transmissibility' of tradition (Erfahrung) and its disappearance, and the 'shattering' of tradition as lived experience (Erlebnis) on the basis of the historical conditions of perception. The conditions of modernity are such that the transmissibility of tradition and its passing away, previously understood subject to 'periods' of time, now, in the era of technology, happens in an instant. In an age of 'instant archaism' characteristic of the industrialisation and production of commodities of the nineteenth century 'second nature', any attempt to retain or capture Erfahrung as the experience of tradition can only be by way of the glimpse, the 'fixing' of which can only constitute an individualised, compensatory nostalgia,

⁴⁰⁰ Benjamin, W., 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, tran. Zohn, H., (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970):157-202; 'The Image of Proust' in *Illuminations*:203-217; 'Surrealism' in Benjamin, W., *One Way Street* op.cit 225-239; 'A Small History of Photography' op.cit; 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*:219-253

exemplified in Proust's 'memoire involuntaire' or the complex desire for the 'return of the gaze' in Baudelaire's 'correspondances', both of which seek to invest in objects the characteristics of inter-subjective exchange (commodity fetishism). Here we might say these authors each present a last redoubt against, but at the same time, they point towards the transformation of experience. Perhaps nothing captures this more than Baudelaire's 'battle' against photography, the crowd and the passing veiled woman, as Benjamin reads them in 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire'.⁴⁰¹

In 'Motifs', Benjamin demonstrates photography's lack of return of the gaze and Baudelaire's battle to come to terms with this. Characteristically, it is a battle between the 'photographic' and 'art', as the imaginative, the intangible and the beautiful.

In so far as art aims at the beautiful and, on however modest a scale 'reproduces it' it conjures it up out of the womb of time. This no longer happens in the case of technical reproduction. (The beautiful has no place in it.)...If the distinctive feature of the images that rise from the memoire involuntaire is seen in their aura, then photography is decisively implicated in the phenomenon of the 'decline of aura'. What was inevitably felt to be inhuman, one might even say deadly, in daguerreotypy was the (prolonged) looking into the camera, since the camera records our likeness without returning our gaze. But looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met (which in the case of thought processes, can apply equally to the look of the eye of the mind and to a glance pure and simple), there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent...Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the memoire involuntaire...The greater Baudelaire's insight into this phenomenon, the more unmistakably did the disintegration of aura make itself felt in this poetry.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ Benjamin, W., 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, trans. Zohn, H., (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970)

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 189-190

Benjamin saw Baudelaire as the “last lyric poet of the nineteenth century” and the exemplar of the transformation of allegory in the era of modernity. The last lines of the above quotation encapsulate this. Insofar as he strove to ‘capture’ the auratic, the conditions of modernity impinged upon this strife. This is epitomised in Benjamin’s reading of Baudelaire’s sonnet ‘A une passante’ which he reads as a ‘photographic’ allegory of desire in modernity. The key ‘figures’ here are the ‘un-representable’, ‘negative figure of the crowd, “the mass was the agitated veil; through it Baudelaire saw Paris...In the sonnet “A une passante” the crowd is nowhere named in either word or phrase. And yet the whole happening hinges on it, just as the progress of a sailboat depends on the wind”,⁴⁰³ and the figure of the passing woman emerging from it. The figure of desire, “the figure that fascinates”⁴⁰⁴ in Baudelaire’s poem is the ‘passing away’ figure in the movement of the crowd, like a photograph, caught in a flash of an instant of passing, as “love-not at first sight, but at last sight.”⁴⁰⁵ At the same time, the woman is “a figure of shock, indeed of catastrophe.”⁴⁰⁶ As such the figure becomes the emblem for the massed ‘movement’ of modern experience and what happens to desire; how it becomes photographic, as opposed to auratic, within that experience. The investment of desire is in the ‘image’ or ‘imprint’ of the woman. She is already gone, passed by, and as she is mourning, she is doubtless veiled and thus already possessing both the ‘negative’ effect of death and “eyes...that...have lost their ability to look”.⁴⁰⁷ Yet her presence as ‘passante’ adheres to the temporal paradox of quasi-arrested passing. The ‘photographic’ shock that Baudelaire receives from the passing woman provokes the fantasy that the woman returns the gaze, but he can only attempt the fantasy as a projected ‘hallucination’ onto the ‘screen’ of her non-seeing eye and, in a retrospective figure of (punctuated) speech, which mimics the mechanics of the camera, “A lightning flash...then night!”⁴⁰⁸ Thus there comes another shock, after the shock of the event, the happening of which remains entirely irretrievable. The poem stages the shock, and shock defence in Baudelaire’s parrying of the shock in the repetitious parody of the camera. The image of the

⁴⁰³ Benjamin, W., ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, op.cit. 170

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 171

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 171

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 171

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 191

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 171

woman is photograph and camera in this relay of shock effect and shock defence; the camera imparting a “posthumous shock.”⁴⁰⁹ The happening of the event, despite Baudelaire’s attempts to attribute a ‘look’ to this ‘fleeting beauty’ is not masked by a resolution of the desire in such projected fulfilment. It can only be staged in the ‘negative’ space of the repeated parody of photographic shock interrupting such projected resolution. As Benjamin’s commentary affirms, Baudelaire experiences not erotic rapture, but “the kind of sexual shock that can beset a lonely man”.⁴¹⁰

As MacPhee states, referencing Benjamin’s essay ‘Central Park’⁴¹¹, but as relevant to ‘Some Motifs’ and ‘A une passante’, “Baudelaire’s allegory break[s] into [the] world...to leave its harmonious structures in ruins.”⁴¹² Despite Baudelaire’s efforts to organise the experience of the ‘passante’ in terms of ‘fleeting beauty’, he produces the photographic imprint emerging from the ‘negative’ of the crowd, which does not ‘look back’.⁴¹³ That said, his poetry exemplifies the critical historical moment of reading inasmuch as the impact of modern experience may still lend itself to the attempt to articulate experience such as in Baudelaire’s correspondences as “an experience which seeks to establish itself in crisis-proof form...it presents itself as the beautiful. In the beautiful the ritual value of art appears.”⁴¹⁴

This demonstrates the crux of the issue with regard to modern technology and the modern conditions of perception. Whilst allegorical seeing may articulate the demise of the holding at a distance, typified by the Kantian schema of perception, the possibility remains to ‘freeze’ the dynamics of modern experience into the temporal co-ordinates of subject-led perceptions, as indeed in the terms of Heidegger’s ‘world picture’.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 177

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 171

⁴¹¹ Benjamin, W., ‘Central Park’, tran Spencer, L., (*New German Critique*, no.34, 1985)

⁴¹² MacPhee, G., *The Architecture of the Visible*, op.cit., 207

⁴¹³ See also the insightful reading of Baudelaire’s allegory of photography and the crowd which is “Une Passante” by Samuel Weber in Weber, S *Mass Mediauras*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press 1996) 94-96

⁴¹⁴ Benjamin, W., ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’, op.cit., 184

The destruction of experience as holistic Erfahrung in the era of modernity, with its production of commodities plucked from 'context' and instantly archaic, disperses the conditions for the transmissibility of tradition, as aura, but at the same time provides transformed opportunities for auratic perception. "The disconnected moments of lived experience, now free from tradition, lie available for new and potentially restrictive modes of recombination."⁴¹⁵

This is why photography and film are so important for Benjamin, but in the critical context of new possibilities for perception, as he suggests in the essay on Surrealism, where "an action puts forth its own image and exists, absorbing and consuming it, where nearness looks with its own eyes [and] the long-sought image sphere is opened... in which political materialism and physical nature share the inner man, the psyche, the individual ...with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains unrent."⁴¹⁶

This is where the concept of 'innervation' becomes important. In sum, this is the transposition of those mimetic impulses between the human body and 'first nature' technology from more archaic times, the residue of which have now become individualised and fetishised, such as in *memoire involuntaire* and correspondances onto the plane of the collective experience of modernity, where bodies are 'automatonised' to the rhythms of modern urban life, precisely to enable a 'play' within those conditions, with 'movement' dispersing the 'automatic' responses demanded of modern conditions and the transforming possibilities of 'play' as the sphere of non-instrumentality within technology.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ MacPhee, G., *The Architecture of the Visible*, op.cit., .209

⁴¹⁶ Benjamin, W., 'Surrealism' in *One Way Street*, op.cit., 239

⁴¹⁷ The mechanisation of experience, its shocks and shock defence, forms the context for the 'Motifs' essay. Benjamin cites "Of the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing and the like, the 'snapping' of the photographer has had the greatest consequence. A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were. Haptic experiences of this kind were joined by optic ones, such as are supplied by the advertising pages of a newspaper or the traffic of a big city." And "wrote Marx, that the worker does not make use of the working conditions. The working conditions make use of the worker...In working with machines, workers learn to co-ordinate their own movements with the uniformly constant movements of an automaton." Benjamin, W., 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', op.cit., 176-177

Miriam Hansen explains the significance of innervation for Benjamin first in terms of the context, in which bourgeois culture had come to treat modern technology as 'second nature',

Benjamin does not assume an instrumentalist trajectory [for technology] from mythical cunning to capitalist-industrialist modernity. The telos [of the] ... 'domination of nature' defines the second, modern technology only from 'the position of the first', which sought to master nature in existential seriousness, out of harsh necessity. By contrast Benjamin asserts [that the] the second technology rather aims at the interplay between nature and humanity. And it is the training, practicing of rehearsal of this interplay that Benjamin pinpoints as the decisive function of contemporary art, in particular film...Film has the potential to reverse, in the form of play, the catastrophic consequences of an already failed reception of technology.⁴¹⁸

Technology was conceived, as 'second nature' from the point of view of the domination of nature as an end in itself and "bourgeois culture had been complicit with that process by disavowing the political implications of technology, treating it as 'second nature', while fetishizing an ostensibly pure and primary nature as the object of individual contemplation."⁴¹⁹ The point is to recognise the residual yield, the play and movement of photography and film as a means to reconnect with those mimetic impulses of non-sensuous similarity, transposed to context of the modern experience of the always potentially dispersed, moving 'crowd'; to put the 'play' or, in other terms, the heterogeneity of historical layers of perception, back into modern experience.

Because of the medium's technicity, as well as its collective mode of perception, film offers a chance...to bring the apparatus to social consciousness, to make it public. 'To make the technical apparatus of our time, which is second nature for the individual into a first nature for the collective, is the historic task of film.'...Innervation as a mode of regulating the interplay between humans and (second) technology can only succeed (that is escape the destructive vortex of defensive numbing adaptation) if it reconnects with the discarded powers of the first, with

⁴¹⁸ Hansen, M.B., 'Benjamin and Cinema', in *Critical Inquiry*, (Vol. 25, no.2, Winter, 1999), 320

⁴¹⁹ Hansen, M.B., 'Benjamin and Cinema', op.cit., 320

mimetic practices that involve the body as the 'pre-eminent instrument' of sensory perception and (moral and political) differentiation...[that is to say] efforts of innervation on the part of a new, historically unprecedented collective which has its organs in second technology.⁴²⁰

We can see how, for Benjamin, this is another way of turning 'second nature' on its head. If, going along with Hansen's interpretation, there is a hint of Kant lurking in this notion of the body as 'pre-eminent instrument', it is entirely recast against, "the perceptual limitations constitutive of the human being qua individual body...the anthropocentrism that maintains the hierarchic polarization of humans over the rest of creation; and the capitalist society's perpetuation of the self-identical individual against the realities of modern mass experience".⁴²¹ It is the challenge that technology potentially offers to all this that drives Benjamin. It is the imposition of subject-centred perceptual co-ordinates and the consequent subordination of the phenomenal world through technology that creates the conditions for the utmost violence. That is why Benjamin exerts the utmost effort to read technology against that grain and imbricate it in an entirely new way of conceiving history as technology, technology as history. Thus Benjamin will turn to photography and film as *technik*, which provides for an expanded spectrum of perception and a visual yield that contributes to the deepening of apperception beyond the restrictions of subject-centred co-ordinates.

'A Small History of Photography' addresses this in more or less overt ways.⁴²² It hints at the importance for Benjamin of 'reading' history through the *technik* of photography, from "the fog that surrounds the beginnings..." to the "interval of ninety years [that] discharges its historical tension"⁴²³, we are *not* dealing with history as the "fill[ing of] homogeneous empty time"⁴²⁴, but instead those moments whereby the arrest of time that is photography at the same time

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 321

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 323

⁴²² Benjamin, W., 'A Small History of Photography', *op.cit.*, 240-257

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 240 and 256

⁴²⁴ Benjamin, W., 'Theses on the Philosophy of History XVII' in *Illuminations*, *op.cit.*, 264

presents the “crystallization into a monad”⁴²⁵, shot through with heterogeneous time. The matters that emerge as decisive from the ‘Small History of Photography’ have to be understood in terms of the technik of technology as ‘second nature’, which requires an entire renegotiation of the relationship between technology and human experience. Technology as a second nature is no longer in the position of being subordinated to the human-centred ‘interiority’ of the ‘first nature’ technologies of magic or aesthetic technique. Thus Benjamin will say that photography in its capabilities to reveal “the physiognomic aspects of visual worlds which dwell in the smallest things” will “make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical variable.”⁴²⁶ Photography opens up the potential for a spatio-temporal heterogeneity as never before, beyond the confines of aesthetic technique and subjective intention. This is what Benjamin means by the ‘optical unconscious’. “For it is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious.”⁴²⁷ What compels in photography is beyond subjective intention, by virtue of the fact that, as Benjamin first delineates in reference to Hill’s image of the *Newhaven fishwife*, “there remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer’s art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in art.” He reiterates this in terms of the ‘Dauthendey’ picture, whereby,

No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has so to speak seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future subsists so eloquently that, we looking back may rediscover it.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 265

⁴²⁶ Benjamin, W., ‘A Small History of Photography’, op.cit., 243-244

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 243

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 243

Importantly, whilst such moments may appear ‘incoherent’ in terms of a perception co-ordinated by way of aesthetic technique, they can be subsequently coherent in terms of a ‘new regime of perception’. It is important to again stress how photographs reveal “the visible as a historical variable”⁴²⁹ and in this sense can undermine any clinging on to the ‘naturalised’ conditions of aura. So, photographs have the capacity to “pump the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship.”⁴³⁰ That historically variable nature of visibility is also apparent in the desire “to bring things closer to us”⁴³¹, which, as MacPhee suggests, connects with “the different apperceptive arrangement”⁴³² demanded by photography, such that it, indeed as Benjamin says, “sets the scene for a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings”.⁴³³ This seems to me to be precisely the condition for the ‘play’ within technology as characterised by Hansen, above.

That element comes to the fore forcibly in relation to the technology of film. The key to film lies in its constructed nature as a matrix of sequencing, inter-relating, editing and cutting of images. As such, as MacPhee explains, “that is the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of formal coherence and meaning are themselves produced through the sequencing and interrelation of images, rather than being a function of a fixed transcendental framework.”⁴³⁴ That is to say that the medium of film matches the transitivity of technology as ‘second nature’ but brings this into play with the distraction of its audiences, which, being both an openness to new possible configurations of perception other than fixed co-ordinates and, as Sam Weber suggests, as dispersion or strewn-ness,⁴³⁵ it connects with the way of being of the masses, so that technology and bodily innervation may come together. Hence the importance of the analogy with the surgeon, not just because “he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient’s body and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs” and, in a similar way, the cameraman

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 244

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 250

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 250

⁴³² MacPhee, G., op.cit., 215

⁴³³ Benjamin, W., ‘A Small History of Photography’ :251, quoted in Macphee, G., op.cit., 215

⁴³⁴ MacPhee, G., op.cit., 218

⁴³⁵ see Weber, S., ‘Art, Aura and Media in the Work of Walter Benjamin’ *Mass Mediauras*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 102

“penetrates deeply into [reality’s] web”⁴³⁶, but because the picture obtained by the cameraman “consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new *law*.”⁴³⁷ [Emphasis added]. It is precisely in this sense that Benjamin reads technology through concepts, which are “completely useless for the purposes of Fascism” whilst being “useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art”⁴³⁸. Fascism is capable of harnessing ‘second-nature’ technology for auratic ends. It can do so by precisely that imposition of subject-centred perceptual co-ordinates and subordination of the phenomenal world, suggested above, so that by way of technology the ‘dispersed’ masses are given a face that looks back, thus ‘fixing’ their co-ordinates. Fascism can “attempt to organise the masses without affecting property relations”, by “giving these masses not their right but their chance to express themselves.”⁴³⁹ That chance comes most emphatically by way of ‘self-expression’.

“Mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of the masses, In big parades and monster rallies, in sports events and in war, all of which nowadays are captured by the camera and sound recording, the masses *are brought face to face with themselves*.”⁴⁴⁰ [Emphasis added]

Fascism, by co-ordinating the means by which the ‘mass’ looks itself in the face, allows the ‘mass’ to find the gaze that ostensibly looks back. Of course, this can also happen through other ‘spectacular’ means via a certain ‘selection’, “a selection before the equipment from which the star and the dictator emerge victorious.”⁴⁴¹

It is this urgency that drives Benjamin to his famous inversion, and it is worth reiterating its context in terms of the importance for Benjamin of the relationship between ‘second nature’ and innervation,

If the natural utilization of productive forces is impeded by the property system, the increase in technical devices, in speed and in the sources of energy will press for an unnatural utilization, and this is found in war. The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology

⁴³⁶ Benjamin, W., ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in *Illuminations*, op.cit., 235

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 236

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 220

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 243

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 253, n.21

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 249, n.12

has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society...[Mankind's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics, which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicising art.⁴⁴²

It is true that here Benjamin 'names' a politics. But it is unlikely that he would be 'guilty' of "over-naming" in terms of an 'instrumental' communism. Two things are significant here. Benjamin has been at pains to recognise the proletarian masses as necessarily 'dispersed' by the 'atomising' forces of modernity, whereby bodily organs are 'disaggregated' into various 'functions'. The point is not to disavow this by a 'false consciousness' of an aggregated body, but to turn this around through the recognition of a new topography of perception, which demands an open field of politics that may shoot a star of hope across history.

Following from this, Benjamin's conception of politics and history is decidedly contra historical time understood as a continuum. For Benjamin the non-sensuous similarity inhering in perception conforms to concept of history wherein, "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again"⁴⁴³; "to articulate the past historically...means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes by in a moment of danger"⁴⁴⁴ such that any politics is going to have to be in terms of the Jetztzeit, "an image is that in which the Then and the Now come together into a constellation like a flash of lightening. In other words; an image is dialectics at a standstill...the image that is read, that is, the image at the Now of recognizability, bears to the highest degree the stamp of that critical, dangerous impetus that lies at the source of all reading."⁴⁴⁵ It seems to me that it is from within technology that Benjamin seeks the conditions for a revolutionary (in terms of an awakening

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 244

⁴⁴³ Benjamin, W., 'Theses on the Philosophy of History V' in *Illuminations*, op.cit., 257

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 257

⁴⁴⁵ Benjamin, W., 'Re The Theory of Knowledge The Theory of Progress' *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. Smith, G., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 50-51

to the 'Now-time') politics, without succumbing to a technological or political determinism. As Miriam Hansen has it:

For the promise cinema held out [as a form of sensory, psychosomatic aesthetic experience] was that it might give the technologically altered sensorium access to a contemporary materially-based and collective form of reflexivity that would not have to surrender the mimetic and temporal dimensions of [historically individualised] experience.⁴⁴⁶

Benjamin's reading has been characterised as one of technology as 'pure means', which resonates with politics as 'pure means'. To debate Benjamin's meditation on politics, as in his 'Critique of Violence' is beyond the scope of this thesis, but this characterisation of his reading of technology derives from an interpretation that suggests, "Benjamin hoped to separate the pure, unalloyed use of technological means [the mediality of the [film] medium], that is film as a revolutionary medium, from its exploitation in fascist propaganda."⁴⁴⁷ This may be to interpret his reading, which clearly goes beyond or seeks another direction to its 'semiotic' element, as 'pure' mediality. However, it seems to me that Benjamin recognised not only in film but in other aspects of modernity, a mode of sensory affect (surely always historical for Benjamin), which potentially interplayed with and thereby potentially "wrested from conformism" a social sensorium that had already become, far from 'pure' but mediated by the 'means' of production and aspects of the commodification of everyday life. In this sense, it could be said that Benjamin would not separate a politics of technology from a politics, as such. The legacy of readings of Benjamin appears to suggest something of an impossibility of the political, inasmuch as, in terms of Benjamin's view of the in-authenticity of tradition, as soon as politics became 'a politics', it would be on a path towards its own disintegration or, if given a 'face', would be dangerously auratic.⁴⁴⁸ If politics derives from and articulates

⁴⁴⁶ Hansen, M.B., 'Benjamin and Cinema', op.cit., 341

⁴⁴⁷ Hanssen, B., 'On the Politics of Pure Means' in *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination*, eds. de Vries, H., & Weber, S., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 246

⁴⁴⁸ For example, David S. Ferris argues "Benjamin's understanding of the historical is useless for political organization: such an understanding is the testimony of an event, that is, of a dialectical image, that must last long enough to be critical, but be cut off from what it criticizes, lest the dialectical complicity of its ground be revealed...In the moment of [this] discontinuity, Benjamin attempts to think a politics, albeit a politics defined by its own inability to save itself, which is to

the 'Now-time' as the interruptive 'crossing' of history seizing the past in-to the presence of the new, then it is perhaps much more a politics of nuance and reflexivity than some of the more contemporary interpretations of Benjamin's language might allow, especially if we still search for a politics of redemption or overcoming. The fact that for Benjamin redemption was only possible at the point of the "outside of time" of the Messiah, acted, I think, as a critique of the presumptions of a politics of overcoming in favour of the recognition of the effect ('power'; politics) of the enfolding of speculative critique into the here and now, at the level of existence, to 'open up' a hope for future possibilities. In this sense I am not sure that his reading of politics and the aesthetic is as far removed from Nancy's as perhaps I first thought. Nor so that of Derrida, but there still lurks the matter of the Messiah as possible transcendental signified, which I think needs to be 'worked out' between Benjamin and Derrida.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida shows how he goes with yet departs from Benjamin. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Derrida takes up the notion of the messianic as a spectral and promissory temporal structure. It is this that he is thinking of, with his injunction in resistance to 'technology' and 'the media' that for which we must assume the inheritance of Marxism as "that which continues to put back on the drawing board the question of life, spirit, or the spectral, of life-death beyond the opposition of life and death"⁴⁴⁹. It is the 'time-out-of-joint' as the time of the infinite memory of and unaccountable future of the 'the other' which for Derrida constitutes justice, and that Derrida wrestles from Marx's ontology by 're-working' Marxism as a hauntology. Derrida is particularly interested in those aspects of Benjamin's thoughts on history that do

say that politics can have no history other than an inability to resist its ungroundable relation to history." See Ferris, D.S., 'Aura, Resistance and the Event of History' in *Walter Benjamin Theoretical Questions*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 24-25. Peter Osborne writes of Benjamin's politics as a 'black-hole' "...the political dimension of the concept of historical experience remained crucially under-determined. As the temporal structure of the new concept of experience a sociologically based but Messianically expanded conception of the historical experience of cultural form achieves increasing clarity, its political meaning recedes from view. The political, one might say, is the black hole at the centre of Benjamin's work. The linchpin of his project to fuse materialism with theology, the idea from which everything else derives its meaning, it is present, ultimately only as a need." See Osborne, P., 'Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats' *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, eds. Benjamin, A., & Osborne, P., (London: Clinamen Press, 2000 edition), 93

⁴⁴⁹ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, op.cit., 54.

not just imply the 'messianic' but mention it.⁴⁵⁰ But at the same time Derrida resists any identification with the Messiah. We might wonder why he names his injunction messianic at all. We might also wonder whether Benjamin's bringing of the Messiah into play here with his concept of history might be some equivocation on his part? I might say 'yes' and 'no', but the 'no' supports the view that a 'Messianic' appeal by Benjamin at the same time is devoid of any model of 'overcoming' or completion on his part. Furthermore, the alliance in Benjamin between a politics of memory, ultimately premised upon the Messianic and his concept of innervation, is not modelled on anything suggesting the 'overcoming' in Hegel's sense of the incarnate of the 'body' of state or community. *Dispersal* is, I think, critical for Benjamin. So we need to explore why the messianic for Derrida and why the messianic pitted against that other spectre of technology? In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida answers this question in terms of an inheritance of Marxism and an open future. To take the latter first, in its thematic recurrence throughout *Specters*, Derrida will deploy the messianic, despite its religious signification to mark the entirely open 'to come' of the other,

This eschatological relation to the to-come of an event and of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated...just opening...messianic opening to what is coming...to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or him for whom one must leave an empty place, always in memory of the hope – and this is the very place of spectrality.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵⁰ In a footnote in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida particularly identifies Benjamin's theses thus: having extrapolated on the 'puppet and the dwarf', Derrida continues "The following paragraph names messianism, or more precisely, messianic without messianism, a 'weak messianic power'...Let us quote this passage for what is consonant there...with what we are trying to say here about a certain messianic destitution, in a spectral logic of inheritance and generations, but a logic turned to the future no less than the past, in a heterogeneous and disjointed time. What Benjamin calls *Anspruch* (claim, appeal, interpellation, address) is not far from what we are suggesting with the word injunction: "The past carries with it secret index by which it is referred to redemption...There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists aware of that...We should quote and reread here all these pages – which are dense, enigmatic, burning- up to the final allusion to the 'chip' (shard, splinter) that the messianic inscribes in the body of the at-present and up to the 'strait gate' for the passage of the Messiah, namely every 'second'. For this does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous empty time." Derrida, J., *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Kamuf, P., (London: Routledge, 1994), 181, n. 2

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 65

Simon Critchley suggests that, for Derrida, the messianic points to the irreducibility of the religious, or more exactly,

The irreducibility of the spectral is linked to the irreducibility of the religious for Derrida, where Marx critique of religiosity would be part and parcel of his ontological approach. Hauntology is premised upon the irreducibility of forms of non-identity and alterity, where the religious is a privileged form of such alterity.⁴⁵²

We could say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to this in the context of Derrida’s critique of Marx’s ontology as a means by which to chase down all examples of the ‘ideological’, including religion. Derrida wants to put back in play a certain structure, which pertains to a mode of the religious in order to refute the ontological present in favour of the promise, the ‘to come’. This is the transformation required to mobilise the spirit of Marxism against what Derrida characterises as an insufficiency of the ontological vis-à-vis (to go right back to the beginning), “the new speed of the apparition (we understand this word in its ghostly sense) of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, and the virtual event, cyberspace and surveillance, the control, appropriations and speculations that today deploy unheard-of powers”.⁴⁵³ It therefore seems to me that Derrida posits the messianic, not so much for its irreducibility in terms of the religious, but because it shares something of or deploys a structure of differance, vis-à-vis what we might understand as the apocalyptic structure of technology. This differentiation is important in order to conclude that for Derrida there is no ‘exterior’ politics in a ‘pre-formed’ or envisaged ‘incarnate’ sense that can be applied to technology or our technologically dominated age. Just as we cannot assume that which counts as the inheritance of Marxism, or the inheritance of the religious for that matter, on the basis of a content that may impede the ‘absolute hospitality’, the ‘yes’ to the arrivant(e), the ‘come’ to the future that cannot be anticipated”⁴⁵⁴. Insofar as it is open and it is “waiting for the event as justice, this hospitality is absolute only if it keeps watch over its own universality”⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² Critchley, S., ‘Derrida’s Specters of Marx’ in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (Vol. 21, no.3, 1995), 17

⁴⁵³ Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx*, op.cit., 52-54

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 168

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 168

Here in *Specters* Derrida will write of a despairing messianism, which might appear to have some affinity with Benjamin's articulation of hope and sadness and "hope for the hopeless", but is distinct from this. Derrida links a "despairing messianism" with the uncanny and unheimlich, "strangely familiar, yet inhospitable at the same time" of Freud and Heidegger, to get across the necessity for embracing a lack of assurance, an 'impossibility', "this figure of absolute hospitality whose promise one would choose to entrust to an experience that is so impossible, so unsure of its indigence, to a quasi-"messianism", so anxious, so fragile and impoverished...for a despairing messianism."⁴⁵⁶ This despair is necessary because "without this...despair and if one could count on what was coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program. One would have the prospect but one would no longer wait for anything or anyone. Law without justice."⁴⁵⁷ Such despair is necessary as the mark of a certain essential hesitation and, we might say, interruptive vibration *against* whilst *within* the onslaught of the virtualisation of the tele-technological. 'It' moves, trembles, it 'spooks', 'es spukt'; as part of the two-fold gesture, the differance of the technological. As above, in this chapter:

"in the general dis-location to which our time is destined...the messianic trembles on the edge of this event itself. It is this hesitation, it has no other vibration, it does not live otherwise, but it would no longer be messianic if it stopped hesitating; how to give rise and to give place, still, to render it, this place, to render it habitable, but without killing the future in the name of old frontiers..."⁴⁵⁸

This position re-emerges with Derrida's other sustained engagement with the question of technology, which occurs in his debate with Bernard Stiegler. The dialogue occurs in *Echographies of Television*.⁴⁵⁹ In brief, Derrida and Stiegler share concerns about the ways in which contemporary technology may or may not keep open the possibilities for reflexive memory and an opening to the future. Stiegler is concerned that the current modalities of technological image production and the modes of 'selection' that predominate economically and

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 168-169

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 169

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 169

⁴⁵⁹ Derrida, J., and Stiegler, B., *Echographies of Television*, tran. Bajorek, J., (Oxford: Polity Press, 2002)

socially, in terms of the dissemination of technologies, are such that, rather than opening up space and time as modes for reflexive memory and future horizons, instead are at one with an undifferentiated temporal flux of consciousness, which is in danger of reducing reflexivity. Responding to Stiegler's predominantly Husserlian paradigm, Derrida reiterates his thesis concerning the spatio-temporality of arche-writing, as differance, the already inscribed anachronistic temporality of that 'other' spectre that preoccupies him in *Specters of Marx*. Derrida will basically keep faith with his articulation of inheritance, reading and the notion of image reading as far more spatio-temporally "internally" 'different' than Stiegler might allow. Stiegler, on the other hand, suggests that the selection, direction and steer given to modalities of the image that predominate as potentially 'flattening out' memory, requires an external political will to engage in new paradigms of intelligibility concerning the image. It is in this *external* sense that Stiegler will call for a 'politics of memory.'

The stake today is to invent, therefore, at an international level, a politics of memory, in response to the 'economic' and 'phenomenological' specificity of the contemporary technologies that allows the future to take place in a manner that is more than less interesting, itself more than less promoting of the future...Political mobilization, is consequently for Stiegler, one important condition of reflection and invention upon the movement of difference and spacing that constitute the tele-technologies in the first place, a movement of which these same technologies, in alliance with the economic, are reducing rather than increasing consciousness."⁴⁶⁰

Both Derrida and Stiegler share an injunction for an open future, premised upon a politics of memory, but as we have seen with Derrida, "an invention that would promote the incalculable (open future) is itself impossible to calculate."⁴⁶¹

As Beardsworth summarises,

⁴⁶⁰ See Beardsworth, R., 'Towards a Critical Culture of the Image' in *Tekhnema*, (Vol. 4., Spring, 1998), 8-9 or: <http://tekhnema.free.fr/4Beardsworth.html>,

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9

Thus where Stiegler looks for political determination between difference and the technical, for the future to remain open, given that determination opens up the future as much as it may close it, with this same horizon in mind, Derrida both looks to political determination and takes distance from the political instance, leaving the future of the technical to be decided, given that for him, anticipation always runs the risk of filling the future in.⁴⁶²

Derrida has shown that the thinking of technology needs to think the anachronistic spatio-temporality of difference and the messianic hesitation, within the 'speed of the apparition' that contemporary technology appears to be, in the way that he has brought the intervention of difference to other forms of communication, such as writing, art, speech, and the conceptual frameworks through which they have been thought, as a politics without calculation, without pre-determined 'exterior' force.

Nancy will similarly but differently suggest that 'politics' in relation to technology and art is co-extensive with each of these on the basis of what they share and are exposed to with regard to the circulation of sense. What is perhaps difficult and strange in Nancy's thought is his privileging of 'sense' as the way in which we can rethink existence and how this can be applied to political and communal relations, as opposed to essentialising and totalising models of thought. Insofar as the aesthetic has a primary relation to sense, Nancy nevertheless is not promulgating the aesthetic as the route to the political or as the mode by which to deconstruct the technological as each needs to be rethought within its own terms.

I suggest Nancy makes something of a bridge between Heidegger and Benjamin's thought along the lines of the distinction between aesthetics and 'aisthesis', art and sense. He extracts from Heidegger the notion that art opens a world, 'creates' the sense of sense as world, world as sense, and extracts from Benjamin, obliquely and more 'hidden' perhaps, that art has to be thought in terms of the infinite relativisation of the fragment. That is to say, where in some

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 10

respects Nancy will 'echo' Heidegger's notion of the 'riss' on the border between sense and world, for Nancy this is a 'fragmentary' opening to 'sense' coextensive with world and has not to do with any claims towards the gathering of a community, or similar broader "theological-political claims". Nancy also takes from Heidegger the 'original' relation between 'art' and technology in 'techne', but he resists an opposition between the routes or 'ends' of each. Rather, he re-thinks 'techne' in its specific articulation of sense. Similarly, vis-à-vis Benjamin, Nancy will not critically separate art as 'technique', as a form of constrictive application to 'nature', but will rethink technique as the mode of infinite relativisation of the fragmentation of art that breaks with the 'artifice' of the unicity in the concept of art. He takes from Benjamin something of the historical urgency of rethinking 'sense' in the here and now, whereby 'our time' appears to us as the 'absence' or 'loss' of 'sense', but is thus, and necessarily, open to a future uncertainty of 'itself'. The absence of sense of our world is characterised both by the accumulation of senseless atrocities and our current state of the West's future being determined by the continuation of a subject-centred individualism cast within an ever expanding 'eco-technics' of capital. Faced with this, the West's response is, rather than rethink possibilities, to cling on to

...exclusionary and appropriative politics, its yearning fascination with exteriority (God, Law, Value); its debilitating nostalgia for lost community, myths and rituals...the precariousness of its rational and libertarian efforts to establish the self-evidence of 'freedom'; its self-deceiving presumption of evil's essential negativity; the intrusion of eco-technical values into health and life; its determination of the 'market value' of human being reflected in media opinion...etc.⁴⁶³

Underlying this is a 'substantialist' metaphysics, which relies on the presumption of a predetermined existence and essence of human being, which is in turn reflected back upon itself in what Nancy calls an 'immanentism'. Contra to this, Nancy proposes a re-articulation of the 'circulation' or coming and going of sense (as opposed to the 'vicious' circle of significations that I think Benjamin

⁴⁶³Hutchens, B.C., *Jean-Luc Nancy: The Future of Philosophy*, (Buckinghamshire: Acumen, 2005),2

would identify with technique) that is our world, in which we exist as singular finite beings, insofar as we are exposed to the plurality of, and thus the fragmentary nature of this 'circulation' of sense. To share in the 'surprise' of sense is our freedom, as an inaugural act, irreducible to those historical and extant 'models' of history, community, politics, technology, art premised upon substantialist conceptualisation. Nancy's thought thus proceeds by way of a critique of and 'labouring' of such conceptualisations in order to draw out the "untapped 'an-archic' conceptual possibilities of experience and the intense disruptions, interruptions and fragmentations of existence"⁴⁶⁴, insofar as existence has been thought in substantialist, immanent ways, which prohibit the thinking of freedom in the fragments of sense.

If Benjamin is a background figure for Nancy, it is through Hegel and Heidegger that Nancy will primarily approach a rethinking of art and sense. In some ways Nancy shares Heidegger's view about the distinctive possibilities of art in relation to experience. But Nancy moves away from Heidegger's immanentism, which is premised on an 'authentic' gathering, with regard to the place of art in disclosing a world. I want first to delineate some of Nancy's key thoughts in relation to art and sense before considering the wider ramifications of Nancy's thought on technology, politics and community.

Significant for Nancy is art as the creation of 'worlds' of sense and the delineation, the 'setting out' of the singular plural of the senses. The point for Nancy is to bring sense back into the world in all its fragmentation as existence to counter the attempts to 'capture' sense under some subject versus object 'law' or 'eidos', which can be traced back in the history of aesthetics. In this he is with Heidegger and Benjamin who, we might say, shared a view as to the 'constrictive' coordinates of aesthetics, although they differed dramatically in their accounts of how to respond to this. Sense is restless and strange as co-extensive with world inasmuch as it marks the continuing affirmation of singularity and the infinite finitude of sense. Nancy thinks the world without transcendence and, as such, the world is nothing but the singular instances of

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3

sense in their restless aleatory 'coming and going'. Insofar as there is a 'trans', it is not the exteriority of a transcendental condition, but what Nancy calls a 'trans-imminence' to characterise this co-extensivity between world and sense as the spacing of singular sense. For Nancy what art marks, traces or brings to presence is the incessant strangeness and 'estrangement' of 'man' to his sense of sense as existence, which means to say, our infinite exposure of ourselves to our existence as non-essence. If this is our infinite exposure to the 'otherness' of our being, Nancy does not evoke this in existential or transcendent terms of being 'thrown into the world'. It is more a matter of what Nancy characterises as 'affectability' and 'passibility' as being in the world toward sense.

Affectability constitutes the pres-ence of sensible presence, not as a pure virtuality, but as a being-in-itself-always-already touched, touched by the possibility of being touched. For this, it is necessary for being-passible in itself to have already offered some part of itself – but here, the part counts for the whole – to something outside of itself (or to some part of itself set apart from itself). Affect presupposes itself: in this it behaves like a subject, but as the passive or passible actuality of a being-subject-to. This originary act of passibility necessarily takes place as the cutting and opening of an access, the access through which it is possible for a sensing thing to sense something sensed, for a sensed thing to be sensed. Exteriority as intimacy of the aesthetic entelechy gives us the cut of the place: sensation is necessarily local. A sensation without difference and without locality – a sensation without world – would not be a sensation (and would not be 'a' would not be this singular being that a sensation as 'a' sensation always is).⁴⁶⁵

This is to broach a complex evocation of sensing oneself sensing and being sensed. But this discussion, seemingly at the level of the minutiae of sense, is critical for Nancy in extrapolating the significance of the creation of singular 'worlds' or 'fragments' of sense, which are necessary for our comprehension of the world as it is today. In a way, this is to recast Benjamin's innervation as the 'between' of beings as singularities articulated by a supplementary, 'hidden' we

⁴⁶⁵ Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 128-9

might say, sense of touch, as the one supposedly ‘reflexive’ but always ‘exposed-to-the-other-at-a –distance’ sense.⁴⁶⁶

The sense of touch feels itself feeling itself and thus presents the proper moment of ‘sensuous exteriority’. It is both the interval between touching and the heterogeneity of the ways this interval figures in contact with the singularities of the world.⁴⁶⁷

Insofar as the modality of touch ‘stands for’ the ‘gap’ and ‘spacing’ as the condition of sense as sensing oneself-sensing at the same time broached by the ‘other’, Nancy is as interested in the ‘localisation’ of sense as the plurality of worlds, ‘demonstrable’ by way of the irreducible heterogeneity of the aesthetic.

But what art makes visible – that is, what it touches upon and what it at the same time puts to work through *techne* – is that it is precisely not a matter of differentiation happening to an organic unity, nor a differential as continuous variation. It is rather a matter of this: that the unity and uniqueness of a world are and are nothing but the singular difference of a touch and a zone of touch. There would be no world if there were no discreteness of zones (an extension more ancient than any origin)...⁴⁶⁸

Given that the arts both touch upon one another and yet are discrete, and that they can be thought as exposed to each other’s ‘otherness’ in their very ‘identity’”, continually fragmenting both ‘within’ and in ‘contiguity’ with each other any ‘unity’ that is Art, they articulate something of a ‘modality’ for thinking the political and the communal as well. As such, thinking the singular plural of the fragment enables a deconstruction of technology as a means of undermining the ‘sovereignty’ of the technological, without dismissing technology. In an interesting departure from Benjamin perhaps, and in a very particular way inflected by aspects of Heidegger’s thought, ‘art’ (but let us not

⁴⁶⁶ Derrida ‘s essay on Jean-Luc Nancy is entitled ‘Le Toucher’, in which he makes considerable idiomatic play on the notion of touch and its reflexivity; to touch on; to ‘meddle with’; to approach at a tangent in such a way as to make clear the heteronomy and distance installed in touch which always already interrupts any assumed reciprocity or fusion’ or auto-affection

⁴⁶⁷ Hutchens. B.C., *Jean-Luc Nancy: The Future of Philosophy*, op.cit.,55

⁴⁶⁸ Nancy, J-L., ‘Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One?’, 19.

forget, art in all its fragmentation), certainly supports, or goes along with, a re-thinking of technology.

Nancy recognises the intimate connectivity between war, sovereignty and the circulation of capital and its mediations and within the immanent thinking of technology, war and its supposed opposites, humanitarianism and peace become inter-related, such that the values and ends of justice, goodness and perpetual peace become empty and inaccessible, just as sovereignty is the empty 'concept' or "figure" of legitimacy for the "ecotechnical spacings of the circulation of capital."⁴⁶⁹ However, at the same time Nancy recognises that within itself, "ecotechnics can offer an absence of sense that it cannot itself appropriate by immanent thinking...there is a form of inaccessible sovereignty in the community of sharing among singularities that precedes the instrumental utilisation of figures of sovereignty."⁴⁷⁰

Political and or technological 'determination' in this sense is the aleatory coming and going of 'touches' of communicative sense that both 'tie' and 'untie' in their relation.

The inexpressible communicability of sharing composes a sovereignty that will never reach a limit, never achieve the immanent end of sovereignty for which ecotechnics purportedly strives....buried beneath the ecotechnical circulation of capital and the sovereign logic of war is the technology that assists in the circulation of meaning as an end in itself...the network of communication exposes us to the interleaved reticulations of existence...the global condition of the world is one in which there is spacing, not finishing; the intersection of singularities not the identification of figures; and the exhaustion of the ideal of sovereignty that, in reality is lacking in itself."⁴⁷¹

In Nancy's own words:

The global world is also the finite world, the world of finitude. Finitude is spacing. Spacing "executes" itself infinitely. Not that this means endlessly beginning again, but that meaning no longer occurs in a totalization and presentation (of a finite and accomplished infinite). Meaning is in not finishing with meaning....Within this "nothing"; there is no repression or sublimation of the violent burst of sovereignty: never to be

⁴⁶⁹ Hutchens, B.C., *Jean-Luc Nancy: The Future of Philosophy* 153

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 154

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 154

finished with, there is an explosion...from beyond war, the lightning of peace. In a sense this is technology itself. What is called technology or again what I have called ecotechnics (in itself which would be liberated from capital), is the *techne* of finitude or spacing. This is no longer the technical means to an End, but *techne* itself as in-finite end, *techne* as existence of finite existence in all its brilliance... a technology that of itself raises the necessity of appropriating its meaning against the appropriative logic of capital and the sovereign logic of war.⁴⁷²

As such, political and technological 'determination' is constitutively open to, exposed and even vulnerable to the future. But this is 'preferable' to, in Nancy's terms, appropriating the meanings of art, technology, the political, and community and reflecting them back in an 'ideality' so as to predict their future outcomes.

Instead of empowering ourselves by treating such notions as significations of a controllable future, it is imperative to deconstruct their terms and contexts in order to free them from corrosive presumptions that anticipate the form the future will take.⁴⁷³

We need to go back to T.J. Clark's meditation on art and technology at the beginning of this chapter and re-approach this relation between art and the 'image' world and the potential politics this relation offers. "What is the difference between dead mimicry and live (uncanny) 'giving voice'?"⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Nancy, J-L *Being Singular Plural* op.cit 139-140

⁴⁷³ Hutchens, B.C., *Jean-Luc Nancy: The Future of Philosophy*, 159-160.

⁴⁷⁴ Clark, T.J., 'Modernism, Postmodernism and Steam' 160-162.

The underlying theme and concern of the thesis has been to rethink the relationship between aesthetics and politics without subordinating one to the other and without recourse to totalising concepts, which assume a foundation and ground for each and return the 'other' and its future possibilities to the 'same'. There is an ethico-political project of my own here, in that I am seeking a way in which the reading of art and its history and the philosophical history of aesthetics, can make a difference as part of an ultimately emancipatory project, without such a reading being subordinated to a political programme that reduces the effectiveness and affect of the art, but at the same time without recourse to aestheticism. That is precisely why I have been attracted to the thought of Derrida and Nancy. It is their acknowledged debt to and close reading of the 'metaphysics' of modernity and a radicalised repositioning of ontology for contemporary contexts that I have pursued here as a means to think another approach and a different conceptual space.

The influence of Derrida's thought on the discipline of art history, although of some significance, has not been great, as I see it. Jean-Luc Nancy's influence has been even less so, and it has only been in the past four years or so that Nancy's 'position' on art has been commented upon and his overall body of thought explained.⁴⁷⁵

Specific commentary on Nancy and art appears in a volume that characterises its provenance in terms of 'post theory' or after 'high theory'. Theory is here understood under the broad sweep of *critical theory* and its dominance in the eighties and nineties.

⁴⁷⁵ See Malpas, S., 'Touching Art.' In *The New Aestheticism*. Joughin, J.J. and Malpas, S., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 83-95., Hutchens, B.C., *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*. (Buckinghamshire: Acumen Press, 2005) and James, I., *The Fragmentary Demand: an introduction to the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Art's relations to dominant ideologies have been exposed from a number of perspectives, as well as its potential to challenge these ideologies. What has frequently been lost in this process, however, is the sense of art's specificity as an object of analysis- or more accurately, its specificity as an aesthetic phenomenon. In the rush to diagnose art's contamination by politics and culture, theoretical analysis has tended always to posit a prior order that grounds or determines the work's aesthetic impact, whether this is history, ideology, or theories of subjectivity. The aesthetic is thus implicated in other terms, with other criteria and its singularity effaced.⁴⁷⁶

That Nancy's work might emerge and be given a context in the wake of the demise of critical theory is not to be taken lightly. It could be argued that the demise of critical theory is symptomatic of various other 'posts' as part of the claimed neo-liberal consensus of the West, such that we are in a post-historical, post-ideological, post-feminist, post-colonial and now post-critical [theoretical] world. I myself have wrestled with this problem of whether the 'habitus' of the thoughts of Derrida and Nancy, might be part of the problem that they nevertheless seem to me to acutely address.

However what has been evident to me is that neither Derrida nor Nancy has advocated either explicitly or implicitly in their writing something like a post-critical, new aestheticism. What they have done is recognise a *different* way in which art, literature, and language are critical, ethical and potentially emancipatory in relation to a re-thought idea of the political.

The matter of theory has been in discussion through a major publishing event for the discipline of art history since 2004, *Art Since 1900*, the encyclopaedic publication produced by the group of art historians/critics who are behind the journal *October*.⁴⁷⁷ In its publishing release at least, it was claimed to be "a landmark study in the history of modern art". I state this to mark out its provenance within the commercial circulation of art historical texts and not to comment on its claim. My interest here is in how it presents 'theory' as part of

⁴⁷⁶ Joughin, J.J. and Malpas, S. *The New Aestheticism* op. cit., 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Hal Foster, et al. *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-Modernism, Postmodernism*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

its study. It introduces itself by means of four 'key' theoretical paradigms for the study of art history, 1) psychoanalysis, 2) the social history of art, 3) formalism and structuralism and 4) post-structuralism and deconstruction. I think it fair to say that these introductions draw upon the more obvious analogies with visual art works (and the specificity of *art* works is significant), such as surrealist painting with psychoanalysis, realism with social history, cubism with structuralism, "de-institutionalising" and "appropriation" art with post-structuralism and deconstruction. This is understandable in terms of its textbook status, which ensures for the reader a visual reference for the theoretical premises introduced, and it could be that the writers thought it important to *historicise* via art history, the claims of each theoretical conceptual apparatus. My sense though is that it presents us with a *memory* of the politics of theory, now past.

I have deliberated over such matters and the where and how we are to search for a politics and ethics, has led me to some thinkers rather than others. This has been in an effort to avoid an over-reductive, either/or mechanism for critical thought, or a return to paradigms that appear to me to end up not quite meeting the demands of a situation which seems to call for a different conception of the aesthetic and the political.

Theory itself has been rendered by some as culpable in forging the 'consumerist syndrome' and spawning a 'culture without a subject' or direction, inasmuch as it has been thought by some commentators that, say, a scepticism in terms of the link between power and knowledge renders all knowledge and all truth (and thus ethical) claims relative and continually subject to re-evaluation to the point of insubstantiality, or that the questioning of assumptions about subjectivity renders the 'subject' bereft of agency, powerless against the onslaught of linguistic and pictorial interpellation.

In terms of *Art Since 1900*, I had an expectation that it might have something to say about the resources we can bring to bear upon an understanding of ethics and politics in relation to aesthetics and art objects and their location within 'representation' now. The publication is mindful to point out some of the difficulties faced in articulating the aesthetic and the political in current times.

The round-table discussion concluding the book, tellingly entitled “the predicament of contemporary art”, marks this out in a number of ways.⁴⁷⁸

The argument captured in the discursive signing-off is that we face the overall absorption of contemporary art into the culture industry, epitomised by the spectacularisation of the museum and gallery as part of an abundant spectacularisation of design along with consumerist display via fashion and retail. This is, according to the argument, the fulfilment of Guy Debord’s ‘society of spectacle’ analysis of ‘integrated spectacle’; the working out to its fullest intensity of “the intensification of capital to the extent that it becomes an image” and “the intensification of the image to the effect that it becomes capital.”⁴⁷⁹

There is the relationship between art and globalisation in the wake of postcolonial critique, whereby, despite critical effort and the opening of spaces for ‘postcolonial others’ and their aesthetic articulation, the impact of globalisation nevertheless endangers and brings about further commodification of criticality.

There is the awkward relationship of art to technology. This is presented as an antinomy between the artist as ‘technophile’ and the artist as deliberately ‘technophobe’. On the one hand, there is the embrace of the technological by artists augmenting technologies to the ‘second power’. This is by virtue of the further aestheticisation of the already aestheticised commodity of visual technology, which marks the everyday experience of circulated images. The work thereby brings about an immersive experience of awe. On the other hand, there is the ploughing of the remnants of the technological by exploring the discarded and the outmoded as a medium. However this is then prey to a fashionable commodification.

Finally there is the demise of theory. None of the paradigms; psychoanalytic, Marxist social historical, structuralist or post-structuralist appears to speak to

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 671-679

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 673.

these times of “flattened indifference”, “consumerist-touristic sampling of art”, and memory in the shape of technologised amnesia.⁴⁸⁰

Whilst the book stands as an *historical work*, one still perhaps wishes for a sense of the future in which we might institute a reconsideration of what we might mean by, and need to think, in terms of the political and the aesthetic, in order to give us a different kind of leverage on these questions other than a somewhat dystopian view, tinged with, as I suggested above, the memory of, and perhaps nostalgia for, a certain historical conjuncture for ‘theory’.

The notion that we need a different kind of leverage has been running throughout my thesis, and has been intervening and interrupting, and I now need to set out the terms more extensively. Borrowing from Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, arguably re-thinking the political and the aesthetic and how they may relate to one another, does require something of a *retreat*.⁴⁸¹ It requires a retreat precisely in order to engage in what it means to face the political and the aesthetic when they have reached their limit points *such that* they are hypostasised into totalising concepts. The sense is that the political is ‘everywhere’, such that we can no longer critically engage with the political reflectively and the aesthetic, too, is such that it is ‘everywhere *but*’ where we might seek to critically engage with it.

To explain this I first return briefly to Derrida and the political. In a seminar given by Christopher Fynsk, presented in relation to the inauguration of the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political set up by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in 1980,⁴⁸² he shows how Derrida has explained that philosophy (his way of ‘doing’ philosophy) is political, insofar as it is a certain retreat from the political. Inasmuch as the political is understood as one means of the production of representation or representing production, Derrida shows what a limiting condition this is. Ian James in his book on Nancy discusses it thus:

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 678-679.

⁴⁸¹ Lacoue-Labarthe, P. and Nancy, J-L., *Retreating the Political*. Ed. Sparks, S. (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴⁸² The papers and discussions in relation to this inauguration form the substance of Lacoue-Labarthe, P. and Nancy, J-L., *Retreating the Political*. Op. Cit.

Philosophical practice, in Fynsk's words, becomes [in deconstruction] a "work of reading or writing which brings to light that point where every representing production – and that is to say every practice which implies language – fails. Every practice then, including its own."...This moment of failure which philosophical activity affirms is an encounter with what he calls, after Granel, the "practical finitude" of all human production. By this he means the inability of human production to master the relation it maintains to its ground or foundation.⁴⁸³

The key point about this reference to 'practical finitude' however, is that the recognition of this is repressed, or suppressed, by the metaphysical grounding of human production in its figures; God, Man, Reason, (and I add) Politics, Art, Technology, Human Rights, Sovereignty, the Nation State, Hospitality, Cosmopolitanism "and thereby attempts to install itself as master over a specific domain of beings."⁴⁸⁴ It is to this that Nancy's conceptualisation of totalising or immanentism refers, rather than totalitarian forms of political states themselves. It is also that which Derrida's thought seeks to uncover and, against which, his philosophy 'politicises', by way encountering 'practical finitude', and the affirmation of *failure*.

...philosophies affirmation of failure, the affirmation of the impossibility of mastering a ground or foundation, is less a nihilistic staring into the abyss and more an encounter with an instance of freedom and decision (that is the recognition that our being is not predetermined by an essence or a ground), a decision in which the existence of others and shared relation to being is at stake...[deconstruction's] encounter with 'practical finitude' means that philosophy is not and cannot be a *theoretical* practice, that is to say, one which directs itself toward the world as a work to be produced on the basis of grounded conceptual representations. Rather, in thinking existence in terms of practical finitude, as a relation to an unmasterable ground, philosophy allows for the possibility of a certain kind of

⁴⁸³ James, I., *The Fragmentary Demand: an introduction to the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006), 156.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

decision with regard to existence or being in which something new might emerge.⁴⁸⁵

It is not that Derrida's thought denies representation and its effects in philosophy and in the law, in the conditional of hospitality, of friendship, of historical time

The effects of representation are...always at work within philosophy, but at its limit and in its encounter with practical finitude philosophy, "affirms itself as being both more and less than such a representing production"...Philosophy here is political because, as an attempt to interrogate or expose the limits of cultural knowledge and practices, it "would seek the conditions of an effective alteration in these practices; it would seek to open itself to what, from a past inaccessible to those practices, gives a future. It would seek to produce political possibilities for communities yet to come"...it is rather about releasing future possibilities from the limit points of what we think we know about the past and the present.⁴⁸⁶

I am not sure that Derrida would readily accept without further question the reference to 'communities' here and, to be more exact, it is perhaps not that philosophy or theory is political. It is *differance*, the spectral, time out of joint, the messianic without messianism, 'democracy-a venir-to come', unconditional hospitality, that are political because they expose the antagonism between finitude and its suppression. Hence, I suggest that, for Derrida, there can be no politics of the *present moment*, in the strict sense, as that would be based upon a 'grounding in/of the present' which is the very suppression of finitude that his politics exposes.

This has led to some well known difficulties considering what some have thought as Derrida's inconsistency or equivocation, "one the one hand conditional...on the other hand unconditional as two indissociable terms" and his insistence on *negotiation* between such heterogeneous elements, whilst at the same time advocating the "to come" and avoidance of political programme. Laclau and Critchley's critique in Chapter One of this thesis would suggest that a

⁴⁸⁵ James, I., op.cit., 157.

⁴⁸⁶ James, I., op.cit., 157.

more practical politics *can* in fact arise out of such negotiation, insofar as the articulations arising from hegemony, for instance, do not presuppose a purported grounding or foundational essence. As I have tried to show, however, Derrida's thought would suggest that hegemony as such, and that which arises as the overarching term, being open to deconstruction, renders it one more attempt to 'frame' future possibilities.

Considering Derrida's thought in the way that Fynsk articulated it in 1980, the political has been there all along. It seems to me that, for Derrida, the political is the tracing of this gap between representation and the groundlessness it seeks to obscure, and this is worked through in relation to the various encounters with the representations that he writes and talks about. Our responsibility is towards the intimation of this *differance* and limit. It is a responsibility because, within this gap, the exclusionary nature of our representations are opened to the other and the '*time of the other*', as captured in Derrida's important figure of the spectral and his resistance to ontology and, to an extent, materiality. Art and Literature are political in the sense that they are [not] representations but are capable of exceeding representation by 're-marking' the intimation of the relation between representation and its inassimilable 'other'. Throughout the thesis, I have pointed to a number of texts in which Derrida develops this. I am not proposing that 'deconstruction' be applied as a 'theory' to art works, as a means by which it demonstrates or finds itself reflected back its own premises. Rather, I am suggesting a comportment towards the reading of art, such that what might be un-thought is open to future possibilities.

In one of his later seminars, Derrida makes a finer point of difference between the 'other in me' and the 'wholly other', with reference to the poetry of Paul Celan.

Still privileging, since it has been our concern throughout, a thinking of sovereignty, of its majesty in the figure of a present and self-present *ipseity*, sometimes self-present in the form of the ego, in the living present of the ego, of the 'I', this 'I', this power to say 'I', that from Descartes to Kant and to Heidegger, has always been literally, explicitly reserved for human being...what I would like to make apparent, if

possible is how Celan signals toward an alterity, that, in the inside of the 'I' as the punctual living present, as the very point of the self-present living present, an alterity of the wholly other, comes not to include and modalize another living present (as in the Husserlian analysis of temporalization, where in the protention and the retention of another living present in the now living present, the ego comprises in itself, in its present, another present), but – and this is a wholly other matter – let's appear something of the present *of the other*, this 'letting the most proper of the time of the other'...

But perhaps we are beginning here to think this subtle, *unheimlich* difference between the two kinds of strange, a difference that is like the place for the narrow passage of poetry of which Celan soon will speak. It is the difference, in the punctuality of the now, in the very point of the present instant, of my present, between, on the one hand, my other living present (retained or anticipated by an indispensable movement of retention and protention) and, on the other hand, the wholly other, the present of the other whose temporality cannot be reduced, included, assimilated, introjected, appropriated within mine, cannot even resemble it or be like it, the present or proper time of the other, which I must no doubt forgo, giving it up radically, but whose very possibility (the *perhaps* beyond all knowledge) is also at the same time the chance of the encounter and of this event, of this coming, of this step called poetry...a poetry that robs and turns the breath, that is to say, also life and path, which can still be a path of art at the same time larger and narrower.⁴⁸⁷

What Derrida seems to call upon here is an ethical relation (and it is a matter of debate as to whether this may also be 'political'), that is a relation to the wholly other such as is found in Blanchot and Levinas. This, insofar as that ethical relation is drawn from the *absence* of 'in-common' and that which relates 'us' is the absence of common and the intimating and attunement to the 'wholly other'. Art and literature can show this by virtue of their *singularity* and the capacity to re-mark this. It is the necessary, what we might term, *struggle* between the names [we] give to and inherit as, the institutions that 'bind' us, including language as such, and the singularity of the [wholly] other, that marks Derrida's work. There is something of a 'double' other in Derrida's thought, insofar as he

⁴⁸⁷ Derrida, J., *Sovereignties in Question*. Eds Dutoit, T. and Pasanen, O., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 131-133.

is acutely aware of the relation of inheritance, history and memory (which is not always benign), that we bear to language, for instance, such that it is not our own most, even as we strive to make it our 'own' and is always inscribed with an 'other'. At the same time, it is through this spectrally inscribed language that an ethical relation to the other is possible.

This revenance does not befall words by accident, following a death that would come to spare all others. *All* words, from their first emergence, partake of revenance. They will always have been phantoms, and this law governs the relationship in them between body and soul. One cannot say that we know this *because* we experience death and mourning. That experience comes to us from our relation to this revenance of the mark, then of language, then of the word, then of the name. What is called poetry or literature, art itself – in other words a certain experience of language, of the mark, of the trait *as such* – is perhaps only an intense familiarity with the ineluctable originarity of the spectre...the common universal experience of language in general becomes here an experience *as such* and appears *as such* in poetry, literature and art. Here would be much to say about this 'as such'...Whoever has an intimate, bodily experience of this spectral errancy, whoever surrenders to this truth of language, is a poet, whether he writes poetry or not.⁴⁸⁸

In this sense he has a somewhat different perspective on how we might think the relationship to sense, being, being-in-common and the place of the aesthetic and the political compared to Nancy. Derrida's differentiation between the other and the 'wholly other', appears to underscore something of a transcendental ethics, as has been argued in respect of Levinas. However, it would seem to be more of a piece with his notion of the messianic, insofar as there is the other in me that is always already in me as the necessary relation of identity which can in this sense be 'thought' and 'understood', but then there is the other, wholly inassimable to 'thought' and an 'order' of temporality or horizon of expectation, as suggested with the double 'other' within language above.

⁴⁸⁸ Derrida J, *Sovereignties in Question*, op.cit., 105.

It is here that there may be a difference between Derrida and Nancy, in that Derrida is much more concerned with a relation that involves a structure of temporal and spatial disjunction which 'inscribes' a [spectral] alterity on the principle of responsibility, rather than the 'sharing of voices' or contact/separation that Nancy invokes.

In their earlier deliberations in setting up the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe think the relation of the philosophical to the political with Derrida's case for philosophy as political in mind and in response to Heidegger's ideas of epochal 'sending' and the 'completion' of metaphysics. They identify two aspects to the political. One is its completeness. The retreat of the political is the retreat of philosophy from the political, insofar as the political is no longer a question. "...it is not a question or in question, but is rather that which, in politics, goes unquestioned (e.g. the acceptance within much contemporary debate that politics is ultimately and its last moment a function of *political economy* and that all other considerations are subordinate to this)."⁴⁸⁹

In the manner of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and his understanding of epochal sending, the political is no longer a question because of the co-belonging of the political with the philosophical understood as metaphysics. The metaphysical sending of being of the epoch is the actualisation of thought as the political through philosophically instantiated figures of the human. In this sense Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe articulate the completion of the "onto-theological" project carried on through the Enlightenment.

...the European Enlightenment that constructed the human in a number of specific ways (through the privileging of free will, of rational or cognitive faculties, or of the equality and rights of the individual within a universality of justice or law) is itself a secular continuation of an onto-theological tradition...Through these figures of the human...that tradition has imposed itself over the past three centuries in an attempt to actualize or 'complete' itself in different political forms...What this epochal thinking leads to...is the sense that, in the wake of specific

⁴⁸⁹ James, I., op. cit., 158.

(totalitarian) projects...and specifically in the light of the failure of these projects, the political has completed itself, or that it is now subject to a certain kind of closure...In this context socialism is given a privileged and dominant position since it is taken to be the complete and completing figure of philosophy's imposition – up to and what, for us at least, could have represented the hope of a critique and a revolutionary radicalization of established Marxism.⁴⁹⁰

With the failure of socialism and the loss of any sense of a revolutionary project, the political is complete as it is no longer able to be thought and realised. Instead it becomes that which is obvious, unexamined, and in its very completion and obviousness, that to which philosophical reflection is unable to respond. The political must be thought anew.

This is on a par with Nancy's later Nietzschean-inflected meditation on the absence of sense, and the exigency of our time, also referred to elsewhere in this thesis. The absence of sense, understood as the completion or closure of philosophy, is evident in a number of Nancy's texts.

We know, indeed, that it is the *end of the world* and there is nothing illusory about this knowledge...But the same adversaries of the thought of the 'end' are incorrect in that they do not see that the words with which one designates that which is coming to an end (history, philosophy, politics, art, world...) are not the names of subsistent realities in themselves, but the names of concepts or ideas, entirely determined within a regime of *sense* that is coming full circle and completing itself before our (thereby blinded) eyes.⁴⁹¹

This connects with the other aspect of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's analysis of the retreat of the political, which is the question of immanentism. As much as the world has lost the sense given to it by transcendental values, so there exists the attempt to overcome this loss by realising erstwhile transcendent principles in figures 'posited' within the totality of the social body or community in the here and now, to the exclusion of all others. It is this totalising immanence that is the

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁹¹ Nancy J-L., *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 4.

mark of totalitarianism in its broadest sense, and not in terms of empirically existing regimens of organisations of power hitherto described as such. It is in the name of these figures of immanence that atrocities continue to occur.

Insofar as the political within the totalitarian formation is no longer a transcendence or an alterity (the divine or a 'yet-to-come'), but rather is invoked as an 'already here', an immanence governing the social whole, it cannot be questioned as such and maintains itself in an omnipresent givenness and self-evidence...[this] does not mean that it is for us a matter of repeating the appeal to transcendence, whether it be God, Man or History; these are transcendences which have installed totalitarianism or those in which it has installed itself, converting them to the immanence of life-in-common...such nostalgia is precisely that which motivates the drive toward immanence and totality proper to totalitarianism.⁴⁹²

This is the key to Nancy's drive to re-treat and re-envision 'being-in-the world', not on the basis of immanent figures or significations which claim to have already given or ordered or substantiated our sense of the world, but on the basis of sense, *as such*, as *existence*, which for Nancy is always already singular-plural.

In order for the human to be discovered and in order for the phrase 'human meaning' to acquire some meaning everything that has ever laid claim to the truth about the nature, essence or end of 'man' must be undone...Can we think an earth and a human such that they would be only what they are – *nothing but* earth and human – and such that they would be none of the various horizons often harboured under these names, none of the 'perspectives' or 'views' *in view* of which we have disfigured humans and driven them to despair?...What if this ...multiplicity, which tears open and is torn open let us know that we have not even begun to discover what it is to be many...what if it lets us know that it is itself the first laying bare of a world that is only the world, but which is the world absolutely and unreservedly, with no meaning beyond this very Being of the world: singularly plural and pluraly singular.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² James, I., op cit., 164.

⁴⁹³ Nancy J-L., *Being Singular Plural*, op.cit., pp.xi-xiv.

If this sounds like a return to a 'new found' humanism, this is not Nancy's project, given that the 'human' itself has become one of those immanent figures claiming substance or substantial truth beyond question. Rather, what Nancy is broaching is an understanding of the world as the multiple, fragmentary circulation of sense that it is with singularities always in circulation with a multiplicity of sense.

Insofar as Nancy appears to privilege the multiplicity of *sense*, his thought might be conceived as a new form of aestheticism or something *beyond* existential phenomenology. Whilst it is the case that Nancy's thought develops by way of labouring or inverting some of the conceptual apparatus associated with these, such conceptions of *his thought* may re-instate a conceptual immanentism and desire for substantiation that his thought continually seeks to resist.

It may be said that Nancy invokes a particular kind of realism and materialism through his ontology; an understanding of being and existence and the very *materiality* of thought, which he mobilises through certain modalities. As these modalities proffer sense in relation to exteriority and continual interruption of any 'pull' to substantiation in the sense of immanence, they are both responses to and invocations of a 'fragmentary demand'.

Nancy's thought writes against the grain of what one might have come to expect in relation to ontology, ethics, community, politics or art. It might be said, for instance, that there is an ethical presumption in 'relation' and 'communication' as facets of 'to be'.

To be is nothing that is in-common, but *nothing* as the dispersal where what is in-common is dis-posed and measured, the in-common as the with, the beside-itself of *to be* as such, to be transfixed by its own transitivity: *to be* being all beings, not as their individual and/or common 'self', but as *the proximity that disperses them*.

Beings touch; they are in con-tact with one another; they arrange themselves and distinguish themselves in this way. Any being that one might like to imagine as not distinguished, not dis-posed would really be indeterminate and unavailable: an absolute vacancy of Being. This is why the ontological moment or the very order of ontology is necessary.

'To be' is not the noun of consistency; it is the verb of dis-position. Nothing consists, neither 'matter' nor 'subject'. In fact 'matter' or 'subject' are nothing but two names that are correlates of one another; in their mode of consistency they indicate the originary spacing of the general ontological disposition...There is no difference between the ethical and the ontological: the 'ethical' exposes what the 'ontological' disposes. Our understanding (of the meaning of Being) is an understanding *that* we share understanding between us and, at the same time, *because* we share understanding between us: between us all, simultaneously-all the dead and the living, all beings.⁴⁹⁴

The resistance to immanence, the notion of contact/separation and fragmentation or incompleteness in relation to the circulation of sense, are key concerns. This includes the incompleteness that is 'literature' as the modality of in-common 'communication' that at the same time continually interrupts the predilection for mythic or immanent, as articulated by Nancy through his thinking of community and the subject. Such concerns are worked anew in further writings, with reference to politics and art, some of which I have referred to throughout the thesis. For the purposes of conclusion I shall draw upon certain 'themes'.

Nancy's thinking of community in *The Inoperable Community* establishes his principle of community in-common but no common-being. The subject of community is important for Nancy, as it enables a critique of immanence and an articulation of how we might understand the finitude of shared existence. Community as an organic or communitarian project is a nostalgic response to the contractual partitioning of politics and, as such, could never exist, as there can be no 'communication' without separation, distance, dispersal or exposure of one singular existence to another. The *immanent* figure of community persists however in the model of community as 'self-production' as foundation and essence, indeed as 'work'. This is 'explicitly' in communism, but in persistent nostalgic arguments for community, as the 'totalisation' of being-in-common as the overcoming of finitude. By a reworking of Heidegger's *Mitsein*, being-with, in relation to the existential analytic of being-towards-death, which puts 'the subject' into a relation of 'incompleteness' and exteriority on account of an

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

ungraspable finitude, combined with a re-evaluation of the work of Bataille in respect of encountering finitude indirectly in the irrecoupable death of others, Nancy conceives of a 'co-existential' analytic on the basis of an un-worked (that is to say not able to be 'worked' on the principle of overcoming or dialectising finitude) community of being-with on the basis of singular existences exposed to (and thereby sharing) each other's finitude.

This notion of 'being-with' in shared finitude, without foundation or essence, right at the 'surface' of existence is supported by Nancy's notion of literary communication at its limits. It is in the sharing of literature that 'communication' 'ex-scribes'. It is through literature that the circulation of sense, *in excess of* signification is shown, that is *exposed*, and is the means by which meaning is continually interrupted and thought anew. Thus, where for Derrida literature is the place where language re-marks itself in its *differ-ance*, intimating the *spatio-temporality* of the 'other' in being, for Nancy the literary is the spacing for the circulation of sense in excess of signification that being *is*. In that sense, insofar as the literary 'ex-scribes', it has a certain power of ontological disclosure and 'creation' of being-with in the fragment of its world. This is an ontological disclosure thought very specifically by Nancy.

...the ontological condition required here is not a status...but consists in a releasing of being...a releasing of being, abandoned to a singularity or trajectory of singularities...Freedom exposes existence, or rather, freedom is the fact that existence is exposed...the disclosedness of beings as such...refers to the improbable, to the unexpected to the surprise of disclosure...what is disclosed-it is being-and that its disclosure exceeds and surprises instead of coming back to it..⁴⁹⁵

It is in this circulation of sense, which is each time ex-scribed and inaugurated anew and incommensurably, that Nancy ascribes our freedom and interruption of the oscillation between a mythicisation of sense by way of immanent grounding or the nihilistic denial of sense, which becomes yet another form of 'myth', as referred to earlier in the thesis.

⁴⁹⁵ Nancy, J-L., *The Experience of Freedom*. Trans McDonald, B., (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993), 94.

If being is...our sharing, then 'to be...is to share. This is relation: not a tendential relation, need, or drive of portions of being that are oriented toward their own re-union (this would not be relation, but a self-presence mediated by desire or will), but existence delivered to the incommensurability of being-in-common. What measures itself against the incommensurable is freedom. We could even say that to be in relation is to measure oneself with being as sharing, that is with the birth or deliverance of existence as such (as what through essence delivers itself), and it is here that we have already recognized freedom... ⁴⁹⁶

On this basis Nancy will further develop his notion of politics as an arena of non-self-sufficiency, insofar as freedom is not to do with political *autonomy*, which may be construed as relative by way of social contract and citizenship or absolute by way subject-hood subordinate to the state, as enshrined in the Enlightenment project of 'the political' referred to earlier. According to a logic of immanentism, the relative autonomy of the exteriority of citizenship will seek its completion in a desire for interiorised subject-hood, as its supplement and the absolute autonomy of interiorised subject-hood will seek to complete itself in exteriorisation. Again, such dialectical oscillation is interrupted by Nancy's construal of a politics of non-self-sufficiency, which amounts to an extreme relativisation of autonomy on the basis of the tying, untying, retying of the social bond at the limits of singular and plural identity *as* and *at* the "site of their coalescent disintegration".⁴⁹⁷ This praxis of non-self-sufficiency *produces* the singular/plurality of the social bond, each time anew.

The (k)not: that which involves neither interiority nor exteriority but which, in being tied, ceaselessly makes the inside pass outside, each into (or by way of) the other, the outside inside, turning endlessly back on itself without returning to itself...Such a politics consists, first of all, in testifying that there is singularity only where a singularity ties itself up with other singularities, but that there is no tie except where the tie is

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁹⁷ Librett, J.S., 'Translator's Foreword' in Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., xxi.

taken up again, recast, and retied without end, nowhere purely tied or untied.⁴⁹⁸

As previously discussed in this thesis, Nancy, in the same volume, gives an analysis of art that appears analogous to that of politics. Nancy understands the historical moment of art to be one of 'autonomous fragmentation', which might be deemed to have become exhausted in this time of 'absence of sense' and thus a discourse on the desire for a return to aesthetic wholeness emerges (the return to meaning, for example). Nancy counters this by arguing that, insofar as art has been thought as autonomous fragment, this has always been in relation to a concept of wholeness which has not been forgone and hence has both returned to itself as a 'micro' whole and is open to the attempt to re-incorporate in a figure of holistic aesthetics. This leads to Nancy's articulation for a fragmentation of the aesthetic as such. This is another way in which Nancy articulates the relationship between art and the excess of signification and the interruption/circulation of sense, referring back to the notion of *presentation* in connection with Hegel's aesthetics.

Instead of the ambiguous end of the fragment, it is a matter of the fraying of the edges of its trace...the frayed access to a presentation...the infinity of a coming into presence, or of an *e-venire*. The event is...the incommensurability of coming to all taking-place, the incommensurability of spacing and fraying to all space disposed in the presentation of a presentation...it is *presentation itself*...as fractal exposition: presentation as fragmentation.⁴⁹⁹

Jeffrey Librett, Nancy's translator, asks whether the closeness of this analogous thinking amounts to rendering the political *aesthetic* or the aesthetic *political*. Nancy provides an answer re-affirming the relationship between literature and community discussed above and re-traces a distinction between 'the political' and politics.

We call *writing* that which does not respond to any model whatsoever of the appropriation of significations, that which opens at once relation, and, along with relation, significance itself...'writing' is what precedes

⁴⁹⁸ Nancy, J-L., *The Sense of the World*, op.cit., 111

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

signification, what succeeds on it and exceeds it, not as another, heightened and always deferred signification, but as the outline, the breaking of the path [*frayage*] of significance through which it becomes possible not only for significations to be signified but for them *to make sense in being passed on and shared among individuals*. Writing is thus political 'in its essence' that is to the extent that it is the tracing out [*frayage*] of the essenceless of relation. It is not political as the effect of an 'engagement' in the service of a cause, and it is not political-qua 'literature' – according to either the principle of the 'aestheticization of politics' or its inversion into the 'politicization of aesthetics'. It is indeed necessary to ask in what way literature and, consequently, aesthetics and fiction become involved here, but only after one has affirmed the political nature of writing: *the in-finite resistance of sense in the configuration of the 'together'*.⁵⁰⁰

One can see here a casting of writing as that which brings about the finite sharing that is existence as the singular/plural being-with, and in this sense is a modality of 'the political' as he is seeking to define it. On this basis Nancy may reject any attribution in terms of previously thought relations between aesthetics and politics. That said, writing is political, perhaps on two fronts; insofar as it *resists* 'politics', as it has been thought immanently and in terms of a hypostasis of community *and* as that which breaks out the 'path' by which the circulation of sense that is the basis for the political takes place. This does not preclude a political *exigency* for writing, which at the same time is *not* the subordination of writing *to* the political.

Writing – and thus also necessarily its *poetry*, which is to say, above all, its *praxis* – is the task of sense, on condition that it has not already been tied up, but the response – without resolution – to the absolute injunction of having to establish ties. And this nonprescribable injunction is also irreducible to all 'poetizing' or 'literary' aestheticization. The languages are to be tied. Each language is to be indefinitely tied up in the (k)not of its proper infinity and into the (k)nots of the proper infinity of others. They are to be tied up into the unattached (k)not and the non-subjective ipseity of the in-common that does not communicate or commune...this does not mean above all

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 118- 119.

'literature' as a model, but the poetics of styles, modes of existence, modulations of relation and retreat, languages, peoples, that is cultures and ethnic groups, as well as social classes and non-identified populations, the peoples' idioms and countries, their passages from land to land, landscapes, worlds that are the world, worlds that are a world. *In this sense*, the political exigency cannot not be an exigency of configuration, even though it ought to resist the figuration/presentation of a sovereign body...Identities must write themselves...as non-identifiable (k)notes of sense...⁵⁰¹

A later text shows how Nancy further considers this relationship and affirms a particular relation of the aesthetic and political which is not a subordination of one to the other, but an acknowledgement that each has its distinctive 'force'. Nancy characterises their distinctive force in response to the question, 'Is everything political?' and in that sense a continuance of the concern to 're-treat' the political, as referred to previously.⁵⁰² Nancy articulates their distinctive force vis-à-vis "an incommensurable justice".⁵⁰³ Politics is understood as the spacing which keeps open the general incommensurability of justice and the spacing of the other spaces, "where the incommensurability is in some sense *formed* and *presented*."⁵⁰⁴ Insofar as this incommensurability may be presented in art, amongst other configurations ('religion', 'thought', 'science', 'ethics', 'love' 'war' etc), these configurations are both presentation and at the same time, "give form to an "impresentation" or a withdrawal of presence"⁵⁰⁵ and are at the same time incommensurable with each other, even as they may touch each other. Politics is the site for the keeping open of these types of incommensurability without unifying or even giving shape to them whilst holding a certain 'shaping power' of non-unity.

Politics should now be understood as the specific site of the articulation of a non-unity – and of symbolization of a non-figure...the necessity of *not* accomplishing an essence or an end to the incommensurable, and *nonetheless*, and *precisely*, of maintaining the (im) possibility: a

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

⁵⁰² Nancy, J-L., 'Is Everything Political?' *The New Centennial Review* 2.3, Fall (2002): 16-22.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 20

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 20

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 20

necessity of shaping power – the force that must hold together the non-organic, non-unity-on the model of an incommensurable ‘justice’...Politics becomes precisely a site of detotalization.⁵⁰⁶

We might say therefore, somewhat paradoxically, that politics is the *passage* by which the open relation of singular/plurality and tying/untying is *kept open*.

Art, as one of the ‘incommensurables’ is, for Nancy, one of the means by which we relate to sense in excess of signification and in this sense, art touches on existence or brings our sense of existence to presentation, as opposed to representation. As we see, this understanding of a sense in excess and thus resistant to totalisation or subordination to a unifying concept is allied to a thinking of justice and value at the level of existence. I now turn again to the very particular ways in which Nancy elaborates upon the relation of art to *sense*.

As I have iterated more than once, Nancy wants to understand sense as both *in* and *in excess of* the bounds of signification and mimetic appropriation and, importantly, if Nancy is working out the ontology of *sense*, he is doing so in response to a demand of the *present*.

Insofar as fundamental ontologies as unifying principles intent on restoring ‘word and world’ to full presence, which is what is behind mimetic thinking, only serve to *repress* the *multiple and fragmentary nature of the sense* that the world is today, Nancy ‘allows’ sense to emerge as “the multiple, fragmented and fragmentary real of the world to which thought is ceaselessly exposed at its limit.”⁵⁰⁷ “‘Sense’ [in Nancy] is *untied* from an exclusive belonging to a symbolic order or relation of signifier to signified; it exists both as an outer limit and as an excess of signification, per se, becoming *the element within which* significations, interpretations and representations *can occur*.”⁵⁰⁸ Sense for Nancy takes us to a limit, which provokes a rupturing of signification; a rupturing of presence and it is on the basis of this that we have to re-think an ontology and ethics of being in the world together.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁰⁷ James, I., op.cit., 9.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

Nancy's ontology is distinctly materialist, in that he is trying to think a materiality 'prior' to and in excess of modalities of thought, which at the same time exposes thought to *its* fragmentation. His materialism is not that of 'substance' in the ways in which we have been used to thinking it. One can begin to grasp this through his writing on 'the subject' and 'the body'. A key motif in his thinking of the subject is his somewhat unusual invocation of 'la bouche', the mouth. Ian James explains thus:

Where for Lacan eyes and ears are sites of reflection which offer a perfect figure for his emphasis on the specular quality of the imaginary order and a dialectic of desire and recognition instituted by the symbolic, for Nancy, *la bouche* figures this instant of thought of *presentation* and *withdrawal* of an I which surges *forth* in a spasm of 'extreme withdrawal' prior to any economy of exchange or of recognition. "Imagine" Nancy tells us, "a mouth without a face...a mouth without a face then, making a ring from its contraction around the noise: *I*" The mouth here is not the mouth that we represent and place within an identifiable face. Rather it is that opening or *beance* around which the mouth that we know forms itself.⁵⁰⁹

Nancy is presenting a materiality here, which is figured as an exteriority of spasmodic spacing in which the singularity of the subject's existence *takes place*. As such, it is *exposed to* other singularities in this 'field' of *plural spacing* 'prior to' any substantive identification. Insofar as identity is 'inscribed' it is always already 'ex-scribed' in this exposure.

In a complex thinking of bodies as creating or becoming or 'worlding' (disclosing a shared 'world') without prior 'foundation', Nancy understands the way in which bodies relate to each other or are related 'internally' in respect of their 'component' parts in terms of 'parts outside parts'; that is to say fragments, but *not* fragments of a 'whole'. This is one of the ways in which Nancy articulates the key idea of relation *as contact, which is at the same time distance and separation*. Being together but apart, *contact and distance without*

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

foundation is key to Nancy's re-thinking of art, technology, ethics, politics, and community.

The structure of 'parts outside parts' describes the way in which material bodies exist in a relation of exteriority to each other, never occupying the same place, and is thus able to articulate themselves as bodies and come into relation or contact with other bodies. In this sense, for Nancy, matter or materiality is always an outside or an impenetrable element, since we know that objects are touched, seen, sensed and given sense only from the outside and from this relation of exteriority, of objects touching each other in a mutual distance or separation.⁵¹⁰

This connects with another aspect of Nancy's materialism, figured through his thinking of the body via *techne*. Along with Heidegger, Derrida and Stiegler, Nancy wants to think originary technicity as the means by which material bodies are disclosed in the *contact-separation of matter and sense*. But his is a profoundly different thought and a departure from Heidegger. It is not a matter of objects ready-to-hand in a meaningful context that ultimately returns to a subject that confers upon them *instrumentality* or *purpose*. For Nancy, in what I suggest is radicalisation of Benjamin, "it is the body of sense itself, the body as the spacing and sharing of sense, which emerges as the site, or locus of interconnection of tools or apparatus and it is this interconnection which is the happening of the body and the spacing, sharing of sense."⁵¹¹ It is important to retain a grasp of this on the basis of contact/separation as also developed through Nancy's thinking of ecotechnics.

Similar to Benjamin, but for a new era, for Nancy is it decidedly *not* technicity *in itself* that serves an ideology of technical ends or goals. Ecotechnics can be thought as a modality of 'being' without 'ends' and without foundation.

For Nancy, by the very fact that it is 'nonsystematisable' and premised upon contact/separation rather than presumptions of unity and indeed global unification, technology can be understood as multiple, local, continually

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

‘bifurcating’, splitting off in differences and in excess of ideological ‘ends’. Ecotechnics *can* invoke the event and passage of the world of sense in *all* its coming and going and passages of interconnectivity, contact/separation. It is from this basis that we need to understand the importance for Nancy of ‘touch’. Touch is the modality of sense that ‘embodies’ the thinking of contact and separation/distance. Touching is the movement from exteriority, from the outside that involves both contact and separation/distance at the same time. In order for contact to take place there has to be exteriority and distance. It is modality that ‘presents’ the limit of embodiment where embodiment ‘undoes’, exposed to exteriority. Importantly for Nancy, touch is the ‘gateway’ to the sense of the senses, insofar as the senses are singular plural and touch one another in proximate distance.

Touch is nothing other than the touch of sense altogether and of all the senses. It is their sensuality as such...touch presents the proper moment of sensible exteriority, it presents it *as such and as sensible*...Touch is the interval and the heterogeneity of touch. Touch is proximate distance. It makes one sense that makes one sense (what it *is* to sense): the proximity of the distant, the approximate of the intimate.⁵¹²

How does this impact on thinking of and reading artworks? For Nancy, artworks take all we have said up to now about sense, the ‘worlding’ of sense, the body as singular/plural contact/separation, technics and the modality of touch to a *presentation* and *patency*, by delineating, by presenting (*not* representing) the sense of sense, the presentation of sense. Artworks present presentation and thereby present the ‘there ness’ of a fragment of world, world as fragment. This is *not* the same as Heidegger’s notion of a poetics of world-disclosure. For Nancy, in their admixture of *technicity* and sense, artworks undo ‘poetics’ or phenomenological sense and instead present “an exposure to an irreducible exteriority or being of sense ‘outside of itself’...the-contact-in-separation, touch, and exscription of sense.”⁵¹³

⁵¹² Nancy, J-L., *The Muses*. Op.cit., 17.

⁵¹³ James, I., op.cit., 222.

Nancy has 'pressed' this account right at the 'ground' of the image. Related to but differing from Derrida's thinking of the trace and latterly the *force* of image, Nancy accounts for the *working* of the work in contact/separation of the tracing of the 'line' (this applies to any medium; inasmuch as there is spacing there is tracing) which has the double function of 'figuring' but at the same time separating and differentiating and importantly 'holding at a distance', 'stopping' at the threshold. The 'force' of the line is exactly this contact/separation, "it is because the line of the image (its tracing, its form) is itself...its intimate force; because the image does not 'represent' this intimate force, but it is that force, it activates it, it draws and withdraws it, it extracts just as it withholds it, and it is with that force that it touches us."⁵¹⁴ This intensification of touch via the technicity of the *image* suggests the image is ontologically *distinct*. What matters here is that the image is a force not a thing and, inasmuch as it opens up and creates a world in its fragment, it at the same time withdraws from/exceeds signification, so we might say, somewhat elliptically, it touches both the visible and the 'invisible', which is another way of indicating the singular/plurality of sense which the world *is*, without mystique. I am aware that this is evocative of Merleau-Ponty, but I think with Merleau-Ponty it is the contact and not the separation that wins over, whereas for Nancy the separation is key but cannot 'be' without the contact.

What Nancy presents is a move beyond and different to those ways of approaching the 'image-like' and fragmentary nature of our world as it is, which have predominated to date. Both Derrida and Nancy are aware of the dilemma in terms of 'grounding' this world, either by continuing to present this world in the Marxian sense of historical materialist grounding or by the paradoxical *acceptance* of fragmentation in the desire for grounding. It seems to me that Derrida does move from a memory of politics to a very distinctive politics of memory in which the aesthetic plays a part in re-marking the spatio-temporal difference and 'hauntology' that shapes his thought of the political. Nancy takes the fragmentary there-ness of the 'world' and *re-cognises that within it which works creatively* to open us to a new sense of world and 'being-in-the-world',

⁵¹⁴ Nancy, J-L., *The Ground of the Image*. Trans Fort, J., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005)..5.

that opens us to the 'along' and 'between', the contact/ separation (at the limit, exposed) of abundant singularities and their co-existence. The aesthetic can do this in accordance with its specific relation to signification, technicity and sense.

I do not think these thoughts from Derrida or Nancy amount to aestheticism, the privileging of the aesthetic over the political or the aestheticisation of politics, insofar as both the aesthetic and the political have been re-thought in relation.

They do present for me the possibility that the moment of *critical* theory, criticism and the emancipatory project for art history is not necessarily 'a thing of the past'.

The journey that this thesis has taken has followed a path of theoretical interventions in respect of the reading of art and particular turns in that reading. I have considered the impact of the Marxist social history of art on the discipline of art history, first in terms of a certain historical conjuncture in relation to a reading of Manet's *Olympia* and then how my chosen advocate for such reading, the art historian T.J. Clark sustained and developed his overall position through later texts. Then, following a particular trajectory in terms of aesthetics, politics, memory and representation, I considered a cinematic 'text', *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. I explored this across its visual arrangement, considering the script and synopsis that shaped the cinematic presentation in accordance with the literary-philosophical position of its script-writer Marguerite Duras. I examined the film in relation to the 'philosophical turn' in interpretation, characteristic of influences in film studies and art history and theory in the nineties in respect of Gilles Deleuze. I allied Duras's writing to the thought of Maurice Blanchot and reflected upon Blanchot's influence on considerations of memory, the other and community.

I then returned to an underlying problematic in terms of aesthetics and politics 'figured' in the relationship between art and technology. Here I revisited an 'antinomy' between art and the technological, as thought first by Heidegger and then Benjamin. This difference between the *potential* for technological *reproducibility* and the 'saving power' of art from technological *reduction* still plays itself out today in the institutions of 'art history' and 'visual culture'.

I have referred to the institutions of art history and art criticism in respect of a certain 'anxiety' in the institutions with regard to the *contemporary*. This anxiety concerns the usefulness of the theoretical paradigms that have become established as the modern tradition for these disciplines, with regard to the articulation of the relationship between the aesthetic and the political in terms of contemporary art. In a text which I have taken to be representative of the

disciplines, *Art Since 1900*⁵¹⁵ contemporary art is understood in relation to the contemporary world which is characterised by the further integration of spectacle across all aspects of cultural life. This involves the proliferation of technology across the realms of information and entertainment, the fragmentation of previously thought identities via globalisation and the incorporation of the aesthetic into various forms of leisure bringing about a general lack of differentiation between modalities of the aesthetic.

Such anxiety has emerged, as I suggest, through a 'memory of politics'. There is an acknowledgement, yet regret, that theoretical models, premised upon a different and former set of orders of meaning and boundaries to cultural formations, cannot sufficiently serve as critical resources to bring to bear upon this change in cultural circumstances. Thus the disciplinary anxiety prevails. I have further elaborated upon the thought of Derrida and Nancy as a means by which to respond to this anxiety for the future of theory within these disciplines.

Each of the chapters in the thesis is marked by the intervention of these two primary interlocutors. The chapters are episodic inasmuch as they interrogate each question in hand and pursue it through the interventions of Derrida and Nancy.

Underpinning the thesis is the concern to rethink the relationship between the aesthetic and the political as part of an ethico-political and ultimately emancipatory project. This is to enable both the aesthetic and the political to remain open to their future possibilities and the unanticipated 'other' without being foreclosed upon on the basis of totalising concepts and the return of the 'other' to the 'same'.

I have employed a 'motif' throughout the thesis to capture the distinction between foreclosure and openness, suggesting that the difference lies between a

⁵¹⁵ Foster, Hal et al (eds). *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-Modernism, Postmodernism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2004.

‘memory of politics’, premised upon a metaphysics of presence and ultimately a continuum of past, present, future and a ‘politics of memory’, as I borrow the term from Derrida. The ‘politics of memory’ is characterised by anachronism, the ‘time-out-of-joint’ and the promissory structure of the messianic.⁵¹⁶ This rethinking of history and memory has been formulated by way of the thought of Derrida and somewhat differently by Nancy. Both have provided the means by which to question and re-treat the ‘models’ of the historical, the political and the political subject that have shaped the approaches to the reading of art with which the thesis has engaged.

Derrida insists that the self/other relation or any presence, including that of the work of art, has inscribed within it the trace of absence. This is the absent other, from the immemorial past or the future of mourning to come, unpredictable and incalculable to which we must respond or give hospitality towards in our thought. As is evident from *Memoirs of the Blind*⁵¹⁷ or the *Restitutions* essay⁵¹⁸, for example, which I have referred to in this thesis, Derrida will approach art from the point of view of that absent other inscribed in the work and ‘remarked’ in its structure. The absent other cannot be restituted to a subject of or for the work, but neither can it be foreclosed upon in terms of its force.

Derrida reads art in respect *for* that ‘absolute’ anterior memory of the other, inscribed in the absence/presence of the trace, but whose loss cannot be redeemed. The memory of the absent other both calls for inscription in the trace, yet exceeds any such ‘witnessing’, and is always to come. In this way the historical position and meaning of art and its trace of the other cannot be finalised as ‘past’, ‘over’ or at an end. This is part of an ethico-political

⁵¹⁶ For Derrida here ‘the messianic’ is in lower case and not a proper reference to the Messiah. As previously indicated in the thesis, Derrida’s interest is in the *structure* of the messianic, discussed in terms of ‘democracy-to-come’, offering the promise of the future and the entirely unpredicable, unanticipated coming of the other, without its religious content. I refer to this again in this conclusion. See Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx* op.cit 65

⁵¹⁷ Derrida, Jacques. *Memoirs of the Blind: the Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*. Translated by Brault, P., & Naas, M., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

⁵¹⁸ Derrida, J., ‘Restitutions of the truth in pointing [pointure]’, in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 257-382

commitment running throughout Derrida's work and the different topics to which he responds.

Nancy offers a different asymmetry of 'spacing' whereby the historical, the political and the political subject are thought as articulations of singularities. These singularities, which Nancy also refers to as 'worlds of sense' are always in a position of exposure to other singularities in a singular/plural world of 'being' as existence, without 'end' or foundation or unity of sense. This is Nancy's response to the contemporary world as it *exists* and articulates his resistance to the return to essences, foundations or particular figures of transcendence to explain and give sense to this world. Thus, rather than being thought as a foundation, the political is understood in terms of the tying and untying of relations and the spacing of incommensurable 'fragments', one of which is art.

Art is a fragment as it is not bound to substantialisations, idealities, representation or presumed orders of signification determining meaning. Nancy eschews any mythicising in relation to art, the subordination of art to ideals of 'essence' or unified identity or the reading of art in terms of *presumed* other identities like 'religion', 'community', particular socio-cultural groupings such as nation, class, race or gender or other substantiating concepts seeking to complete art's presence in representation. Nancy considers all 'identities' and worlds of sense including that of art to be singular and thus incommensurable with each other, whilst plural in that they necessarily co-exist and touch each other. Art is not autonomous but neither are these other worlds of sense. They too are without essence. Art *is* as part of the world of different singularities which touch and are exposed to each other without any one dissolving into another. This is the world where what is in common is difference and 'fragmentary' identities.

Nancy approaches art as the presentation of existence and difference bringing forth singular 'worlds of sense' in this plurality of different 'worlds' exposed to each other. Such presentation interrupts the normalised thinking of realms of sense, conceptual organisations, and hierarchies of meaning or exclusive

identities, which might aim to subordinate art to another world of sense, as suggested above.

Art is read in terms of the emancipation from and displacement of its sense from unities and essences and in that way it is understood as presenting the articulation of difference and the fragmentary mode of being-in common that is existence. At the level of the reading of images, this keeps in question and invites exploration of the border or threshold between an image's points of reference; in simplified terms, this is the threshold between content (idea) and form (technique), because neither of these can be assumed to be entirely closed in their point of reference, nor can one be considered as subordinate to the other.

The thesis has dealt with readings of art which each in their own way broach the question of history, memory and the political and challenge the assumptions of the epistemologies that may pertain to these, in order that the question remain a question for the sake of justice to the past and that very opening to the future.

T.J. Clark offers a Marxist position which recognises the dynamic of the historical situation and the demand placed upon the artist in terms of the socio-cultural resources at his or her disposal. Clark understands this changing dynamic in relation to the further incursions of capital into everyday life, characterised as spectacle and thus into the cultural forms that inform the artist. From the Marxist political commitment of his position, this calls for an art history on the basis of a re-invigoration of the concepts of class and ideology and their relation to 'social practice' and indeed the *importance* for him of recognising a 'memory of politics', as I have characterised it.

Invigorating a model of the relationship between the aesthetic and the political that sustains class, ideology and 'subjects of history' as part of a social totality is critical for Clark. That this is ultimately under the aegis of a representational aesthetic and substantiated 'truth' of the political and the social is critical to his position vis-à-vis the debates within *Screen* over modernism, signification and identity, social practice and ideology. I have articulated the significance of his theoretical stance and its transformational influence upon the discipline of art

history, whilst problematising the presumed concepts and model of history which his thinking of the relationship between the aesthetic and the political subtends.

The readings of the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* including that of Duras, through her synopsis and screenplay, recognise the challenge the film presents to more conventional understandings of and the epistemological basis for the relationship between history, memory, the aesthetic and the political in respect of the 'documenting' of the atrocity of mass death in 'memorial' cinema. I have shown that these readings draw upon a range of resources for critical theory including Duras's affiliation with the writings of Blanchot, in order to articulate this cinematic challenge and complicate and displace memory in terms of any straightforward 'givenness' of memory. The readings problematise such givenness in respect of the relation of the self and other in terms of loss and memory; received notions of mourning as working through, assimilating the 'other' and overcoming; or conventional presentations of 'remembering' and the modes by which they inscribe the ethical imperative not to forget.

However, I suggest that these readings of the film variously reach their limits in two ways; one way is by ultimately 'retreating' to a model premised upon an inter-subjective understanding of traumatic loss and its overcoming, even as this transcends self-hood for the sake of East and West; the other, by way of Duras, is by substantiating the 'impossibility of memory' as nevertheless the *possession* of a subject, and thus dependent upon a subjectivity, even as this may be 'given over' as 'survival' to the 'other'.

The thought of Heidegger and Benjamin has been presented here within the context of their positions regarding art and technology and through this, the impact of their thought on aesthetics and politics. The ramifications of their thought extend beyond any such circumscribed debate. Heidegger's thought of art as 'originating', provides a critique of representational aesthetics. Art as the site of the rift between world and earth challenges both representation and the 'enframing' of technology. Heidegger thinks this on the basis of a model of history and memory that recognises the linkage and 'strife' between inheritance

and the opening of future possibilities. However, this model remains underpinned by the significance of 'the authentic' in terms of the 'unveiling of truth' and the event of disclosure in art and how this is related to Heidegger's thinking of the historical subject, ultimately gathered into the 'people' in terms of the political. Art's saving power renders it ultimately redemptive in the strife between past and future possibilities. Thus Heidegger presents a substantiated 'end' and 'teleology' for art and politics.

Benjamin forges a concept of history and memory against the 'catastrophe' of history as continuous progress. History conceived as continuous progress denies the force of the inheritance of that which is lost to history and that which is to come. For Benjamin, insofar as experience is 'inauthentic' in accordance with his Messianism⁵¹⁹, it is not open to the gathering of memory or redemption of the past in historical time. It requires a distinct understanding of experience as marked by the vicissitudes of historical and perceptual change. It is possible to break the chain of history thought as progress, recollection or redemption and 'reinscribe' history's lost moments in accordance with the changing realm of technology.

Benjamin thinks through the alteration of both the spacing of time and modes of subjective experience brought about by technological reproducibility in photography and cinema. On this basis he recasts the historical moment in 'photographic' terms as the constellation of past and present, which seizes on the past at the moment of its disappearance. This seizure interrupts the dialectic of the historical continuum. Whilst for Benjamin this interruption opens up the possibility of a justice for the past and a hope for the future, this is fleeting and dispersed and thereby requires vigilance. This is vigilance towards the 'now' as present 'otherwise' with the glimpse or flash of the other, when synchronised with the index of the past's injustices.

⁵¹⁹ The Messiah is the promised deliverer of the fulfilment of historical time and in that sense authentic time is only possible with the fulfilment of history (its end) with the advent of the Messiah.

The distinction between Benjamin's and Derrida's position is indicated by their use of the Messianic (capitalised) or the messianic (without capitalisation). For Benjamin, the significance of the Messianic lies in its reference to the Messiah's advent from 'outside' of time and history. As previously stated, on the basis of Messianic time, the historical tradition and its passing are inauthentic and thereby are to be thought in terms of the seizure of time and the interrupted dialectic without redemption; history will only be redeemed at its end. Benjamin is an important source for Derrida's particular thinking of the political, insofar as the Messianic invokes a promissory structure and the crossing of time by the immemorial past and an open future that cannot be anticipated or redeemed, in the name of justice. However, Derrida conceives of the messianic (without capitalisation), apart from its particular religious content, as folded into historical time and thus invoking the structural injunction of the 'time out of joint' and the unanticipated 'coming of the other' *in* history yet without *end*, to which we have an ethico-political responsibility.

I have sought to show how the readings addressed in this thesis meet their own limits when they ultimately subtend the metaphysics of presence. This may be realised in a substantive presence or ultimate *end* or even the *negation* of substantive presence in favour of its direct opposite as substantive absence or impossibility.

Derrida and Nancy demonstrate these limits and offer conceptual bases for 'reading otherwise'. On this account I have reflected upon the position of theory in relation to the aesthetics and politics informing art history and art criticism in the contemporary world and have sought to articulate a particular stance towards a politics of memory as an ethico-political project in respect of these disciplines.

Derrida and Nancy have offered similar but significantly different positions with regard to the themes and formation of this ethico-political project. As I have suggested, Derrida is concerned with what I might term an *extreme* crossing of time and space, a spatio-temporal disjunction that inscribes and affirms an alterity 'spectrally' on the principle of *responsibility* for the 'immemorial' past *and* an open, undecidable and incalculable future and hospitality to the 'other'

always to come or return. Nancy's affirmation of responsibility invokes a different spatial and temporal relation which displaces the present and its substantiation, by way of the opening of and exposure to the singular plural of being-in-common and an ethico-political affirmation of the sharing of voices or 'worlds' of experience within a mode of contact/separation in this respect.

In each case they offer for art history and art criticism ways in which to rethink their conceptual terms, tradition and their past as a 'response' for the future-to-come.

Insofar as art history or art criticism may draw upon or seek a 'politics' grounded in presumed subjects of that politics or other essentialising or totalising concepts, I suggest this invokes a past-present, prior ground or presumed future ground and thus I refer to this as a 'memory of politics'.

Throughout this thesis, 'reading art otherwise' suggests a displacement of such a ground and memory in favour of an ethical injunction to interrupt, cross time or affirm spacing and exposure to the other without this ground or (past or future) presence, as the force of a 'politics of memory'.

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