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DISPARITIES OF PLEASURE

by

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetic pleasure has increasingly become a critical concept in the analysis of contemporary cultural production. Primarily, it has become an analytical focus for studies of the nature and role of popular culture in contemporary society. This thesis investigates concepts of aesthetic pleasure and their development, transformation, and currency in various disciplines and discourses, and examines their application within culture, art and communication.

This thesis, as an inquiry into the historical and social influences of categorizations of aesthetic pleasure, privileges reception and the communicative role of cultural objects, rather than a more traditional acknowledgement of production orientated aesthetic values. The long established division between high art and mass culture, that is reliant on the opposition "culture versus commerce" theory, is now problematic. Conditions of pleasure can no longer be viewed as isolated from commercial exchange. Consequently, an analysis of pleasure is left with ambivalent categorizations with which to consider the multiple forms of cultural practice and the hegemonic conditions of capitalist society. With the growth of consumer culture, pleasure becomes linked with the commodification of cultural products, but most importantly, commercial and technological developments have restructured forms of reception, hence the framework within which aesthetic pleasure can be conceptualized.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my daughter Cali.

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INTRODUCTION

My approach to pleasure takes up Barthes' concept of pleasure as a "critical principle".[1] Aesthetic discourse is shifted in Barthes' reference to pleasure; set in motion as *drift*, pleasure remains indeterminate and undecidable as ideological form:

> An entire minor mythology would have us believe that pleasure (and singularly the pleasure of the text) is a rightest notion. On the right, with the same movement, everything abstract, boring, political, is shoved over to the left and pleasure is kept for oneself: welcome to our side, you who are finally coming to the pleasure of literature! And on the left, because of morality (forgetting Marx's and Brecht's cigars), one suspects and disdains any "residue of hedonism." On the right, pleasure is championed *against* intellectuality, the clerisy: the old reactionary myth of heart against head, sensation against reasoning, (warm) "life" against (cold) "abstraction" ... On the left knowledge, method, commitment, combat, are drawn up against "mere delectation" (and yet: what if knowledge itself were delicious?). On both sides, this peculiar idea that pleasure is *simple*, which is why it is championed or disdained. Pleasure, however, is not an *element* of the text, is is not a naive residue; it does not depend on a logic of understanding and on sensation; it is a drift, something both revolutionary and asocial, and it cannot be taken over by any collectivity, any mentality, any ideolect.[2]

The concern of the thesis is theoretical, in that a broad historically based analysis frames aesthetic discourse and the conceptualization of pleasure. Aesthetics as discourse is read as an historically determined conjuncture of high and low cultural forms which posit pleasure as closely tied to the process of cultural modernization: commercial exchange, developments in technology, changes in perception and modes of signification. This approach suggests cultural transformation as a movement towards both an autonomy aesthetic and commercial diversification, hence the recognition of varied processes of cultural reception. Thus as Barthes observes, pleasure is not *simple* but as historical, political, and social as culture itself.

The first chapter examines the origins of aesthetic discourse as an independent and systematic critique. Under the influences of eighteenth century scientific doctrines, especially

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[1]Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 52.

[2]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, pp. 22-23.

developments in the natural sciences, aesthetic values were rationalized and codified as concepts drawn from an "organic" natural world. But as aesthetic values were increasingly compared to nature, this was a nature deeply codified through scientific reason. Once aesthetic values were viewed as both "natural" and "organically" perceived, an aesthetic autonomy could be easily rationalized as the means to separate the aesthetic sphere from commercial conditions and the social and subjective relations of everyday cultural practice. Such a "disinterested" aesthetic, the legacy of enlightenment discourse, denies not only everyday experience, but the very conditions of its cultural and economic formation. The result, the concept of aesthetic pleasure is rationalized as a "higher", universal value without interest or cultural utility.

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the ideology of classical liberalism dominated social, political, and economic thought. Closely connected to the ideology of liberalism, Romanticism as both an aesthetic and political sensibility developed into a popular cultural movement. Chapter two outlines the cultural links between the world views of Romanticism and liberalism (especially the ideology of bourgeois individualism) and examines how Romanticism grew into an oppositional force to challenge the conditions of economic and cultural modernization, of which it was an integral part.

The Romantic popularization of the notion of the genius and the sublime was essential to an autonomy that enforced an aesthetically perceived separation from the influences of the industrialized modern world and the rise of the bourgeoisie to the center of both economic and political power. Romanticism provides the historical antecedent of the discourse of aesthetic negation and establishes dual oppositions that detach high culture from a commercially regulated culture, or as it is often called a culture of consumption. As the increasingly industrialized capitalist economy sharply differentiated work from leisure, social interests within new commercial formations of culture became both signified and diffused. The pleasures of commercial cultural practices were easily rendered as aesthetic qualities "lower" in

value or a form of debasement concurrent with conditions of commodity exchange. This notation of the popular was immersed within two primary conditions of modernization: technological forms of reproduction and the cultural hegemony of the bourgoisie. High and low cultural forms became increasingly oppositional in status. High art as a "pure", autonomous sphere of aesthetic pleasure was increasingly institutionalized to guard against the inroads of mass culture; popular or more commercial forms of culture were denigrated as products of standardization and manipulation.

Pleasure within reification is developed in the third chapter as a discussion of "natural" and "false" needs outlined through Marx's concept of use-value and exchange-value. My analysis centers on the work of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer and their critical appraisal of mass culture formulated in the term the "culture industry". The condition of reification, as outlined by Adorno, leads to aesthetic reception within commercial cultural exchange as forms of "mass deception"; subjective expression is denied within the accompanying administered components of culture's subjection to exchange-value. If culture is entirely "debased" through commercial conditions, as Adorno postulates, this establishes the necessity for aesthetic experience to excert á "distance" in order not to engage in the conditions of reification. Such a process of negation becomes the aesthetic legitimation of production values and the reception process, hence Adorno's cultural criticism rejects the immanent possibilities of aesthetic pleasure. For Adorno, the pleasures of commodity consumption remain an artifice of subjective realization. The failure to acknowledge pleasure as an immediate aesthetic experience was largely determined by Adorno's refusal to accept the integration of commercial and technological influences within cultural productivity in general.

This concept of aesthetic negation is critiqued through the recognition of aesthetic experience held at the level of everyday cultural exchange and the potentiality of communication within symbolic meaning. Aesthetic conditions of perception and signification, within the production of cultural meaning and symbolic relations, deny conditions of reification

as totally manipulative and deceptive in experiential qualities. Therefore factors of economic and social exchange within conditions of commercial culture are given significance as symbolic relations of aesthetic reception rather than defining the subject isolated within a false consciousness.

Walter Benjamin, writing during the same period as Adorno, recognized technological cultural influences within forms of reproduction as a primary factor influencing not only the production qualities of cultural objects, but most importantly the changed condition of their reception. In refering to production aesthetics and technological forms of reproduction, Benjamin cites a challenge to the capitalist forces of production. In his chief concern with the loss of the "aura", reception no longer elicits a purely contemplative response; Benjamin describes how an inactive, "distracted" audience is able to meet the cultural object "halfway". These transitional values in the reception process define cultural experience as dependent on altered forms of aesthetic production and reception which demand an evaluation of traditional aesthetic values.

Chapter four discusses Benjamin's unfinished study of the origins of mass culture in the nineteenth century. Drawing on the notion of a "phantasmagoria" of pleasure, references to Benjamin's analysis of reproduction techniques is a means to examine the early technological formations of commercial culture as sensuous, complex developments that both incorporate and contradict the social norms and cultural values which define nineteenth century modernity. The figure of the nineteenth century *flaneur* is representative of these cultural changes within the hegemony of capitalism. The *flaneur*, representing the subject immersed within the nineteenth century culture of consumption, serves as the means to identify the extension of commercial exchange into all aspects of experience. As the *flaneur* demonstrates, subjective identification within the terms of a commodity aesthetic extend beyond the constraints of capitalist exchange-value.

This emphasis on external influences is essential to Benjamin's political interest in a social collectivity that is reliant on his interpretation of Marx. In establishing an inquiry into the urban conditions of cultural modernization, Benjamin evokes Baudelaire's epic poetry, especially his use of *correspondences* as a way of grasping a direct sensuous involvement in cultural transformation. Thus popular pleasure is both a quality of the commodity aesthetic and an evaluation of new modes of reception.

Chapter five takes a stronger critical appraisal of the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure. The concept of the postmodern condition opens up an inquiry into contemporary culture by re-examining the historical context of high modernism, hence questioning the effectiveness of aesthetic discourse as a negation of the social. The postmodern condition is termed a process of aesthetic *resistance* rather than a negation through aesthetic autonomy. Resistance puts "interest" back into aesthetic experience by acknowledging the reception of aesthetic pleasure as socially constituted. Thus postmodernism by going beyond an autonomy aesthetic displaces the binary oppositional system of aesthetic evaluation - most importantly the division between high art and mass culture. This analysis leads to a point of destablization or a semiotic shift towards difference, rather than relying on dominant and subordinant codes of an aesthetic judgment.

The feminist critique of modes of representation has transformed the postmodern evaluation; difference as sexual difference establishes the methodology to investigate relations of power and cultural instrumentalization. By privileging sexual difference as a power relation, the cultural codes of perception and signification are broken down to signifiers that identify pleasure: desire, the body, vision, the erotic, and fetishism.

Chapter five cites Barthes' "pleasure of the text" as the most instructive source of this analysis. Although Barthes' reading of pleasure is not included until the later part of the thesis, it is singular in seeking precedents for aesthetic displacement as a pervasive pleasure

and political force. It is, therefore, disparities of pleasure (as are most exemplary in Barthes' concept of pleasure), rather than an "organic" harmonious and universally valid aesthetic, that posit pleasure as a critical principle.

CHAPTER I

AESTHETICS AS SYSTEMATIC CRITIQUE

> To determine *a priori* the connexion of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure as an effect, with some representation or other (sensation or concept) as its cause, is utterly impossible; for that would be a causal relation which, (with objects of experience,) is always one that can only be *cognized a posteriori* and with the help of experience.[1]
>
> Necessity and universality are the criteria of the *a priori*. The *a priori* is defined as being independent of experience, precisely because experience never "gives" us anything which is universal and necessary.[2]

Introduction

During the eighteenth century, aesthetics became viewed as independent from the traditional constraints of philosophical and literary criticism.[3] The origins of defining aesthetic discourse as an independent and specialized body of knowledge corresponds to a shift in focus from categorizing how a work of art fits the terms of a specific genre, to establishing an inquiry into the reception of art as a specific subjective response and critique. In earlier aesthetic theory, associated with classical criticism, distinct genres were standardized as theories of mimetic representation orientated primarily to placing the production of art within specific categories. Art in its various genres was regarded as imitative, not in a sense of copying, but as how specific forms are codified as ideal representations, which then serve to constitute a pragmatic relation with an audience.[4]

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[1]Immanual Kant, The Critique of Judgment, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 63.

[2]Gilles Deleuze, Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habbejam (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. 11.

[3]Ernest Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, trans. Fritz C.A. Hoelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 275-276.

[4]M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 20-21.

Jurgen Habermas, by applying Max Weber's characterization of modernity as the scientific disruption of the world views expressed in religion and metaphysics, outlines the specialization of knowledge during the eighteenth century as forming three autonomous spheres: science, morality, and aesthetics. The efforts to develop these disciplines as rational, independent bodies of knowledge contributed to the growth of aesthetics as guided by three structures of cultural order: the cognitive-instrumental of science, practical morality, and the artistic sphere as an aesthetic expressive rationality.[5] Such a rationalization of cultural order influenced aesthetic discourse to change its focus from the production aspects of art as imitation to an inquiry into conditions of reception which would legitimize aesthetic discourse as an autonomous body of knowledge:

> The various arts were removed from the context of everyday life and conceived of as something that could be treated as a whole ... As the realm of non-purposive creation and disinterested pleasure, this whole was contrasted with the life of society which it seemed the task of the future to order rationally, in strict adaptation to definable ends.[6]

The pleasure in an aesthetic experience, or aesthetic pleasure as an integral part of an aesthetic response, similiarly was viewed as separate from everyday lived experience.

Aesthetic Methodology

Influenced by the methodology of the natural sciences, aesthetic discourse identified a self-reflective form of aesthetic inquiry independent from the influences of material and social conditions. The logic of scientific methodology increasingly defined conditions of "truth" as essential to aesthetic discourse and integral to continuing structures of aesthetic validation. Consequently, in aesthetic discourse as in the natural sciences, additional classification and ordering of terminology occured. By utilizing this methodology of objective, rational conditions,

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[5] Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity: an Incomplete Project," in The Anti Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Fort Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 9.

[6] F.H. Kuhn, cited and trans. in Peter Burger, Theory of the Avante-Garde, trans. Michael Shaw (Minnesota: University of Minnesotata Press, 1984), p. 42.

aesthetic discourse was institutionalized as a comparative "systematic" form of judgment and critique.[7]

This inquiry into conditions of an aesthetic experience was systematized through the formulation of hierarchical values; an aesthetic judgment (response) could now be validated as expert criticism. The rationalizing factors of aesthetic reception narrowed and a separation grew between the aesthetic sphere and other areas of cultural signification. This division, primary to eighteenth century aesthetic theory, established aesthetic experience as separate from external interests. Relying on this methodology of internal constraints, an aesthetic experience is designated to be impartial. Aesthetic judgment without interest established claim to universal validity or a universal judgment; detached from life's interests and activities, a "disinterested" pleasure is established as a feeling or expression primary to aesthetic ends.

The systematic ordering of aesthetic pleasure displays the increasingly paradoxical elements that contribute to the tradition of a "high" modernist aesthetic. Firstly, an aesthetic response is no longer primarily concerned with the object itself (as in classical genres), but in determining aesthetic values which constitute an aesthetic experience. Secondly, an aesthetic judgment can now be rationalized as based on conditions evaluated as universal while also treating reception as entirely subjective. The pleasure in such a judgment is aesthetic reception without the inducement of desire and without experiential interest. Of course, while everyday cultural experience fails to support only one set of aesthetic codes or Taste, the influence of science contributed to a long term committment to universal values, which isolated a "purity" in aesthetic reception through a subjective contemplative approach almost entirely divorced from representational or conceptual content.

Accepting the independence of an aesthetic response, as both distinct from social conditions and scientifically rooted in its value judgment, attributed to conditions which . .

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[7] Cassirer, p. 29.

privileged an autonomous position of art. Cultural products could now be easily designated a place within a high and low aesthetic sphere. This division assigned conditions for either genuine or spurious cultural forms within the acceptance of *a priori* conditions of aesthetic experience.[1] Such a predetermined interpretive construct is unmotivated and without conceptual criteria, consequently this "disinterested" aesthetic claims a natural basis for aesthetic experience. Classifying aesthetic reception as entirely subjective and natural, i.e. untainted by interest or purpose, established for art theory a contemplative aesthetic "distance" from the economic change and political unrest of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Immanual Kant was most influential in defining this "distance" by formulating aesthetic pleasure within *a priori* conditions of reception.

Kantian Aesthetics: the Rise of the Subjective Universal

Modernist aesthetic theory claims a dependency on Kantian philosophy. Because of Kant it became possible, if fact credible, *to ask*, is there a "higher" aesthetic pleasure. In The Critique of Judgment, Kant constitutes the existence of a subjective aesthetic which is transcendental in that the subject in its contemplation of the aesthetic object withdraws from both practical concerns and theoretical criteria. It was this transcendental aesthetic that through comparisons with the natural sciences – as a teleological judgment – came to justify

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[1] Hans Reichenbach, The Theory of Relativity and *A Priori* Knowledge, trans. and ed. Maria Reichenbach (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 48. Reichenbach outlines Kant's principles of *a priori* knowledge as defining a number of co-ordinating concepts that determine the reception of an object through an aesthetic judgment which is reliant on this synthesis. Quoting Kant's construction of the object through ordering perceptions, Reichenbach writes:

> The concept of *a priori* has two different meanings. First, it means "necessarily true" or "true for all times", and secondly, "constituting the concept of the object".

These concepts lead to the aesthetic claim of universality.

conditions of universality as well as a "supersensible" abstract subjectivity.[9] When an aesthetic appraisal is assessed as naturalized perception, subjective pleasure negates external factors giving precedence to an internalized subjective "depth", which in Kantian terms establishes the criteria for aesthetic freedom. By restricting the aesthetic to this "natural" transcendental form of expression, guided by expert criticism, aesthetic pleasure is idealized within an abstract sphere without interest (desire) or utility (cultural experience).

As an aesthetic judgment in Kantian terms is entirely subjective, but also "universally valid for everyone", the subjective aspect of the reception of art exists apart as self-reflective contemplation.[10] Thus Kant gives primary emphasis to a universally valid aesthetic judgment and critique, that separates the aesthetic sphere from all direct representation. Rejecting the immanence of ideological representation, the aesthetic sphere is valued as an abstract condition without interest. It is this detached "disinterestedness" of cognitive expression which permits aesthetic theory to deny practical interest, hence ignore the contradictions of a "subjective universal communicability". A "higher" aesthetic experience is therefore dependent on two paradoxical terms; it is both an entirely subjective condition yet establishes aesthetic criteria as privileging a universal experience:

> As the subjective universal communicability of the mode of representation in a judgment of taste is to subsist apart for the presupposition of any definite concept, it can be nothing else than the mental state present in the free play of imagination and understanding ... for we are conscious that this subjective relation suitable for a cognition in general must be valid for everyone, and consequently as universally communicable, as in any determinate cognition, which always rests upon that relation as its subjective condition.[11]

Aesthetic experience, as a feeling of pleasure (or displeasure), is not then a causal relationship but one situated in a sphere claiming signification independent from immediate experience or sense-perception - the transcendental. Thus pleasure without mediatory culturally

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[9]Kant, p. 14.

[10]Kant, p. 58.

[11]Kant, p. 58.

based experience shaped the conventions of art theory that continued to dominate much of art criticism well into the twentieth century.

Non-Sensuous Taste

Kant's theory of Taste (that pertains to pleasure in the beautiful in art) exists independent from the "agreeable" and the "good".[12] The agreeable, according to Kant, is without aesthetic value because it is based solely on individual feeling without universal qualities. What is morally good may establish claim to universal validity, but remaining reliant on a conceptual basis of analysis no association is given to aesthetic experience. By exemplifying the agreeable and the good, Kant draws a distinction between the practical and the conceptual for the purpose of demonstrating how neither of these conditions influence his thesis of aesthetic pleasure. This approach gives Kant the methodology to reject causal terms and to establish an entirely subjective position as an autonomous expression of aesthetic pleasure:

> Every reference of representation is capable of being objective ... The one exception to this is the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. This denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the Subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation.[13]

Thus Kant's "free play of imagination and understanding" that is "common to all" subjugates needs, desires, and other social contexts of culture within a number of aesthetically designated dichotomies of reception. This conceptualization of aesthetic reception gives precedence to an evaluation in which one oppositional element is privileged over the other. Beginning in the eighteenth century, art theory perpetuated this dichotomy as the subjective took precedence over the objective, the individual over the social, nature (beauty) in contrast to style, and an autonomous feeling of pleasure over an immediate experience of gratification, designating to

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[12] Kant, pp. 48-53.

[13] Kant, p. 42.

aesthetic theory the high over the low sensibilities.

Burger suggests that Kant's analysis of aesthetic pleasure is primarily concerned with a critique of bourgeois cultural life.[14] In Kant's critique the "interests" of the bourgeoisie are completely alien to values of the aesthetic sphere:

> If anyone asks me whether I consider that the palace I see before me is beautiful, I may, perhaps, reply that I do not care for things of that sort that are merely made to be gaped at. Or I may reply in the same strain as that Iroquois *sachem* who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating-houses. I may even go a step further and inveigh with the vigour of a *Rousseau* against the vanity of the great who spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things ... Everyone must allow that a judgment on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgment of taste.[15]

Kant suggests that the bourgeoisie, now established within privileged positions at the center of political, economic, and cultural power, act as phillistines in their appreciation of culture. They merely show interest in immediate sensuous gratification (such as the eating habits of the "Iroqious sachem") and identify aesthetic criticism with practical and moral suppositions (Rousseau's doctrine). Neither is acceptable to Kant's aesthetic theory. But Kant's admonition of bourgeois ideology also displays identification with his own class by valorizing universal principles above all other qualities:

> With his demand that the aesthetic judgment be universal, Kant also closes his eyes to the particular interests of his class. Toward the products of his class enemy also, the bourgeois theoretician claims impartiality. What is bourgeois in Kant's arguement is precisely the demand that the aesthetic judgment have universal validity. The pathos of universality is characteristic of the bourgeoisie, which fights the feudal nobility as an estate that represents particular interests.[16]

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[14]Burger, p. 43.

[15]Kant, p. 43.

[16]Burger, p. 43.

Art and Nature.

Kant's aesthetic judgment classified an aesthetic "purity" through nature and the forms which nature produces in accordance with its metaphysical tradition of autonomy.[17] In this way, aesthetic pleasure was established within formalist principles which designated to artistic production the same primacy of form found in the aesthetic "finality of nature".[18] Fine art is then defined as appearing "just as free from the constraints of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of mere nature".[19] Thus when aesthetic discourse drew comparisons to science (through *a priori* judgment), art theory, institutionalized as detached from the social including all commercial aspects of culture, sought legitimation in associating aesthetic principles as linked to both art and nature, or more specifically principles that defined nature through science.[20] Within this comparison nature is synonomous with knowledge: ""Nature" ... does not so much signify a given group of objects as a certain "horizon" of knowledge, of the

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[17]Kant, pp. 216-221.

[18]Kant, pp. 67-68.

> In painting, sculpture, and in fact all the formative art in architecture and horticulture, so far as fine arts, the *design* is what is essential. Here is not what gratifies in sensation but merely what pleases by its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite for taste ... The *charm* of colours, or of the agreeable tones of instruments, may be added: but the *design* in the former and the *composition* in the latter constitute the proper object of the pure judgment of taste. To say that the purity alike of colours and of tones, or their variety and contrast, seem to contribute to beauty, is by no means to imply that, because in themselves agreeable, they therefore yield an addition to the delight in the form and one on a par with it. The real meaning is that they make this form more clearly, definetly, and completely intuitable.

[19]Kant, pp. 166-167.

[20]Kant, p. 167.
Kant describes this as:

> (T)he way in which a product of art seems like nature, is by the presence of perfect *exactness* in the agreement with rules.

comprehension of reality".[21] Thus Kant's formalism privileged an analytic of teleological judgment demonstrating an interest in the grounds of knowledge which could claim a universal judgment, rather than establishing the conditions for aesthetic pleasure.

Art came to be viewed as a rival of nature and yet was perceived as containing the same "essence." As illustrated by Holbach in System of Nature, the "essence" of art and nature strive to realize an organic whole: "All is in order in a nature, no part of which can ever deviate from the certain and necessary rules which issue from the essence it has received."[22] This condition of nature was prevalent in both the philosophical and scientific rationale of the Enlightenment and sought to return to a categorization of the "organic" whole as applied to both aesthetic form and reception. Such claims to an "organic" whole, when raised to the level of a systematic aesthetic, supported a universal condition for aesthetic experience.

As an approach to comparing knowledge to "truth" in nature, aesthetics became non-empirical in order to define an "inner space" for constituting Kant's transcendental subject.[23] This analysis was largely advanced through the doctrine of scientific liberalism associated with the work of Issac Newton:

> Newton's physics were evidently successful in the experimental field ... (he) had shown that such methods could reveal the mathematical wisdom of Creation. This was not a gratuitous hypothesis, but a fact accessible to immediate perception. Man could now presuppose the integral rationality of reality and assume its validity in any branch of theory ... Nature was the place where all human values were to be found, a transcendental reality full of life and movement, where God, Man, and things were subject to mathematical harmony.[24]

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[21]Cassirer, p. 39.

[22]Cited in Cassirer, p. 69.

[23]Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 137-139.

[24]Cited in Alberto Perez-Gomez, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: M.I.T. Press, 1983), p. 81.

This dependency on a "mathematical" and "harmonious" ordering of nature through science was formative in determining modernist aesthetic judgment, as not only entirely self-conscious and self-reflective, but self-critical in its evaluation and codification. As Cassirer writes in his study of eighteenth century aesthetic discourse:

> Whether it is the dispute between reason and imagination, the conflict between genius and the rules, the foundation of the sense of beauty in feeling or a certain form of knowledge: in all these synthesis the same, fundamental problems recurs. It is as if logic and aesthetics, as if pure knowledge and artistic intuition had to be tested in terms of one another before either of them coud find its own inner standard and understand itself in the light of its own relational complex.[25]

Pleasure in Form

These influences of scientific ordering and "natural" codification were continued within a high modernist aesthetic. Paradigms of aesthetic autonomy and "purity" were valued, above all else, as the means to dissolve all questions of representation; formalist principles now sought a traditional unity and "natural" coherence through abstract principles:

> The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape - not its picture - is aesthetically valid; something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself ... The nonrepresentational or "abstract," if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary and accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former. Those themselves become the subject matter of art and literature.[26]

Clement Greenberg, the most influential art critic of modernism and the visual arts, established for twentieth century aesthetics a criticism almost totally dependent on a logic of formal constraints which deny external influences:

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[25]Cassirer, pp. 276-277.

[26]Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Art and Culure: Critical Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 6.

> It follows that a modernist work of art must try, in principle, to avoid dependence upon any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium ... The arts are to achieve concreteness, "purity", by acting solely in terms of their separate and irreducible selves.[27]

By claiming Kant as the "first real Modernist", Greenberg accepts the terms of eighteenth century aesthetics.[28] This entrenchment in "its area of competence", in Greenberg's evaluation, defined aesthetic experience as a continuity of tradition and formalist principles. But how is this exclusiveness maintained against the conditions of commercial culture, or what means might constitute in the twentieth century an aesthetic sphere sharply distinct from all aspects of experience now integrated within the hegemony of mass culture and commercial exchange? Contrasting the values of genuine culture with the "vicarious experience" and "faked sensations" of the pleasures of commercial culture, Greenberg evaluates an aesthetic freed from illusionistic and imitative influences (both classical renderings and mass culture were delegated to kitsch). Such qualities satisfy the modernist call for aesthetic "purity" against the influences of mass culture, leading to Greenberg's now well known formalistic "reduction" - the work of art can not be reduced to anything but its own privileged purpose of autonomy. Hence the values which Greenberg gives to aesthetics are formal values dependent on a "literal essence" of their medium that preserved any attempt at "levelling down":

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[27]Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," in Art and Culture: Critical Essays, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 139.

[28]Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology, eds. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1982), p. 5.

> Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist. The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline itself - not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left in all the more secure posession of what remained to it.

> Realistic, illusionistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting - the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment - were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly.[29]

And as Greenberg continues:

> It was the stressing, however, of the inelectable flatness of the support that remained most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism ... Flatness, two dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting orientated itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.[30]

In this way the privileged signifier within Modernism is a pleasure in the "purity" that is viewed as embodied in form. The elemental pleasures of material substance within form reasserted a separate and independent aesthetic existence (rather than implicit awareness of material composition) and established a visual complicity with the "natural", or as Greenberg states the "absolute", to subvert not only other sense-perceptions, but the means (if only in formal terms) to define an aesthetic autonomy from mass culture.

Conclusion

Once aesthetic values were established as originating in nature, which eighteenth century science defined as supporting universal laws, references to a subjective response validated only specific experiences as aesthetic. Such a rationalization of nature was primarily perceived as an "agency" of reason, which assumed a systematic "organic" whole rather than examining parts within a larger cultural system, especially as contrasted to the complexities of modern commercial culture.[31]

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[29]Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," p. 6.

[30]Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," p. 6.

[31]Cassirer, p. 14.
Cassirer suggests that in comprehending new scientific modes of analysis, reason was viewed as a "concept of agency, not of being". When applied to the rational ordering of aesthetic

The concept of the "disinterestedness" of an aesthetic judgment and critique separates an aesthetic experience from all representation and conceptual meaning and transforms the aesthetic into an abstract experience, which continues as a primary element of modernist aesthetic theory. This emphasis on aesthetic contemplation without interest is dependent on Kant's philosophical inquiry into the relation between the subject and the reception of an aesthetic object. A systematic aesthetic experience without interest, therefore permits a rationalization of a "pure" aesthetic judgment claiming universal validity. In this way, an aesthetic experience is primarily defined through formal characteristics, or as in Kantian terms, that which pleases by its form rather than gratified by the senses. Drawing on this analysis devoid of sensuous pleasure, the eighteenth century concept of reason defined aesthetics as cut of from the immediacy of lived experience. The historical and ideological components of such an aesthetic have been discussed in this chapter, but remaining unresolved are the problematics of an aesthetic theory that defines representation as something to "be avoided like a plague".[32] Representation as the signification of meaning and the identification of subject positions will be discussed in the following chapters.

The aesthetic division between high and low sensibilities forced the homogenization of class, sex, and racial differences within a perceived universality of aesthetic discourse. By giving distinction to aesthetic reception within a "higher" aesthetic sphere, the separation between autonomous art and commercial exchange – or an aesthetic and non-aesthetic sphere – became increasingly defined as adversarial in their cultural utility. As art "rivaled" nature (a nature deeply entrenced within scientific principles), it was the demand for universality which codified the differences between the beautiful and the useful. Consequently, in validating an aesthetic sphere, that fails to recognize immanent cultural experience, aesthetic

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[31](cont'd) discourse, Cassirer defines reason as the methodology of understanding the complete knowledge of a structure, or an "organic" view of comprehending the whole rather than the parts of a system.

[32]Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," p. 5.

discourse is viewed as a linear transition of increasingly formalistic and philosophical principles, rather than within the complexities of economic, social, and political influences.

CHAPTER II

ROMANTICISM, CLASSICAL LIBERALISM: TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF POPULAR PLEASURE

> Now so to place these images (of nature) totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflections to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature, - this is the mystery of genuis in the Fine Arts.[1]

> People mutht be amuthed ... they can't be alwayth a-working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a-learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht.[2]

Introduction

The term *romantic* generally signifies both cultural attitudes and political sensibilities. As a cultural movement popularized during the nineteenth century, Romanticism has historical influences extending to both the politics of the French Revolution and the economic transformations of the Industrial Revolution. But as a cultural formation, that suggests an aesthetic of modern experience, Romanticism inherited a broad philosophical legacy; most influential was German metaphysics.[3] Developed as a philosophical tradition of relating the individual to the material influences of the modern world, romantic aesthetic values emphasized the perfectibility of nature over the often alienating and threatening economic and social transformations of the industrialized world. Consequently, romantic aesthetic values posited art as inseparable from nature and by sharing a similiar philosophical grounding art sought the very "essence" of productive natural forces.

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[1]Coleridge, Literary Remains, cited in Abrams, p. 53.

[2]Charles Dickens, Hard Times (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: Signet Classic, 1961), p. 49.
Spoken by Mr. Searly, the proprieter of a horse-riding circus troupe, to the utilitarian educator Mr. Gradgrind.

[3]Anthony Thorlby, ed. "Introduction," The Romantic Movement (London: Longmans Green and Co. Ltd., 1966), pp. 1-2.

Equally valued was an "organic" view of the world through which nature was contrasted to the mechanical and commercial conditions of modern culture. The romantic vision, as a means to reject the atomized society and mechanical divisions of the commercial world, found solace in human consciousness often idealized within a nostalgia for pre-capitalist conditions. As a nostalgia for a period when alienations of the industrialized world did not exist, an aesthetic tied to pre-capitalist conditions, more than any other unifying force, became the focus of romantic consciousness.[4] Evoking this nostalgia, the romantic search for aesthetic resolution came to both negate and attempt to justify the modern world.

Attempts to reconcile the urban and social conditions of modernity developed as an internalized aesthetic response. In achieving this end, Romanticism as an aesthetic developed multiple contraditions. Romanticism constituted a pedagogy of unitary individuality and subjective alienation from the commercial world. But paradoxically, romantic values were inseparable from the historically specific practices of classical liberalism and the related economy of bourgeois capitalism, in fact, liberalism was the foremost condition of support for the same elements of modernity rejected by the Romantic movement. So while classical liberalism supported the commercial and social utility of competitive market exchange, in contradiction romantic metaphors of artistic production and reception often signified an internalized consciousness of transcendence from lived conditions.

This romantic consciousness identified a subjectivity of spontaneity, individual creativity, and aesthetic autonomy. As these qualities were applied to art, the concept of the genius and the elements of the sublime manifested the extreme demonstration of romantic pleasure. The

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[4]Robert Sayre and Michael Lowry, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," New German Critique, 32 (Spring/Summer 1984), pp. 48-49.

> The Romantic soul longs ardently to return home ... What the present has lost existed once before, in a more or less distant in past. The determining characteristic of this past is its difference from the presence; it is the period when the alienations of the present did not yet exist.

separation from the problems of the industrialized world was increasingly internalized as the cultural formations of Romanticism wavered between nature and progress, metaphysics and political expediency. In this way, the aesthetic limits of Romanticism altered aesthetic discourse. Or as Abrams suggests, the production of the work of art became the external relation of an internal expression of philosophical "truth". This internalization of aesthetic production was integral to the values that dominated aesthetic discourse during the next century:

> To put the matter schematically: for the representative eighteenth century critic, the perceiving mind was a reflector of the external world; the inventive process consisted in a reassembly of "ideas" which were literally images, or replicas of sensations; and the resulting art work was itself comparable to a mirror presenting a selected and ordered image of life. By substituting a projective and creative mind and, consonantly, an expressive and creative theory of art, various romantic critics reversed the basic orientation of all aesthetic philosophy.[5]

The changes in these aesthetic standards were vastly diversified as Romanticism favoured multiple genres and art forms against the standardized academic aesthetic. In this diversification the concept of the genius and the sublime played an integral role, as did liberal social theory.

The Concept of Genius

Kant's formulation that "fine art is a product of the genius" foreshadowed the theories of artistic production and the aesthetic of *l'art pour l'art* that prospered in the nineteenth century. Cassirer's inquiry into eighteenth century aesthetic foundations of the genius suggests that the concept of the genius forms a link with the theological mysticism of the Renaissance, rather than a critical perspective associated with the emerging ideas of the Enlightenment.[6] Judging by transformations in traditional relations of cultural production, including patronage and audience reception, the concept of the genius defied its historical

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[5]Abrams, p. 69.

[6]Cassirer, p. 313.

context. Placed within the nineteenth century relations of cultural production and the ideology of classical liberalism, the popularization of the role of the genius supported the separation of the individual from social and historical limitations and typified the process of art as unalienated labour. Preserving an artistic space not sublimated to the commercial world contributed to defining aesthetic activity as antithetic to the market and delegated the artist as a "special kind of person".[7] This specialization is not merely viewed as an economic or professional category, but contrasts aesthetic values to conditions of the industrializing world, especially the division of labour. The qualities of artistic work as an aesthetic (and also moral) force separated the "organic" from the "mechanical" world; this division privileged the conceptualization of "fine art" as the product of genius to structure an aesthetic autonomy.

The pleasure gained from an association with the products of genius could be disassociated from commercially based cultural forms and the intervention of a commodity aesthetic. The concept of the genius as a "higher" sphere of production divided an aesthetic experience from the patterns of cultural consumption that were assured of appropriation through commercial channels. The legacy of Kantian philosophy within the Romantic aesthetic enforced this division by incorporating the unconscious into the artistic process. Placing the unconscious at the center of aesthetic judgment subjugated desire and privileged aesthetic pleasure to revitalize an ideal state of contemplation:

> The aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful consists in great measure in the fact that in entering the state of pure contemplation we are lifted for the moment above all willing, i.e. all willing wishes and cares; we become, as it were, freed from ourselves.[8]

By retaining the Kantian priorities of subjective expression within a dynamic of internal consciousness, the romantic sensibility rejected the imitative constraints of academic art, as well as subverting the influences of commercial culture which signifed impersonal modes of

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[7]Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780–1885 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), pp. 35–36.

[8]Schopenhauer cited in Isreal Knox, The Aesthetic Theories of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer (New York: The Humanities Press, 1958), p. 160.

exchange. This aesthetic of subjective, internalized isolation was viewed as a "higher" value or claim to "truth", and aesthetic experience could be held apart from the utilitarian demands of economic determinants and, more specifically, the actual conditions of the artist producing in society.[9] This focus on production aesthetics (the genius) as an element of individual "creation" mystified the relation between art and its audience. The emerging bourgeoisie readily gave their support to this transition, as art viewed as autonomous was easily termed universal without laying claim to a direct economic relationship or a specific utility.

Aesthetic Transformation

Cultural change occured rapidly with the rise to power of the bourgeoisie within not only economic but social control. In addition to changes in patronage, concepts and practices of leisure time transformed the conditions of both cultural production and consumption. In all culturally defined activity, the socially dependent relations between the artist and traditional systems of patronage were replaced by more impersonal structured relations of commercial and state support. Changes occured in not only the production and distribution of traditional cultural forms, but new economic relations of exchange realized cultural products aligned along new consumption patterns and changes in audience participation. While the market demanded increasingly commercialized systems of production and distribution, art was granted an institutionalized status (thus preserving its aesthetic autonomy and self-referential status), or as Burger demonstrates "art as institution" delegated to art its social function.[10]

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[9]Williams, Culture and Society: 1780–1885, p. 40.

> While in one sense the market was specializing the artist, artists themselves were seeking to generalize their skills into the common property of imaginative truth.

[10]Burger, pp. 24–25.

Burger's analysis refers to the social placement of art. Here the evolution of bourgeois society plays an important role:

> Autonomous art only establishes itself as bourgeois society develops, the economic and political systems become detached from the cultural one, and the traditionalist world pictures which have been undermined by the basis ideology of fair exchange release the arts from their ritual use."[11]

Burger's emphasis on the non-linear development of art as ritual to art as institution interprets an aesthetic as an overall product of cultural influence. The outcome is the transformation of the utility of art in the social sense or the function of art, while also acknowledging, as Burger makes clear, that art as an institution functions according to an inward autonomy which must be differentiated from the content of individual works.[12] When the work of art is institutionalized the resulting ideological function of art permits categorically an exclusion of a non-aesthetic sphere of interest and continues to assert the validity of universal values. The institutionalization of art could then preserve traditional interpretations of "fine art", especially against challenges that stemmed from technological influences.

The Sublime

The "sublime" as a concept divorced from material qualities of representation was essential to the definition of nineteenth century aesthetic autonomy. The sublime, refering to "organic" values derived from nature, was held in contradistinction to the scientific positivism of the Enlightenment, but its formulation was only possible within the similiar systematization of aesthetic principles. As an evaluation of nature and moral consciousness, the sublime was

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[11]Habermas, cited in Burger, p. 24.

[12]For example, the Romantic movement produced many artists with political interests; Burger's analysis focuses on the "historical avant-garde" (Dada, early Surrealism, and Russian post-revolutionary artistic practice). Burger argues that the major activity of the avant-garde was an attempt to transform the bourgeois institituion of art in order to reintegrate art within everyday experience.

both an individual and social sensibility comprehended through unapproachable natural forces, i.e. those beyond the doctrine of science.

The concept of the sublime served to generate a transformative dynamic of aesthetic reception by comprehending that which is most spontaneous and unrepresentable in nature. As art reflects nature, what is most unrepresentable in art is defined as releasing a "higher" or superior, abstract pleasure. The romantic confidence in the pleasures of art could therefore count on a social and philosophical transcendence. Suggesting the pleasure of identification with nature, the sublime in its detachment from the "vulgar" associations of commercial exchange distinguished aesthetic pleasure from the rapidly changing structures and often fragmented existence of the social sphere. But most importantly, the sublime continued within aesthetic discourse the interplay between subjectivity as both highly individual yet unargueably universal. Separating the sublime as a quality of that which is unrepresentable, or again returning to Kant without a designated conceptual base, preserved the means to validate a universal aesthetic judgment, in this way "legislating" a standard that is "valid for everyone".[13]

The sublime entrenched the categorization of displeasure as well as pleasure in aesthetic norms. There is pleasure in the beauty and form of nature, but both pleasure and displeasure are expressed in the unaccountable and uncontrolled choas of nature. But most importantly, the sublime as an aesthetic sphere without worldly association or specific content, re-established for aesthetic theory an autonomous subjective condition of pleasure as primary to aesthetic reception.

As a mediatory element of aesthetic pleasure, positioned between historical forces and artistic isolation, the romantic ideal of the sublime served the artist's own interests within the

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[13] Francis Ferguson, "Legislating the Sublime," in Studies in Eighteenth Century British Art and Aesthetics, ed. Ralph Cohen (Berkeley, California; London, England: University of California Press, 1985).

bourgeois sphere of patronage and the commercial modes of cultural consumption. Many romantic artists rejected the bourgeois domination of culture and adapted the concept of the sublime to evade the system of bougeois interests and social privilege to which they nevertheless were reliant for their income and philosophical idealism.

Utilitarian Philosophy

Although the sublime as an aesthetic sensiblity gained support and popularity within the Romantic movement, the concept of the sublime had ealier gained notoriety as a utilitarian guide to social management. Edmund Burke first outlined the concept of the sublime as a moral intervention within the economic creed of classical liberalism. While the sublime still retained qualifiers of the unrepresentable, especially in nature, Burke applied the concept of the sublime to a particular social utility linked to "passions that belong to society".[14] These passions, or pleasure conceived within a moralizing utilitarian application, attempted to designate individual gratification of needs within the structures of society. This utilitarian notion of pleasure justified an analysis which intepreted the social specificity of human actions as primarily motivated by a desire to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. In an essay first published in London, 1789, Jeremy Bentham writes:

> Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point to what we ought to, as well as to determine what we shall do.[15]

Utilitarian philosophy justified social and economic change as providing the opportunites for the "greatest happiness" of the largest number of people. The ideology of utilitarianism as a moral practice as well as a social and public investigation of individual experience outlines the individual within society as closely regulated by self-interest and mediated by pleasure.

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[14]Ferguson, p. 133.

[15]Jeremy Bentham, "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," in Ethical Theories: A Book of Readings, ed. A.I. Melder (Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1950), p. 341.

Bentham's doctrine of egoistic hedonism was most influential in designating pleasure as utilitarian – socially specific – hence acquiring a categorization within a moral force which could be applied within the often chaotic and seemingly uncontrollable conditions of urban change. But for Bentham, pleasures seldom acquire qualitative distinction, instead pleasure is viewed within a quantitative intensity tied to individual motivations, which can then be positioned as the means for acquiring a maximum benefit in economic efficiency of organization and a minimum application in social administration. Bentham's abrupt quantitative determinants of pleasure and pain as a philosophy of social reform have been used by Foucault to demonstrate the modern, technologically influenced applications of social technologies of power. As an example, the disciplinary technology of Bentham's plans for the never built Panopticon isolated the individual for observation and control without allowing any reciprocation of the "gaze". Thus the individual comes under administrative surveillance as the "object of information, never a subject in communication".[16]

Bentham's reform program, as it encountered confrontation between the profit motive (individual achievement and self-interest) and social cohesion, outlined a doctrine of quantitative pleasures calculated to achieve maximum social management in relation to economic change. According to Bentham, pleasures differ in intensity but not in qualitative characteristics; pleasure is merely quantitative. When taken to its lowest common denominator: "Quantity of pleasure being equal, pushpin is as good as poetry."[17] Bentham's dictum valorizes the simplistic utility in playing the game pushpin; poetic pleasure is denigrated to a falsehood of description. Valued merely as illusion, poetry was easily combined by Bentham with a false morality which contributed to inciting the emotions over reason, hence lacking

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[16] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 200.
It is useful to note that the original french title, Surveiller et Punir, suggests surveillance rather than discipline.

[17] Harry K. Girvetz, The Evolution of Liberalism (New York: Collier Books; London: Collier MacMillan Ltd, 1950), p. 30.

any social adaptability to commercial progress.[18] If aesthetic pleasure is viewed as differing not qualitatively but in categories which more readily suggest a quantitative appraisal, pleasures of the new patterns of commercial exchange are specified as individual satisfaction within consumption practices.

This utilitarian ground for individual pleasure has its origin in the philosophy of Hobbes and Locke.[19] Viewing the individual as operating within self-interest and independent hedonism conceptualizes pleasure as operating distinctly separate from the social. Such an equation of pleasure provided resources for the bourgeoisie to reject traditionally organized social relations, that require a collectivity of subject identification over the rational gratification of quantitative material needs. In fact, since all actions are governed by the desire to achieve pleasure and avoid pain, all commercial conditions of exchange are validated as entirely beneficial in their effects. Or more specifically collective moral evaluations become less important if humans are governed solely by a utilitarian notion of pleasure.

By explaining pleasure in quantitative terms, Bentham suggests individuals remain passive and unfullfilled unless linked to egoistic means of self-gratification. This utilitarian application supported rapid economic change, including the division of labour and the acquisition of social control as well as economic interests by the bourgeoisie. Consequently, the utilitarian theory of formulating pleasure as a means of social management supported the integration of all classes into the economic system. This mainly urban integration was influential in regulating changes in the patterns of social hegemony within the expanding commodity market.

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[18]Abrams, p. 301.

[19]C.B. MacPherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes and Locke (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1962).
Drawing on the philosophies of Hobbes and Locke, MacPherson gives specific attention to the unifying principle of "possessive individualism", which he outlines as connecting basic philosophical assumptions tied to inquiries into human nature as well as concepts of liberalism which advanced economic and political formations of early capitalism, especially the advocation of private property and relations of ownership and contracts.

As such a social analysis validated ideological components as "natural", hence neutral and logically rational (progressively universal) in their application, liberalism as a social force served the economic demands of the newly emerging bourgeoise. It was the psychological assumptions of liberalism - individuals were believed to be egoistic and possessing an atomistic outlook on all forms of communication - that were diffused within the Romantic movement. As cultural signifiers, these complexities of the liberal rationalization of human nature and the metaphors of the romantic imagination (as highly individualistic and expressive) were focused within the pluralistic notion of the "Liberal Imagination".[20] These characteristics of cultural expression gained an increasing hegemony within economic paradigms of progress. The result was that these ideologies, which positioned the individual as standing apart from society, played an increasingly important role in restructuring work and leisure within a culture of consumption or a recognition of the integration of pleasure within a commodity aesthetic.

As leisure became distinctly separate from work, class interests became both entrenched and diffused within the separation of urban culture from earlier rural traditions. The signification of wealth and prosperity developed as a "culture of enjoyment", which differentiated the values of early capitalism - a productive orientated culture - from an emphasis on the pursuits of pleasure and the cultivation of style within consumption patterns.[21] As both a display of bourgeois wealth and urban leisure, the rise of consumer culture acted to both affirm and reject class barriers, consequently to denote the activities of

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[20]Colin Mercer, "A Poverty of Desire: Pleasure and Popular Politics," in Formations of Pleasure, Formations Collective, Tony Bennett et al. (London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 92.

[21]Martin J. Weiner, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit: 1850-1880 (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochell, Melborne, Syndey: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 13.

the "mass".

During the eighteenth century, the reference to "mass media" became used along with the term "popular" to designate the diversification of cultural products within commercial relations of production and consumption.[22] Art no longer received legitimation from one privileged social group, as cultural products were inseparable from relations of commercial exchange. This process took place in all the arts, but most importantly the changes in the production and reception of literature and the visual arts (especially painting) were most emblematic of the influences of commercially regulated culture.

A continued rise in general literacy, along with an increased urban population with leisure time, influenced a growing demand for commercially produced cultural products. Those that were already literate within the new business and merchant classes read considerably more and women of all classes contributed to an increased demand for all types of literature:

> In the fifty-year period between 1730 and 1780 at least one new magazine a year was presented to the London public the majority bearing the "something for everyone" format, including questions and answers on all spheres of personal life ... news, gossip, and fiction. Prototypes of nearly all forms of modern magazines were introduced and for the most part flourished: women's journals, gossipy theatrical monthlies, true and love story magazines, news digest, book reviews, and even book condensations.[23]

Similiar changes took place in the visual arts. Larger audiences were attracted to the Salon. Visual images were included in all types of publications. New interests in journalism and commercial forms of criticism played an important role in encouraging a new relationship in the documentation and commercial distribution of art work. As early as 1686, the first auction catalogue was published in England; four years later an auction house was established

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[22]Leo Lowenthal, Literature, Popular Culture, and Society (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, 1961), pp. 52-108.

[23]Lowenthal, pp. 52-53.

in Convent Garden.[24] Dealers established commercial links between artist and patron. With the opening of museums and galleries, painting became accessible to a larger audience, but as art became increasingly accessible to the public it was also institutionalized to affirm the values of high culture as separate from conditions of commercial exchange.

The ideologies that supported an aesthetic autonomy, especially within the dictum of *l'art pour l'art* or Aestheticism must be viewed as inseparable from the new patterns of consumption and leisure time. In order to preserve the "purity" of high culture as detached from commercial exchange, the popular (commercial) and the utilitarian were viewed as the site of debased cultural forms and inferior pleasure. But as the commodity aesthetic, at least as a site of pleasure, provided access to both limiting and legitimating social differences, cultural products of all types began to demonstrate a complicity in artistic production that integrated within the products of high modernism the pursuits of urban leisure. As demonstrated in the representation and techniques of Impressionist paintings, the individualistic satisfactions of the new middle class were increasingly realized within commodity consumption; this pursuit of pleasure linked the cultural values underlying high modernism with the new forms of mass culture:

> It is remarkable how many pictures we have in early Impressionism of informal and spontaneous sociability, of breakfasts, picnics, promenades, boating trips, holidays, and vacation travel. These urban idylls not only present the objective forms of bourgeois recreation in the 1860's and 1870's; they also reflect in the very choice of subjects and in the new aesthetic devices the conception of art solely as a field of individual enjoyment, without reference to ideas and motives, and they presuppose the cultivation of these pleasures as the highest field of freedom for an enlightened bourgeois detached from the official beliefs of his class. In enjoying realistic pictures of his surroundings as a spectacle of traffic and changing atmospheres, the cultivated rentier was experiencing in its phenomenal aspect that mobility of the environment, the market and of industry to which he owned his income and his freedom. And in the new Impressionist techniques which broke things up into finely discriminated points of color, as well as in the "accidental" momentary vision, he found in a degree hitherto unknown in art, conditions of sensibility closely related to those of the urban promenader

[24]Robert C. Holub, "The Rise of Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century," Comparative Literature Studies, 15, 3 (1978) pp. 282-283.

and the refined consumer of luxury goods.[25]

In order to achieve its own hierarchical position as a pleasurable object, Impressionist painting could not reject the representations of a consumer based culture or the political and economic hegemony of the bourgeoisie. This new culture of consumption, as a sensibility that crossed over both modern urban culture and nature to orientate pleasure as entertainment, identified the individual as both class bound and socially fragmented within changing social structures. But these influences also suggested certain aspects of cultural integration between classes.

Conclusion

By the nineteenth century, the autonomous status of art within bourgeois society increasingly defined its function and social context. Areas of cultural mediation between the status of high art and the political and social hegemony of the bourgeoisie are increasingly institutionalized. Burger's concept of "art as institution" is the medium of exchange which gives allowance for artistic expression both academic and critical. The privileging of art as a unique aesthetic sphere is internalized within the institution; aesthetic experience retains a formalist critique inherited from Kantian philosophy and the romantic legacy of naturalized aesthetic creation. This aesthetic stratification provides a sharp distinction between high art and the mass produced products of a culturally integrated commercial exchange.

The autonomy of art, which was increasingly viewed as antithetical towards commercial culture and the social sphere, was at the same time closely tied to the liberal characterization of an individual, unitary subjectivity. The classical liberal notions of economic evaluation tied to the cultural sphere were associated with aesthetics activities linked to self-gratification or a

[25] Meyer Schapiro, cited in Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in Modernism and Modernity, eds. Benjamin H.D. Buchloch, et al. (Halifax, N.S.: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), pp. 224-225.

utilitarian pleasure. In contrast, Romanticism exploited these same characterizations as a means of cultural refusal to the rapid social and economic changes of the nineteenth century.

Such developments in the pluralistic identification of the subjective self became equally a negation and the immanent expression of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie. The "Liberal Imagination", as the sensibility from which the twentieth century concept of pleasure take its roots, includes both the individualism of classical liberalism and the idealism of cultural Romanticism, which merge in the commercial "intoxication" of a consumer based culture and the economic hegemony of the middle class. This pluralism crossed over characterizations of the division between the mechanical (or artificial) and nature, and as technological developments influenced innovative forms of cultural production, pleasure within a popular, commercial culture and an aesthetic of autonomy influenced by Romanticism assumed oppositional effects. As a result, classical liberal ideology confronted the needs and desires of traditional pleasure - those of a truly vernacular foundation - within a conflict between high and low sensibilities. Tracing pleasure by recognizing both the traditions of the hierarchical, qualitative terms of aesthetic autonomy and the quantitative systematization of Bentham's utility acknowledges not only that the relations of commodity production have entered the aesthetic sphere, but suggests a direction of inquiry into the intersubjective and symbolic relations of consumption patterns. It is these conditions which determine the relations that subjects have with objects.

CHAPTER III

PLEASURE WITHIN REIFICATION

> Reception tends to dull the critical edge of art, its determinate negation of society.[1]
>
> Both (high art and mass culture) are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up.[2]

Introduction

Pleasure within reification concerns the exchange-value and use-value of cultural forms. Reification, a Hegelian concept adapted by Georg Lukacs, defines the alienation of culture from its traditional status the "organic" value form of use-value.[3] Reified culture is defined in terms of the relations of capitalist commodity exchange, and most importantly according to Marx's analysis, subjectivity is determined by the "mysterious" conditions which commodities extend to the relations between individuals:

> A commodity is ... a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.[4]

If relations between humans are similiarly viewed as relations between objects of exchange, reification determines lived experience as suiting its own ends rather than an autonomous subjectivity within a distinct definition of specific human needs. Here the decisive qualities

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[1]Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, trans. C. Lenhardt (London, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 325.

[2]Theodor W. Adorno, letter to Walter Benjamin, 10 November, 1938, Aesthetics and Politics, trans. and ed. Ronald Taylor (London: Verso Editions, 1980), p. 122.

[3]Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 87-89.

[4]Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd. Edition, ed. Robet C. Tucker (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), pp. 320-321.

are those immediately accessible (or denied) by the senses. Specific to this condition, subjective experience is deprived of an authentic contact with objects (use-value), and as a consequence any possibilities for subjectivity are denied:

> Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a phantom objectivity; an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.[5]

Access to a subjective experience is therefore denied at both an individual level and as a socially valued response. The basis of this disintegration of subjective elements privilege a "natural" and often idealized precapitalist economic and social base, and suggest a deeply traditional view of cultural values. But if the concept of an "organic" materiality of culture symbolizes the only authentic one, aesthetic conditions within capitalism remain entirely spurious.

In Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society, Bertell Ollman describes Marx's designation of "object" in reference to "the object of a subject" rather than a reference that gives priority to material qualities.[6] If Ollman's interpretation is correct, which I think it is, Marx's concept of alienation, comparative to eighteenth century aesthetic discourse, also claims a primary subjective intervention or the object has to conform to the reception of the subject. Marx's interpretation connects subjects to objects within a concept of needs ("human nature") and community of values, which are contrasted to the increasing loss of praxis through subjugation to the exchange-values of a capitalist economy. This economic summation of the predominance of exchange-value over use-value focuses on subject-object relations within economic production as a determinate influence on conditions of consciousness and the loss of specific qualities of experience:

> Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer ...

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[5]Lukacs, p. 83.

[6]Bertell Ollman, Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society, 2nd. Edition (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 78.

> production produces consumption by creating the specific manner of consumption; and, further, by creating the stimulus of consumption, the ability to consume, as a need ... of socially created and natural needs.[7]

"Socially created and natural needs" within capitalist production are vital to the concept of reification as the term to discuss human subjectivity and aesthetic experience. For Marx, needs are always linked to "essential powers". The relation of needs to power, both natural and external, is most apparent in the unrealized and unfullfilled potential of human nature. Consequently, Marx defines needs as linked to the senses in an objective condition that includes both internal and external relations with nature. This condition is historical in its cultural formations:

> The forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.[8]

Marx declares humans "real sensuous beings" establishing a critical analysis of the senses and sense-perception as influenced by the relations of power within capitalist productive forces. In contrast, Bentham's categorization of the senses are a simplistic adaptation to capitalist production values, and avoids entirely conditions that further collective cultural practice and social meaning. Bentham's principles of utility fail to recognize elements of mediation between productive forces and human needs, or on the superstructural level in Marx's terms, cultural formations and "natural powers". As Marx explains in a critique of Bentham:

> What is useful to this normal man and his world is absolutely useful ... This yard-measure ... he applied to past, present, and future.[9]

Bentham, taking the petit-bourgeoisie as his model, emphasized the gratification of a simplistic, utilitarian appropriation of needs, in order to justify the privatization of pleasures

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[7]Marx, The Grundrisse, in The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Tucker, pp. 230-231.

[8]Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, in The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Tucker, p. 89.

[9]Marx, Capital, cited in Ollman, p. 73.

which could lead to an underlying system of social management. Marx's assessment of sense-perception under capitalism, especially a subjective realization that is not estranged from the object (in the activity of labour) and is collective in praxis, contributes to cultural criticism an historically drawn analysis of needs, desires, and the commodity form:

> (H)e that would critize all human acts, movements, relations, etc., by the principle of utility, must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch.[10]

But as Ollman outlines, when socially created needs within capitalist commodity relations subjugate "natural" needs, subjective-objective relations viewed simply within exchange-value, remain an anthropological problematic:

> To say that man is a corporeal living, real sensuous, objective, being full of natural vigour is to say that he needs real, sensuous, objects as the objects of his being or his life, or that he can only express his life in real, sensuous objects.[11]

Such a dynamic between "natural" and "false" needs establish reification as extending Marx's commodity fetish into a universal categorization of cultural signification and exchange. This universality was discussed by Georg Lukacs as a uniformity of subjugation to forms of capitalist appropriation or a "second nature".[12]

The critical theory of the Frankfurt School outlined a version of this concept of reification by going beyond Marx's abstraction of needs and "natural powers" to apply aesthetic theory as a critique of subjective alienation within all aspects of experience. As use-value, the object satisfied desires and needs in Marx's simplification, but the commodity

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[10]Marx, Capital, cited in Bertell Ollman, p. 73.

[11]Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, in The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Tucker, p. 115.

[12]Lukacs, p. 86.

> When the commodity becomes the universal category of society, the reification assumes decisive importance in that it subjugates men's consciousness to the forms in which the reification finds expression. The conditions of this servitude to relations of reification is called "second nature".

as exchange-value was now viewed as positing subjectivity in an entirely different sphere. This critique of exchange-value viewed "needs", and in turn the senses, as not primarily claiming "natural" suppositions, but influenced by external conditions, especially technological developments tied to economic and cultural formations of capitalism.

The Culture Industry

The term "culture industry" was introduced by Horkheimer and Adorno to describe the systematic integration of subjective elements by capitalist regulated forces of production which manipulate consciousness within "false" needs.[13] Viewed at its most extreme analysis, the culture industry operates "from above" as a form of "mass deception" eliminating the "popular" of cultural integration from below - the people.[14] Reception within the culture industry (here Adorno recalls Kant's formalism to critique the possibilities of subjective expression) is not a primary active agency but becomes manipulated by mass produced and mass circulated products. The culture industry, as a concept to describe the reification of all social relationships and the integration of aesthetic evaluation within the structures of commodity consumption, represents for Adorno the condition that denies all traces of an automomous subjectivity.

Under this determining influence of the commodities of the culture industry, reified culture is not only instrumental towards the social sphere, but administrative in its structure. Linking culture with all the aversions of administrative ordering, Adorno writes:

> The demand made by administration upon culture is essentially heteronomous: culture - no matter what form it takes - is to be measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but

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[13]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1982).

[14]Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," New German Critique, 6 (Fall, 1975), p. 12.

rather some type of abstract standards imposed from without.[15]

In this "uncomfortable relation" between culture and administration the essential oppositional status which Adorno equates with aesthetic values is denied. The capacities for human expression, "either liberal and individualistic in style" are integrated within the priorities of economic factors.[16]

The central influence of this loss of individual cultural empowerment within capitalist hegemony is for Adorno reliant on the transformation of the social structure from the classical liberal model (which focuses on free market forces) to more recent monopolistic developments. The market, in fact all commercial conditions, are defined as increasingly losing their influence of self-regulation, necessitating other forms of integration that lead to an administered total system of cultural exchange:

> (T)he free market ideology of the nineteenth century, which allowed the cultural sphere a relative autonomy from the forces of production, has given way in the twentieth century to a domination of the form of exchange in all realms of social existence. Culture, which existed to give meaning to and make sense of life, albeit in a reified form detached from social existence, has become so entirely permeated by the commodity form that in a reciprocal movement, meaning and reification have become mutually interpenetrating in the systematic generation of illusion.[17]

Or as Adorno and Horkheimer write:

> Today, when the free market is coming to an end, those who control the system are entrenching themselves in it.[18]

Aesthetic theory viewed from these progressions of monopolistic capitalism interprets the necessity to establish conditions that enable the signifying practices of culture to exist as distinct from the manipulative control of dominant interests. Culture without freedom of

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[15]Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture and Administration," Telos, 37 (Fall, 1978), pp. 97-98

[16]Adorno, "Culture and Administration," p. 102.

[17]Richard Allen, "Critical Theory and the Paradox of Modernist Discourse," Screen, 28 (Spring 1987), p. 77.

[18]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 162.

expression is a regulated process which Adorno and Horkheimer position within specific historical change: fascism inverts culture to make politics aesthetic; the culture industry transforms art to mere entertainment:

> Advertising becomes art and nothing else, just as Goebbels - with foresight - combines them: l'art pour l'art, advertising for its own sake, a pure representation of social power.[19]

Both deny a subjective realization within the placement of an aesthetic autonomy. Consequently, Adorno argues for a dialectic of aesthetic "freedom" conveyed through the autonomous dimension of artistic form, which strives to remedy the inadequacies of the social world:

> Assuming that one has to differentiate form and content before grasping their mediation, we can say that art's opposition to the real world is in the realm of form ... The manner in which art communicates with the outside world is in fact also a lack of communication, because art seeks blissfully or unhappily, to seclude itself from the world. This non-communication points to the fractured nature of art.[20]

This "fractured nature" of art and the lack of communication delegated to artistic practice serves as justification for aesthetic negation. But Adorno also proposes that within a dialectic of formalist criticism and the denial of social experience, art can no longer be legitimated solely within traditional values.[21] This designation of aesthetic negation enables a process of "de-aestheticization" which separates art from ideological manipulation, but in so doing, art fails to exert its influence as an immediate response. Comparatively, pleasure in the reception of the autonomous art object must always exert an aesthetic "distance" in order not to engage in the social sphere. But the culture industry robs the individual of this subjective "distance"; it is this ideological manipulation - the pleasure within reification - that Adorno defines as the advocacy for an aesthetic negation. Within the culture industry, the purveyor of culture for the masses, Adorno and Horkheimer conclude that: "Pleasure

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[19]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 163.

[20]Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 7.

[21]Adorno, Prism, pp. 32-34.

promotes the resignation which it ought to forget."[22]

The Fun of the Art Lover

Adorno's aesthetic formalism attempts to transform both the illusionary standards of classical mimetic representation as well as resist the exchange-values of commercial culture. Such a process of disavowal becomes the sole legitimation of the aesthetic sphere and in dismissing the commodity as aesthetically valid in any form, Adorno rejects the possibilities of pleasure as an immediate effect.

Adorno accepts categories of experience as already given within the culture industry. The introduction of the commodity into all areas of culture provides the context for an enjoyment that is fetishized within "blind consumption". Any subjective realization remains an internal contradiction or recognition of the negation which elevates autonomous art from the products of mass culture:

> The subjectivist approach to art simply fails to understand the subjective experience of art is itself meaningless, and that in order to grasp the importance of art one has to zero in on the artistic object rather than on *the fun of the art lover.*[23]

For Adorno, the pleasures of commodity consumption remain merely an artifice of subjective expression. Reception of an aesthetic linked to commodity production begins and ends with exchange-value, specically monetary exchange. The outcome, decides Adorno, at his most pessimistic, is that the individual gains pleasure not from listening to the concert but from buying the ticket.[24] Monopolistic capitalism through the conditions of exchange therefore

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[22]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 143.

[23]Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 20. My italics.

[24]Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 278-279.

The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the

entrenches its power in cultural goods. Adorno's despondency in citing new consumption practices is so reliant on this *sui generis* of reification that in refering to reception he defines "conformity as replacing consciousness".[25] This experience cheats the pleasure seeker "out of itself" to situate the fullfillment of desire through the commodity form as another means of exploitation.[26]

Searching for the tradition of agency in subjective fullfillment, Adorno grants the possibilities of realizing a subjective response only within an earlier historical era not regulated by commercial cultural forms and specifically commodity consumption. Cultural criticism extends this analysis, as criticism can only "share the blindness of its object".[27] An aesthetic dependent on formalistic principles therefore sustains a relationship with objects that is not reified, but this condition exists only as an internal negation. Adorno provides examples of such modernist resistance to commodity production in the work of Schonberg, Kafka, Beckett, and Kandisky. For example, Schonberg's use of atonality is a strategy to evade commodification and reification while articulating it in its compostional technique.[28]

Within these conditions of reification, an immediate subjectivist approach is "false" and "manipulative"; the "fun of the art lover" is inseparable from this formulation of "mass deception". As subjective reception within the products of the culture industry remains an "easy" aesthetic enjoyment and a definite compromise, Adorno establishes the structures of further denial:

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[24](cont'd) ticket to the Toscanini concert. He has literally "made" the success which he accepts as an objective criterion, without recognizing himself in it.

[25]Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," p. 6.

[26]Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," p. 274.

[27]Adorno, Prism, p. 27.

[28]Andreas Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," in After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 34.

> However strong historically the tendency towards a recurrence of pleasure may be, pleasure remains infantile when it asserts itself directly and without mediation. Art absorbs pleasure as remembrance and longing; it does not seek to reproduce pleasure as an immediate effect.[29]

The "infantile" associations of exchange-value - or pleasure within reification - deny an immanence of cultural pleasure providing at best only superficial gratification.

Re-reading Adorno

This oppressive system of administered social control that Adorno connects with the products of the culture industry is not entirely consistent with a more rigorous reading of the essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception". A reading can be proposed that outlines Adorno's view of the culture industry as not being entirely dependent on an aesthetic autonomy supported by a closed dichotomy of high and low cultural forms.[30]

Most importantly Adorno's aesthetic categorization of cultural products is marked by specific historical relations. The condition of reification that is described as perpetuated through the technological apparatus of the culture industry is not primarily a critique of its products, but, as we have seen, of the conditions of inequality within the political and economic conditions of capitalism: "A technological rationale is the rational of domination itself."[31] Adorno locates the loss of aesthetic values and forms of experience, especially the possibilities of the reception of an autonomous subjective expression, not in the individual

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[29]Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 21.

[30] Mariam B. Hansen's "Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film"," outlines a convincing position on reading Adorno "against the grain" in New German Critique, 24-25 (Fall/Winter, 1981-82), pp. 186-198. This approach is expanded by Huyssen in "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagnar". Huyssen reads Adorno "against the grain" in his inquiry into the development of modernism since the nineteenth century, and as a response to the increasing commercial conditions of all forms of cultural production. His analysis views modernism within cultural conditions that act to both appropriate and transform popular culture, but also positions cultural experience within an economic and ideological complicity.

[31]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 121.

reception of cultural products including art, but within the closures of the capitalist mode of production:

> Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms ... it is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumer's needs ... No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power is greatest.[32]

Thus Adorno acknowledges that the enactment of desire, and what he sees as a "false" subjectivity within exchange-value, is an integral influence of the capitalist system, but not necessarily the end result of all popular culture, or as Adorno concludes:

> The attitude of the public, which ostensibly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system and not an excuse for it.[33]

Granted Adorno derides all the products of mass culture as constituting a false realization of pleasure; the movie theatre becomes a "bloated pleasure apparatus" and jazz is a "regression of listening". This state of manipulation is inseparable from unrealized possibilities of subjective expression. Cultural experience is posited not as an immanent identification with the popular imagination, but is enclosed within the structures of the capitalist system. As Adorno writes contrasting popular forms in pre-capitalist conditions with their later formations under commercial exchange:

> Amusement and all the elements of the cultural industry existed long before the latter came into existence.[34]

Light Art

Adorno's essay on the culture industry can therefore be "re-read" to support a thesis that contributes to understanding the transformations that occured in the traditional distinctions between a high and low aesthetic sphere. "Light" art is not a decadent form, suggests

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[32]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 121.

[33]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 122.

[34]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 135.

Adorno, refering to the pleasures associated with a popular response to culture.[35] Neither is "light" art a betrayal of the ideal of "pure" expression, that Adorno places as the necessity of preserving art's autonomy from the reified status of the social world. "Light" forms of distraction have remained in the shadow of autonomous art, because the presumed purity of the aesthetic sphere was perpetuated by the bourgeoise. But Adorno's reliance on individual (and liberal) aestheticism generally fails to include modern developments in aesthetic production and reception. Consequently Adorno's arguement perpetuates the Kantian transcendental subject that is granted autonomy from commercial conditions of culture or a "purposeless for the purposes declared by the market".[36]

Adorno's dialectic of art and the social also delegates to "light" art the role of institutionalizing the most decadent or academic art associated with the political and economic hegemony of the bourgeoisie. In fact, Adorno's view of autonomy in the work of art, as a source of refusal to positions of power, was also a response to academic cultural criticism that resides in the comfort to be found in the divorce between high and popular culture, art and entertainment.[37] But because Adorno does manifest a belief in the conditions which posit all cultural practice within consumption as subsumed within reified conditions of capitalist production, this postion has often named him an elitist. Such a categorization of aesthetic judgment dominates Adorno's critique of how the culture industry has determined the development of popular music.[38] Adorno's myopic attitude was not a return to traditional aesthetic values as the unique precedents for the validation of an autonomous aesthetic; instead, he attempts a dialectic which includes a process of "de-aestheticization" to

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[35]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 135.

[36]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 148.

[37]Adorno, Prisms, p. 27.

[38]Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," pp. 270-299.

demonstrate the inadequacy of a reliance on either an immanent or transcendental critique.[39] As Adorno writes to Benjamin, recognizing the problematic of art's relation to the social:

> 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 bourgeois reaction to negate the reification of the cinema in the name of the ego, and it would border on anarchism to revoke the reification of a great work of art in the spirit of immediate use-value.[40]

But Adorno's principles of aesthetic negation do constitute an abrupt assertion of denied possibilities of subjectivity within the conditions of capitalism. This dialectic of art and the social is in fact a critical, if not melancholy, reflection on the "two halves" which do not add up.

Reception of the Popular: Technology and Cultural Production

The failure for Adorno to acknowledge immanent pleasure within social praxis was dominated by his critique of technological determinism, which he located within the products of the culture industry. Adorno's explanation of how the term culture industry was selected examines assumptions which deny all aspects of a popular response when leveled against reified, technological conditions of mass culture. Because of the contradictory references to mass culture - as conditions which arise when mass and popular mediate a response - the term culture industry was coined:

> In our drafts we spoke of "mass culture". We replaced that expression with "culture industry" in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art. From the latter the culture industry must be distinguished in the extreme.[41]

Adorno's denial of acceptance of a truly popular culture, or in keeping within Adorno's

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[39] Adorno, Prisms, pp. 33-34.

[40] Adorno, letter to Benjamin, 10 March, 1936, Aesthetics and Politics, p. 123.

[41] Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," p. 12.

aesthetic formalism, an aesthetic experience that is not "denatured", is inseparable from his reliance on upholding a dialectic between art and the social. This dependency on an autonomous aesthetic sphere is influenced by a failure to come to terms with two primary aspects of cultural change. Firstly, Adorno's insistence on an aesthetic autonomy suggests a refusal to define consumption within mediation other than an economic, technological determinism, hence "manipulation". But secondly, and most importantly, this notion of manipulation leading to "mass deception" was a failure to re-evaluate subjective and social identification within the signifying structures of commercial culture. A brief inquiry into aesthetics specific to film provide the best example, because of the very nature of the technological apparatus and the representations of film production and reception.

Adorno describes the technology of film as limiting access for individual reception or aesthetic contemplation by the audience. Films were merely a product to be consumed as an ideological model:

> Real life is becoming indistinguisable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience.[42]

Because the film medium is inherently representational, the social is easily projected into the product, thus significance rests with the content, not as Adorno proposes with purely abstract aesthetic values.[43] Because of this reliance on a Kantian inscription of pleasure, that preserves an aesthetic of contemplation, Adorno failed to accept that patterns of response within technological means of reproduction could incur an aesthetic reception other than the instrumental relations of reification. As a result of this condemnation, Adorno describes the laughter of the audience at the movie theatre to be nothing more than "a parody of humanity":

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[42]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 126.

[43]Theodor W. Adorno, "Transparancies on Film," New German Critique, 24-25 (Fall/Winter, 1981-82), p. 202.

> Its members are monads, all dedicated to the pleasure of being ready for anything at the expense of everyone else. Their harmony is a caricature of solidarity. What is fiendish about this false laughter is that it is a compelling parody of the best, which is conciliatory.[44]

Or as Adorno continues, the culture industry can not provide the immanent framework for desire, as a result, pleasure is denied:

> The monastic theory that not asceticism but the sexual act denotes the renunciation of attainable bliss receives negative confirmation in the gravity of the lover who with foreboding commits his life to the fleeting moment. In the culture industry, jovial denial takes the place of the pain found in ecstasy and in asceticism. The supreme law is that they shall not satisfy their desires at any price; they must laugh and be content with laughter.[45]

This denial, expressed as "conciliatory laughter", suggest the attempt by the culture industry to reconcile "light" art with "serious" art (high art), and vice versa. This is especially relevant to Adorno's music criticism. In Adorno's aesthetic finalization this cheats the pleasure seeker out of immediate pleasure within both the illusions of the culture industry and the false position of affirmative art. Thus Adorno presents the dichotomy of high and low forms as existing in a forced dialactic relation of negative space:

> Only where the appearance of pleasure is lacking is a faith in its possibility maintained.[46]

Consumption as Symbolic Exchange

Combining aesthetic pleasure with the cultural and the political through aesthetic negation defines consumption practices as having very little differential meaning in society. The concept of reification, as a mediation on Marx's commodity fetish, seeks the emancipation of subjects, but to the extent that objects are purely exchanged and not given a primary cultural function they enter into a system which neutralizes the subjective dimension leading

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[44]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 141.

[45]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 141.

[46]Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," p. 274.

to pleasure. Consumption without any utility - practical, symbolic, or otherwise - invokes a litany of negative values.[47] Therefore pleasure, as an expression of cultural forms immersed within exchange-value, appears as a denial in reference to "the fun of the art lover" and elements of commodification limit the experience of pleasure in consumption as false consciousness. Furthermore, and most importantly, consumption without symbolic value - practical, political, pleasurable - is nothing but a commodity fix.[48] Calling this an addiction would suit Adorno's historical anxiety by playing into the structures of totalitarianism that he posits within technological determinism. But the cultural system of modern capitalism is more than subjugation to authority; without dismissing exploitation entirely it has become necessary to recognize these conditions at the level of communication or the potentiality of symbolic exchange.

Baudrillard's analysis of consumption circumvents this simplistic view of use-value within conditions of alienation, yet at the same time remains closely associated to its concepts. By moving from the concept of reification, that exists as a critical dimension of the commodity fetish, Baudrillard examines consumption within a structural mode of signification which displaces the privileged subject of Marx's anthropological designation of "natural" needs. Therefore consumption does not arise from objectively defined "needs" within subject-object relations, but a socially mediated system rationalized and regulated by the commodity as "sign form" or a system of exchange of objects considered as both material production and codes of signification. In this analysis the commodity is not separate from the sign in defining cultural representation and the social code of communication:

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[47]This approach to the symbolic value within consumption is based on the work of Marshall Sahlins, Culture and Practical Reason (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, Mo.: Telos Press, 1987); and Stephen Kline and William Leiss, "Advertising, Needs, and "Commodity Fetish"," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, 2, 1 (Winter, 1979), pp. 5-30.

[48]Frederic Jameson, "Pleasure: A Political Issue," in Formations of Pleasure, p. 3.

> The origin of meaning is never found in the relation between a subject (given a priori as autonomous and conscious) and an object produced for rational ends - that is, properly, the *economic* relation, rationalized in terms of choice and calculation. It is to be found, rather, in difference, systematized in terms of a code (as opposed to private calculation) - a differential structure that establishes the social relations, and not the subject as such.[49]

Because Baudrillard defines structures of signification and symbolic exchange at the centre of the commodity form, these relations of communication mediate social exchange and suggest that the commodity form does not mystify people but socialize them.[50] In this exchange, the symbolic qualities of consumption goods (objects) are not merely a fetish of the commodity form (the condition of the reified subject), but serve a cultural "utility". This concept of Marshall Sahlins is utilitarian in that it defines signification within cultural meaning and symbolic evaluation:

> (T)o give a cultural account of production, it is critical to note that the social meaning of an object that makes it useful to a certain category of persons is no more apparent from its physical properties than is the value it may be assigned in exchange. Use-value is not less symbolic or less arbitrary than commodity-value. For "utility" is not a quality of the object but a significance of the objective qualities. The reason Americans deem dogs inedible and cattle "food" is no more perceptible to the senses than is the price of meat. Likewise, what stamps trousers as masculine and skirts as feminine has no necessary connection with their physical properties or the relations arising there from.[51]

This cultural process of meaning production applies a semiological model to the social logic of consumption. This model is an exchange of signifying practices or a reception process in which humans "define objects in terms of themselves and themselves in terms of objects",[52] Thus signification serves a cultural utility, in that as Sahlins outlines, it determines a meaningful process in determining what is "reality". While this reality is a social reality recognizably marked by a market rational, it must also be thought of as a system of symbolic exchange dependent on consumption as defining the relation of the subject to

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[49]Baudrillard, p. 75.

[50]Baudrillard, p. 147.

[51]Sahlins, pp. 169-170.

[52]Sahlins, p. 169.

commodity goods. This conceptual analysis draws from Saussure's model of the sign. All values are exchanged within signification; the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary thus there are no fixed meanings or universal concepts. As all values are relational there are no "natural" needs:

> This is true of language communication. It applies also to goods and products. Consumption is exchange. A consumer is never isolated, any more than a speaker. It is here that total revolution in the analysis of consumption must intervene: *Language cannot be explained by postulating an individual need to speak* (which would pose the insoluble double problem of establishing this need on an individual basis, and then of articulating it in a possible exchange). Before such questions can even be put, there is, simply, language - not as an absolutely, autonomous system, but as a structure of exchange contemporaneous with meaning itself, and on which is articulated the individual intention of speech. Similiarly, consumption does not arise from an objective need of the consumer, a final intention of the subject towards the object; rather, there is social production, in a system of exchange, of a material of differences, a code of signification and invidious (*statuaire*) values.[53]

Baudrillard's analysis does not entirely shift away from categories of exploitation, terms such as "hyperreality", "implosion", "simulation", and "simulacrum" still refer to reification. But by transfering critical interpretation from commodity production and exchange-value to the level of the sign, objects of consumption reject the concept of a singular use-value posited within pre-given needs. Desire within consumption, according to Baudrillard, seeks experiential needs and fulfillment of human subjectivity in that it "threatens" the *equivalence* on which our social and economic exchange is based.[54] The question of how this "threat" occurs is answered by Baudrillard in an "exhaustion" of established values and codes. But as D'Amico's critique of Baudrillard states, this condition remains problematic in the practices that form everyday experience. Thus capital extracts pleasure (reification), but we also take pleasure in capital.[55] The real issue for pleasure comes down to the relation between praxis and the symbolic order.

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[53]Baudrillard, p. 75.

[54]Robert D'Amico, "Desire and the Commodity Form," Telos, 35 (Spring 1978), p. 107.

[55]Baudrillard, Simulations, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e) Inc., 1983), p. 35.

Conclusion

Adorno's designation of exchange-value as cultural "deception" recognizes neither individual expression nor collective participation within the reception process. This concept of reification grounded in the products of the culture industry is a critique of the commodity nature of forms of aesthetic production. The commodity nature of commercial culture eliminated for Adorno any subjective position that would locate pleasure as a direct response to the cultural object. In refering back to Marx's subject-object relations, there remains no access to use-value. By eliminating immanent relations, the artistic process, as viewed by Adorno, is constrained by a methodology which supports formalist conditions internalized within the art object. Thus formal constraints preserve the autonomy of art and establish a detachment, however limited, from social origins, hence any association of art with the culture industry.

The autonomy of aesthetic experience, as an internalized, self-reflexive "totality", has limited Adorno's contribution to an aesthetic inquiry that recognizes aesthetic evaluation within historically defined cultural formations and social experience. Reification as a key structural feature within cultural meaning concerns the problem of subjective identification, but accepting the process of consumption as symbolic exchange gives significance to social relations rather than the atomized subject. In Adorno's view the value of exchange within consumption, as the predominate value, derides the critical edge of culture by accepting subjective identification within cultural representations solely as false consciousness. Adorno generally failed to differentiate between an industrialized, standardization of cultural production and a subjective and socially regulated reception. By posing the problem of aesthetic categories within the mass production and distribution of commodities and forms of cultural signification, Adorno's analysis serves to question changed conditions of subjective identification. But by grasping the

relation between art and the social as existing in a solely negative space, there can exist no direct experience of aesthetic pleasure within cultural forms.

CHAPTER IV

WALTER BENJAMIN'S CORRESPONDENCES OR SENSUOUS PLEASURE

> To live means to leave traces.[1]
>
> Panorama and "traces"; *flaneur* and arcades, modernism and the unchanging, *without* a theoretical interpretation – is this a "material" which can patiently await interpretation without being consumed by its own aura?[2]

Introduction

It was Walter Benjamin who first grasped conditions of reproduction as a primary factor influencing the mediatory elements of cultural objects:

> Everyday the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.[3]

Benjamin's emphasis on the concept of the aura opens up a focus for cultural criticism that locates at the center of a philosophy of art an experiential condition of aesthetic utility and immediacy. As Benjamin notes, it is the aura that "withers" in the age of mechanical reproduction; as the object is detached from the domain of traditional values, aesthetic experience is defined as accessible through the availability of the plurality of copies.

Conditions of aesthetic pleasure are restructured within technological forms of reproduction and can be conceptualized as "reactivating" the object in a position of "closeness" and aesthetic/political intention. This immediacy is the opposite of aesthetic "distance"; an unapproachability retained as ritual appearance or reflective contemplation.[4] By

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[1]Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Reflections, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 155.

[2]Adorno, letter to Benjamin, 10 November, 1938, in Aesthetics and Politics, p. 127.

[3]Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 223.

[4]Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 243.
In defining this aesthetic response, Benjamin clarifies the difference between aesthetic content and aesthtic form.

introducing the now well known concept of the aura, or more deductively the loss of the aura, Benjamin presents an analysis of reproduction techniques which integrate technology into culture and values immanent criticism rather than privileging criteria of an aesthetic autonomy. Here Benjamin lists outmoded concepts such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery.

Aesthetic Proximity

Techniques of reproduction, by denying the auratic privileged condition of art - the original that preserves an aesthetic value of originality - bring historical changes in reception; art becomes approachable, hence more accessible:

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be .... Secondly, technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room.[5]

Enabling the original to meet the "beholder halfway" defines an aesthetic response which Benjamin himself often questions. The loss of the aura presents conditions for the disintegration of an autonomous aesthetic, but Benjamin also laments the loss of the aura as the experience of the aura defines a response common to the "gaze of nature", hence more easily associated with a traditional human response: "To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return."[6] With the loss of the

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[4](cont'd)

> The closeness which one may gain from subject matter does not impair the distance which it (art) retains through its ritual appearance or cult value.

[5]Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," pp. 220–221.

[6]Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Illuminations, p. 188.

aura a change occurs in not only how the object is approached, but aesthetic evaluation and criticism. As aesthetic reception is now foremost, criticism and enjoyment fuse to turn technological reproduction into a political force.[6] Each individual may now approach art as an "expert"; a greater understanding and appreciation (aesthetic pleasure) becomes possible because of changed forms of reception:

> The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert. Such fusion is of great social significance. The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public.[7]

The collective reception of art as an aesthetic force within a political analysis is foremost in Benjamin's interpretation of the influences of technology. But by substituting a plurality of copies for a unique existence - the aura - Benjamin rather undialectically dismisses the institutionalized conditions of aesthetic production and reception.[8]

The concept of the aura, as described within these influences of mechanical reproduction, is the most celebrated of Benjamin's aesthetic concepts, but the least able to withstand the forces of cultural history. The isolation of artistic production from social and political conditions and the subjugation of technology within capitalist commercial priorities continue to fetishize the unique autonomy and value of the original art object (especially painting). By emphasizing the changed conditions of aesthetic reception, Benjamin's analysis of the loss of the aura provides essential conditions for an analysis of pleasure as a critical concept; the transformation of an aesthetic "distance" leads to aesthetic engagement as a consumption practice that denies extraneous criticism. For this reason, it is Benjamin's later unfinished essays on the commercially based culture of nineteenth century Paris, that are integral to an inquiry into aesthetic pleasure and the commodity form.

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[6] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 234.

[7] Burger, pp. 47-48.
Burger is careful to point out the historical context of auratic art. Especially relevant are his comments on collective and individual recepetion; it is only with bourgeois art that reception is individual.

The loss of the aura is not only linked to altered forms of reception due to reproduction techniques, but to a specific intention within cultural production. Technique is that aspect of production which allows the author/artist to situate work within contemporary conditions by supplying the existing production apparatus or by constituting a challenge to the production forces.[9] Using film as an example, Benjamin suggests that the application of technology corrects the loss of the aura; new relations of accessibility and collectivity work against reification. Exhibition-value begins to replace earlier forms of production as new techniques transform perception and fuse aesthetic intention to new forms of reception. Benjamin provides a number of examples:

> Before the advent of the film there were photo booklets with pictures which flitted by the onlooker upon pressure of the thumb ... Then there were slot machines in bazaars; their picture sequences were produced by the turning of the crank ... Before the rise of the movie the Dadaists' performances tried to create an audience reaction which Chaplin later evoked in a more natural way ... Before the movie had begun to create its public, pictures that were no longer immobile captivated an assembled audience in the so-called *Kaiserpanorama*. Here the public assembled before a screen into which stereoscopes were mounted, one to each beholder. By a mechanical process individual pictures appeared briefly before the stereoscopes, then made way for others. Edison still has to use similiar devices in presenting the first movie strip before the film screen and projection were known.[10]

Benjamin's chief aesethic concern is the altered condition of reception resulting from the cultural transformations of an urban, consumer society. Evaluating consumption, he describes how an inattentive, "distracted" audience displaced a contemplative reception to meet the product "halfway". This transition described the subjective experience of cultural forms as dependent on altered conditions of sense-perception and far less on traditional aspects of artistic production values. Mass cultural products, through their immediacy, therefore demand

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[9]Diane Waldman, "Critical Theory and Film: Adorno and "The Culture Industry" Revisted," New German Critique, 12 (Fall, 1977), p. 57.

[10]Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," pp. 249-250.

an evaluation of those elements that give value to the art object and enforce its aura.

Consumption as Reception: Benjamin's Dream-World

The commercial culture of Paris in the nineteenth century as "dream-world" took on political meaning for Benjamin within a critical anaylsis in which "neither exchange-value nor use-value exhausted the meaning of things".[11] Benjamin's inquiry into the products of mass culture sought for a way to interpret the illusions generated by commercial, technological forms and how within "mechanical reproduction", as termed by Benjamin, the "reality" engendered by mass culture is itself an illusion.[12] Taking pleasure in mass culture remains unresolved in Benjamin's categorizations of political expediency and utopian collectivity. But most importantly for Benjamin's inquiry into the origins of mass culture, the aesthetic power of "redemption", as a quality formally designated to art, now moves into the sphere of commercial cultural products.[13]

Reception within the "dream-world" that mediates Benjamin's interest in the commodity is guided by conditions of desire and "wish-fulfillment".[14] Benjamin's reference to visual

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[11]Susan Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution," New German Critique, 29 (Spring/Summer, 1983), pp. 212-213.
Buck-Morss's essay is based on Benjamin's unfinished study of Paris during the nineteenth century. These essays, concerned with the origins of commercial culture, were begun in 1927 but remained unfinished at the time of Benjamin's death in 1940.

[12]Buck-Morss, pp. 212-213.

[13]Richard Wolin, Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
Richard Wolin's excellent book discusses Benjamin's work as an aesthetic of redemption.

[14]Benjamin's reference to "dream-world" was likely influenced by the Frankfurt School's interest in Freud, especially Freud's concept of the pleasure principle as operating unchecked in the unconscious to motivate the forces of dreams as elements of wish-fullfillment:

> The dream-work is not simply more careless, more irrational, more forgetful and more incomplete than waking thought; it is completely different from it qualitatively and for that reason not immediately comparable with it. It does not think, calculate, or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a

memory traces are combined with a material analysis of production aesthetics. Taking his aesthetic foundation from Marx's analysis of production, changed forms of reception are viewed as mediated not only by conditions of the present, but the ways in which the new intermingle with the old:

> (T)hese wish-fulfilling images manifest an emphatic striving for dissociation with the outmoded - which means, however, with the most recent past. These tendencies direct the visual imagination, which has been activated by the new, back to the primeval past. In the dream in which before the eyes of each epoch, that which is to follow appears in images, the latter appears wedded to elements from pre-history, that is, of a classless society. Intimations of this, deposited in the unconscious of the collective, mingle with the new to produce the utopia that has left its traces in thousands of configuations of life, from permanent buildings to fleeting fashions.[15]

Benjamin integrates Marx's analysis of historical productive activity into cultural theory as a means to define the character of experience, but posits reception over factors of production as the variable in social relations. Consumption then appears as a moment in production, that as a subjective process contains elements of sense-perception. Marx elaborates a partial view of the importance of consumption in The Grundrisse:

> As soon as consumption emerges from its initial state of natural crudity and immediacy - and, if it remained at that stage, this would be because production itself had been arested there - it becomes itself mediated as a drive by the object. The need which consumption feels for the object is created by the *perception* of it.[16]

Benjamin's "wish-fullfillment" in the object is marked by these relations, but is rarely as self-constrained, instead a utopian quality combines with political goals. Because modes of production are dominated by images in which the new is intermingled with the old (or the

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[14](cont'd) new form ... the dream has above all to evade censorship, and with that end in view the dream-work makes use of a displacement of psychical intensities to the point of a transvaluation of all psychical values. The thoughts have to be reproduced exclusively or predominantly in the material of visual and acoustic memory traces, and this necessity imposes upon the dream-work *considerations of representability.*

Freud, cited in Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 61.

[15]Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," p. 148.

[16]Marx, The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Tucker, p. 230. My italics.

outmoded), commodity consumption is given the ability to transform both sensuous experience and the "unconsciousness of the collective" through changed forms of perception.

At this point of social mediation between the individual and the collective, an aesthetic pleasure identifies the products of the commodity world as containing not only both reified conditions and utopian elements (here he refers to Fourier's socialism), but technological forms of cultural production contain transformative aesthetic values. This could be called a "phantasmagoria" of pleasure. Refering to the world exhibitions, Benjamin writes:

> They create a framework in which commodities' intrinsic value is eclipsed. They open up a phantasmagoria that people enter to be amused. The entertainment industry facilitates this by elevating people to the level of commodities. They submit to being manipulated while enjoying their alienation from themselves and others.[17]

Pleasure within reification, as Benjamin describes, is both utopian in its cultural formation yet cynical in its realization. It is this cynicism that retains a moral tone toward capitalist commodity production and exchange.

These conflicts of the "dream-world" are viewed by Benjamin as both a state of sleeplessness and awakening. This dialectic of consciousness integrates individual and collective pleasures:

> The condition of sleep and waking ... has only to be transferred from the individual to the collective. To the latter, of course, many things are internal which are external to the individual: architecture, fashions, yes, even the weather are in the interior of the collective what organ sensations, feelings of illness or health are in the interior of the individual. And so long as they persit in unconscious and amorphous dream-form, they are just as much natural processes as the digestive processes, respiration, etc. They stand in the cycle of the every-identical (myth in the negative sense) until the collective gets its hands on them politically and history emerges out of them.[18]

Benjamin's analysis of mass culture as "dream-world" is both illusionistic in forgetting (the reification of the present) and a collective consciousness in its remembering (a classless society). Altered forms of sense-perception is the key to this analysis. The audience is

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[17] Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," p. 152.

[18] Benjamin, cited in Buck-Morss, p. 225.

approached through the innovative products of commodity production, which opens the consumption process to an interpretation of lived experience mediated by a consciousness which has the potential to act as a "kaleidescope of reception" in which each turn collapses the old order into new.[19] Benjamin associates the lyric poetry of Baudelaire with these sensibilities of cultural modernization by linking the turns of the kaleidescope with capacities of modern consciousness:

> Thus the lover of universal life moves into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity. He, the lover of life, may also be compared to a mirror as vast as this crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with every one of its movements presents a pattern of life, in all its multiplicity, and the flowing grace of all the elements that go to compose life.[20]

And Benjamin is encouraged to write, remembering Baudelaire's sensuous perception of modern life: "Redemption looks to the small fissure in the ongoing catastrophy."[21]

The relevance of interpreting an aesthetic of cultural products in conjunction with the reception of modern experience (for Benjamin commodities become animate objects), rather than the naturalism of nature (as proposed by academic art), gives a new acceptance to the artifice of "second nature". As there is pleasure in illusion in Benjamin's "dream-world", there is illusion in pleasure.

Reality and Illusion: the Panorama

Benjamin describes the introduction of the panorama as an attempt to reproduce nature within the city:

> There were tireless exertions of technical skill to make panoramas the scenes of a perfect imitation of nature. The attempt to reproduce the changing time of the

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[19]Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 175.

[20]Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists, trans. P.E. Charvet (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 400.

[21]Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 159.

day in the landscape, the rising of the moom, the rushing of the water-falls.[22]

Once the authority of art as a unique object had been undermined by technological reproduction, nature in the urban environment exists in the technical skill of the panorama. Benjamin suggests that it is this reversal that points out the "closeness" of modern experience to reveal how commodities create a reality of representation which is illusionistic in its technological formation.

The first appearance of panorama painting occured around the beginning of the nineteenth century, but by the end of the century the popularity of panoramas had rapidly declined.[23] Panoramas were erected so their pictorial qualities, often historical scenes or landscapes, were illuminated from above while the viewer stood at horizon level in a darkened position, not unlike the positioned view or "gaze" of the later film audience. In this way the real and illusionistic spaces of the panoramas claimed the attention of the spectator. Sculptural effects, paint, and lighting were combined to achieve a pretence of reality while exploiting illusion.

Daquerre considered his illumination techniques for the panorama as important as the daguerrotype. This description of Daquerre's work, written in 1839, identifies the central concern of Benjamin's fascination with the nineteenth century cultural imagination as defined through altered forms of perceptual optics:

> The depictions of the diorama, as Daguerre called this invention of his, used a painting applied to both sides of a vertically stretched canvas and various directions and modifications of the reflected and translucent light, either joined together or in proper sequence, in order to attain the various effects of daylight, moonlight, or firelight; they were among the most interesting productions of artistically applied optics, or, if you prefer, of painting that by applying the laws of optics, achieves visual illusions.[24]

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[22]Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," p. 149.

[23]Dolf Sternberger, Panorama of the Nineteenth Century, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Urizen Books, 1977).

[24]Cited in Dolf Sternberger, p. 188.

Studio lighting created the illusions of an artificial nature, but most importantly the panorama devices were simple and their simplicity created an "illusionistic virtuosity" as an end in itself. Or in contemporary terms, special effects were admired for their own entertainment value. There was no evidence of deception to obscure or transform: "This art of deception was done for its own sake and not to deceive."[25] Panoramas achieved a new immediacy of cultural representation no longer obtainable in nature due to industrial conditions and increased urbanization.

The social and illusionistic space of the panoramas exemplify, as nature becomes artifice, the transformation of cultural products in the nineteenth century. Identifying nature with the artifice of mass culture was a way to interpret the commodity aesthetic as a "natural" component of urban experience. As Buck-Morss outlines:

> The nightmarish, infernal aspects of industrialism were veiled in the modern city by a vast arrangement of things which at the same time gave corporeal form to the wishes and desires of humanity. Because they were "natural" phenomena in the sense of concrete matter, they gave the illusion of being the realization of those wishes rather than merely their reified symbolic expression. Mass media (Benjamin would have called it mechanical reproduction) could now replicate this commodity world endlessly as the mere image of an illusion (examples were Hollywood films, the growing advertising industry, Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will"). But the critical, cognitive function in which a politicized art might participate was precisely the opposite: not to duplicate illusion as real, but to interpret reality as itself illusion.[26]

Thus the liquidation of art in its traditional forms, at least as outlined in Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", provides insight into how aesthetic pleasure and cultural practice merge between illusion and reality, and therefore how we interpret illusions as the "real". For reality, suggests Buck-Morss, has become artifice as technology has moved the power of art as illusion into commercial culture.

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[25]Sternberger, p. 11.

[26]Buck-Morss, pp. 213-214.

The amusements of the urban environment of Benjamin's analysis - the panoramas, the arcades, the world fairs - is the transference of culture to a landscape of signification and symbolic recognition immersed within a commodity aesthetic. The products of the commodity world become "natural objects" in this cultural sphere. Baudelaire's poems exemplified for Benjamin this placing of the "natural" within the landscape of the city. The renunciation of the "natural" writes Benjamin, "should be dealt with first in relation to the metropolis as the subject of the poet":[27]

> Nature is a temple whose living pillars
> Sometimes give forth a babel of words;
> Man wends his way through forests of symbols
> Which look at him with their familiar glances.
>
> As long-resounding echoes from afar
> Are mingling in a deep, dark unity,
> Vast as the night or as the orb of day,
> Perfumes, colors, and sounds commingle.[28]

Baudelaire was influenced by the anti-naturalist theories of the nineteenth century, which although extremely diverse, inaugurated a "man-made" order over the increasing problematics of a "natural" world.[29] During the middle of the nineteenth century the Saint-Simonians, the Positivists, and the theories of Marx gave primacy to an urban, industrialized world of work which imposed new order and in fact sought a more moral, social foundation than that found in rural histories.[30] Praising the objectified relations of production (the artificial) over nature, Baudelaire is reported to have said: "I find unenclosed water intolerable. I like it

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[27]Walter Benjamin, "Central Park," New German Critique, 34 (Winter, 1985), p. 35.

[28]Charles Baudelaire from "Correspondances", cited by Benjamin in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," pp. 181-182.

[29]Jean-Paul Sartre, Baudelaire, trans. Martin Turnell (New York: New Directions Books, 1950), p. 103.

[30]Sartre, pp. 103-104.

imprisoned in a yoke between the geometrical walls of a quay."[31] By giving an aesthetic quality to the artificial as well as the natural, Baudelaire expressed his acceptance of a modern aesthetic; hence the falsehood that Baudelaire found in associating aesthetic pleasure solely with an "organic" nature.

The often contradictory influences between the "natural" and the artifical, as well as rural and urban life, are immensely significant during the nineteenth century, because within the representation of an increasingly commercial culture they became redefined and reorganized as bourgeois cultural experience:

> Visual images of nature and the new parks of Paris were only comprehensible, of interest and of value, to a certain public; an audience so positioned as to be able to relate to both sides of the urban/rural question. Landscape had little to say to the peasants whose lands were painted. Writing on town planning and urban renewal was irrelevant to the problems and self-definitions of the urban unemployed or the landed gentry. But both could make active constructive sense to a range of urban social groups ... who were also addressed by new housing and shops, by the products of art and Salon exhibitions, by the new illustrated journalism and cheaper literature, the availability of leisure, of faster and more extensive travel.[32]

These complex "interests" constituted social norms and cultural values, which marginalized the residual beliefs of rural traditions and early forms of market exchange, to establish the pleasures of bourgeois culture. These social conventions influenced Baudelaire's concept of modern experience; culture was as equally symbolic as nature and to idealize nature was to fail to grasp the new forms of urban, social relations. As nature is one construction or metaphor for experience, the commodity world of the city environment is simiarly filled with symbolic references. Within conditions of industrialization, both are artifice and known through cultural interests and political identities. Quoting Baudelaire's criticism of the "Salon of 1859", Benjamin rejects the concept of the original - Nature - against the landscape of the abundance of commodities, or refering to the disintegration of auratic art he favours the

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[31]Schaunard, cited in Sartre, p. 105.

[32]Nicholas Green and Frank Mort, "Visual Representations and Cultural Politics, Bl k, 7 (1982), p. 63.

"truth" of the "useful illusion":

> I long for the return of the dioramas whose enormous, crude magic subjects me to the spell of a useful illusion. I prefer looking at the backdrop painting of the stage where I find my favorite dreams treated with consummate skill and tragic concision. Those things, so completely false, are for that very reason much closer to the truth, whereas the majority of our landscape painters are liars, precisely because they fail to lie.[33]

By rejecting bourgeois myths of auratic art, Baudelaire gives recognition to the inescapable "tragic concision" of style that occurs when art enters the technological reproduction of commercial culture. Benjamin's approach to the products of mass culture - the "naturalism" of the panorama - is then a valorization of illusion within a reality that is already illusionistic within the products and images of mass culture. But it is also a recognition that pleasures of modernity are equally immersed within the transformed sense-perceptions of the "useful illusion".

The *Flaneur*: Consumption as Distraction

The Paris arcades are introduced by Benjamin with reference to the *flaneur*. Architecture and the *flaneur* are significant for Benjamin's analysis of aesthetic experience as both demonstrate a modern link to the commodity aesthetic. Architecture provides the exemplary form of reception within the urban milieu of nineteenth century Paris: "(That) which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction."[34] Reception as a state of "distraction" is an aesthetic that Benjamin utilizes to refer to the cultural landscape of the city. Because architecture can be linked to the past (at least in Benjamin's familiarity with nineteenth century Europe) its claim to be a "living force" has significance in comprehending the relationship of the masses to art. Representing both a tactile and visual stimulated space,

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[33] Cited in Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 191.

[34] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 239.

architecture is not only utilitarian but also serves a ritualistic cultural function.[35] In recognizing these two cultural conditions, Benjamin is concerned to point out that such means of cultural appropriation is not the attentive concentration of the tourist before a famous site, but habitual practice as a trace of cultural experience.

Collectivity when combined with distraction are the keywords in Benjamin's aesthetic inquiry into popular cultural forms. Reception as a state of distraction is noticeable in all areas of culture and is symptomatic of profound changes in perception. The haptic response of the movement of the crowd, as influenced by the architecture of the city and modern transportation, combine with optic qualities of the new cultural formations of technological reproduction (film, photography, print media and other mass produced images). In contrast to a traditional aesthetic response which is passive and individualistic in its contemplation of auratic distance, the products of reproduction (Benjamin refers to film as the "true means of experience"[36]) are by their material and reproductive qualities the means of displacing the individual from a static position of reception; art meets the "beholder halfway".

Benjamin's most significant application of the disruptions and estrangement of traditional forms of experience is his inquiry into the consumption practices of Paris during the nineteenth century. The "man on the street" became a pedestrian who moves onto the sidewalk and follows the consumption patterns of the arcades. Earlier in Paris, such walking or strolling was not a pleasure (before Hausmann's reconstructive work, wide pavements were rare, so there was little protection from vehicles of transportation):

> Arcades where the flaneur would not be exposed to the sight of carriages that did not recognize pedestrians as rivals were enjoying undiminished popularity.[37]

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[35]Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 240.

[36]Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 240.

[37]Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capital, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 53-54.

This transition in public space provided new opportunities for consumption, but most importantly a new sense of praxis within visual signification. This visual representation was closely tied to the commodity and consumption as a pleasurable activity. But Benjamin's description of this cultural transformation includes a sense of loss towards more traditional concepts of experience. The pedestrian adapts its activities to technological "shocks", but when immersed within the crowd, individuals demonstrate a uniformity of behaviour and expression. Benjamin quoting George Simmel explains:

> The interpersonal relations of people in big cities are characterized by the markedly greater emphasis on the use of the eyes than on that of the ears. This can be attributed chiefly to the institution of public conveyances. Before buses, railroads, and streetcars became fully established during the nineteenth century, people were never put in a position of having to stare at one another for minutes or hours on end without exchanging a word.[38]

This situation was not pleasurable for Benjamin. The predominance of the eye over the other senses, especially the ear (as the sound of urban traffic became background to the multi-media representations of mass culture), was symptomatic of the urban geography. But in Benjamin's analysis, pleasure within these representations of mass culture also takes place under the "protective eye":

> There is no daydreaming surrender to faraway things in the protective eye. It may even cause one to feel something of pleasure in the degradation of such abandonment.[39]

There is no "daydreaming surrender" in this experience, but at worse one feels pleasure in degradation. When he writes of this reification of culture, Benjamin retreats to the degradation of such abandonment of the senses, but as commodity production and consumption engulf all modes of desire, both social, political, and sexual, Benjamin constructs pleasure within new cultural formations. This expressed a growing hegemony in economic and social life:

> With the founding of department stores, for the first time in history, the consumers felt themselves as the masses. (Before they learned that only through

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[38]Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 191.

[39]Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 191.

scarcity.)[40]

The popularity of the panoramas coincided with the appearance of the arcades. Benjamin described the arcades as "collective architecture" designed in keeping with new consumption activites. Built of iron and glass, the new construction materials of the nineteenth century, the arcades, which were privately owned yet open to the public, set precedents for the twentieth century mall. Benjamin quotes from an illustrated guide to Paris (1852):

> The arcades, a rather recent invention of industrial luxury are glass-covered, marble-panelled passageways through entire complexes of houses whose proprietors have combined for such speculations. Both sides of these passageways, which are lighted from above, are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city even a world, in miniature.[41]

By Benjamin's time the arcades were outdated. Once the height of commercial luxury, the arcades, built for bourgeois consumption, now sold only novelties and fashions from the past.[42] But the arcades still stood for a specific "dream-image" of the commodity form, and it was within such an image that during the nineteenth century the pedestrian was transformed into a consumer - shopping became a leisure activity.

Capital, for Benjamin, was epitomized by the role of the nineteenth century *flaneur*, in fact under the "gaze" of the *flaneur* capital was immersed within images of visual representation. There was the pedestrian who was jostled by the Parisian crowd, but there was also the *flaneur* who demanded elbow room and assumed a lifestyle given over to enjoyment.[43] But although the flaneur was abondoned to capital, he was not subsumed by it. Representing commercial enjoyment, the *flaneur* exploited the urban conditions to gain an "unfeeling isolation of each in his private interests".[44] In order to accomplish this task,

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[40]Benjamin, cited by Buck-Morss, p. 231.

[41]Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," pp. 36-37.

[42]Buck-Morss, p. 216.

[43]Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," p. 54.

[44]Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," p. 58.

Benjamin views the *flaneur* as coded by the symbolic exchange of consumption, that is the *flaneur* acts as if he was a commodity, but most importantly, his awareness of a commodity aesthetic restrains any experience of "possession" by the commodity form – the *flaneur* shapes his own desires. If the pleasures of the arcades stood for the experience of bourgeois life, this enjoyment in empathy with commercial exchange was both pleasurable and degrading. As Benjamin writes making reference to Baudelaire's aesthetic of the modern:

> In the attitude of someone with this kind of enjoyment he let the spectacle of the crowd act up on him. The deepest fascination of this spectacle lay in the fact that as it intoxicated him it did not blind him to the horrible social reality. He remained conscious of it, though only in the way intoxicated people are "still" aware of reality.[45]

The *flaneur* also symbolised the relation between leisure time and the growth of industrial labour, especially machine driven work within the factory. The *flaneur* representing the culture of consumption rather than production challenged the notion of urban, industrial time by pursuing instead the pleasures of "private" interests:

> His leisurely appearance as a personality is his protest against the division of labour which makes people into specialists. It is also his protest against their industriousness. Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades. The *flaneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had their way, progress would have been obliged to accomodate itself to this pace. But this attitude did not prevail; Taylor, who popularized the watchword "Down with dawdling!" carried the day.[46]

The architecture of the city became a "private" sphere for the enjoyment of the *flaneur*. Benjamin describes the arcades under the "gaze" of the *flanuer* as a cross between a street and a private interior: "He is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls."[47] Benjamin extends this description of undifferentiated space between what is public and private to define the department store as the decay of the

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[45] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," p. 59.

[46] Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," p. 54.

[47] Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," p. 37.
The facades of houses refer to the structures of the arcades.

private interior and the public space of the arcades (as they signify patterns of consumption) now give the feeling of private enjoyment.

Private Interests and the Social Bond

In "Mass Media: From Collective Experience to the Culture of Privatization", John Brenkman addresses private and collective interests within cultural modernization.[48] By identifying consumption as cultural practice, especially within the influences of mass culture and technological reproduction, Brenkman provides an inquiry into the historical influences that form "public" and "private" interests. Citing Baudrillard's analysis of consumption and cultural meaning as the "transubstantiation of economic exchange-value into sign-exchange value", Brenkman argues that the nineteenth century bougeoisie not only struggled for capitalist economic control of production as a "private" interest, but consumption within mass culture completed the separation of producers by integrating this same "private" interest to the very foundation of the "public" or the social bond of consumer culture.[49] The capitalist economy was originally formulated within "private" interests, but the capitalist mode of production has transformed, through commodity consumption and leisure activities, collective conditions and symbolic exchange. The *flaneur* similiarly represents for Benjamin this tension between "private" and "public" interests, or the subject constituted by the exchange-values and the commodity aesthetic of commercial culture.

With the extension of mass media into all aspects of experience (these are the technological conditions extending to the "phantasmagoria" of pleasure), it is not suprising to reflect in the twentieth century on a completely altered conception of public space. As Robert Venturi cynically comments: "Americans don't need piazzas - they should be home watching

[48]John Brenkman, Social Text, 1, 1 (Winter, 1979).

[49]Brenkman, pp. 102-103.

TV."[50] This transformation is exemplified in television in that millions of people watch the same program alone.[51] This separateness does not deny the symbolic exchange within consumption, that is it does not isolate "public" aspects of mass mediated cultural experience, but instead articulates a clarification of altered sense-perception within cultural practices. For example, television has now become a dominant form of "publicness".[52] Television can be said to serve the same function, if not in the same manner, as the piazzas used to.

Capitalism, within these early forms of the "society of the spectacle", restructured the forms of public exchange and the relations signified by the commodity, the novelties of fashion, and the altered sensibilities of cultural norms.[53] Benjamin's reading of the origins of mass culture define experience, sense-perception and cultural meaning as the critical diversity in reception. Or as Brenkman notes:

> (M)ass communication is effective only insofar as we hear in it some echo of our actual or virtual collective speaking -- which is why even the most manipulative examples of mass culture contain a residual utopian or critical dimension.[54]

Forms of consumption mediate the signifying practices of a commodity aesthetic, but as the *flaneur* demonstrates this subjective identification extends beyond economic determinants. The *flaneur* suggests a reading of style as the refusal to accept a readily identified set of cultural values. This struggle for signifying practices is the interconnective component between marginal

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[50]Cited in Hal Foster, Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1985), p. 122.

[51]Brenkman, p. 100.

[52]Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, "Electronic Ceremonies: Television Performs a Royal Wedding," in On Signs, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 32.

[53]Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), paragraph 34. This use of Debord's phrase suggests that the spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image.

[54]Brenkman, p. 105.

and dominant cultural forms.[55]

Aesthetic pleasure within cultural forms is a mediated relation that includes subjective conditions of consumption as a process of "naturalization", not simply by coercion or ideological domination (as an external force), but a hegemonic process of "winning and shaping of consent". In this way, the social conditions of capitalism and hegemonic signifying practices appear both legitimate and "natural". This concept of hegemonic relations within commodity consumption moves away from class bound ideologies to address the transformed spaces of "public" and "private" identification as is valid for a popular culture. Such experience in cultural formations confront a socially and collectively bound subjectivity:

> They turn the subject toward another horizon of social existence, where people's vital and libidinal needs, collectively recognized and collectively expressed, could confront and be confronted by the world these very people produce.[56]

This experience of the popular immersed within the collective has evolved within diverse cultural movements: feminism, race relations, gay rights, labour, youth and student movements, music, etc.

From Superstructure to Correspondences

In "Expressions of the Economic" Michael Rosen outlines the Kantian influences on Benjamin's concept of experience.[57] Rosen argues that Kant's aesthetic was formative for Benjamin as aesthetic criteria that is foundational, but required a re-evaluation. Rosen discusses an early essay which suggests that, for Benjamin, Kant's philosophy is to be acknowledged but criticized:

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[55]Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (London and New York: Metheun, 1979).

[56]Brenkman, p. 107.

[57]Michael Rosen, Times Literary Supplement, February 4, 1983. p. 109.

> What is to be accepted, he thinks, is the fundamental turn given to philosophy by Kant (what Kant himself calls his "Copernican revolution") - a turn away from purporting to investigate the nature of reality directly, towards an investigation of our experience of that reality. Yet, fundamental though Benjamin considers Kant's turn to the question of experience, he is critical of what he takes to be the restricted conception of experience - as if to experience were simply to catalogue sense-images under general rules - which Kant himself presupposes.[58]

Thus even in Benjamin's most materialist, "redemptive" criticism his articulation is *reflectively* Kantian. But unlike Kant's aesthetic judgment, experience is not primarily concerned with initiating aesthetic ordering as knowledge, hence forming an attempt to catalogue the senses. And because Benjamin does not begin with the unitary bourgeois subject, the primacy of the individual is not abstracted within the transcendental epistemological inquiry of Kant's theory of experience. Instead the placement of the individual and subjective-objective relations are investigated through external cultural influences. These external influences - reference to sociological and technological developments - are closely tied to perception as a sensuous evolvement within economic and political forces.

This emphasis on external influences is essential to Benjamin's interest in Marxism, but in confronting Marx's concept of superstructural elements Benjamin refers instead to "correspondence". Benjamin evokes Baudelaire's *correspondances* as a way of grasping both economic factors and social relations within all aspects of culture, in fact *correspondances* attempt to grasp the notion of "modern beauty".[59] Benjamin's correspondences are a "trace" or mediation that grasps the perceptions of the technological forms of cultural modernization as viewed within both memories of the past and desires of the present. But desire for Benjamin is more readily linked to the past:

> The *correspondances* are the data of remembrance - not historical data, but data of pre-history. What makes festive days great and significant is the encounter with an earlier life.[60]

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[58] Rosen, p. 109.

[59] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 181.

[60] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 182.

Reference to the significance of festival days is similiar to Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the carnivelesque as a unique type of communication impossible during everyday experience positioned within the inequalities of economic and social conditions.[61]

The carnivalesque sanctions a cultural force that is seen as preceeding the ordering of the social by soliciting a residue of past history. As the site of popular pleasure, as a relation between the body, language, and political practice, many elements of the carnival are alien to official culture. In the popular, Bakhtin elicits a cultural pleasure that does not know negation by combining sensuous characteristics and strong elements of entertainment; utopian, cultural ideals and lived experience merge in the joining of art and life. In defining this process, Bakhtin is aware of the aesthetic elements whereby the carnival activities attempt to detach cultural forms from hierarchical social codes:

> In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very ideal embraces all the people.[62]

Popular pleasure as Bakhtin demonstrates requires a direct involvement founded on social ordering and cultural meaning. This approach to full participation rather than meaning through techniques of "alienation" is reworked by Pierre Bourdieu's examination of aesthetic sensibility that is linked to an economic and sociological regulated reception and appraisal:

> The desire to enter into the game, indentifying with the characters' joys and sufferings ... is based on a form of investment, a sort of deliberate "naivety", ingeniousness, good-natured credulity ("We're here to enjoy ourselves"), which tends to accept formal experiments and specifically artistic effects only to the extent that they can be forgotten and do not get in the way of the substance of the work.[63]

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[61]Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana; Bloomington University Press, 1984).

[62]Bakhtin, p. 7.

[63]Pierre Bourdieu, Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, trans. Richard Nice (London, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 33. Bourdieu's analysis excludes formal experimentation and techniques of elements of "disruption"

No longer accepting the privileging of form over content, Bourdieu's overt sense of the necessity of participation is a rejection of the traditional institutional and class based authority of art, but it is equally suspect to place too much confidence in a "pure" spontaneity as it is in "pure" form. Refering to spontaneity (even when placing "naivety" in quotations), Bourdieu cannot fail to limit his arguement to a simplistic notion of form and content, which views aesthetic modernity as assessed in terms that divide rather than clarify historical, institutional, and political pressures within both high and low forms. In identifying a popular aesthetic expression, the mediatory elements that Benjamin searches for in correspondences, contain an ambivalence (or pathos) towards the transformation of cultural elements that connect with the social as both manipulative and redemptive conditions. Here illusion and reality again play an important conceptualization of how experience and consciousness, memory and perception, are approached not as a metaphysical interest, but as correspondences which connect all areas of culture.

Acknowledging that new forms of cultural production have the power to reorganize aesthetic value within the commodity form, Benjamin writes:

> The unique significance of Baudelaire consists in the fact that he was the first to have inflinchingly apprehended the productive power of a self-alienated humanity in the double sense of the term - agnosticized [agnosziert] and intensified through reification.[64]

Baudelaire's poetry and prose achieved for Benjamin an exemplary form of aesthetic production, but most importantly Baudelaire's work grasped the secular aesthetics of the commodity world as a functional integration of exchange-value into a popular aesthetic pleasure. Thus approaching the commodity form and the audience, as similiarly engaged in a reified world, the instrinsic meaning of exchange-value is both an aesthetic quality of the commodity and an evaluation of new modes of reception.

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[63](cont'd) such as Brecht's displacement of narrative form.

[64]Benjamin, letter to Horkheimer, 16 April, 1938, cited in Wolin, p. 231.

Engaging the commodity form, Baudelaire did not hesitate to send his poetry to many publishers any number of times.[65] By exemplifing Baudelaire's perception of modern experience, Benjamin connects both the commodity nature of artistic production and the "mass" nature of its public. The relation of aesthetics to the masses, both in their homogeneity as well as their diversity, influenced Baudelaire's creative position of the cultural understanding of audience capabilities and constraints. Refering to the reception of the masses as a state of "distraction", as Baudelaire termed his relations with the readers of the *Fleurs du mal*, Benjamin writes:

> Will power and the ability to concentrate are not their strong points; what they prefer is sensual pleasure; they are familiar with the "spleen" which kills interest and receptiveness. It is strange to come across a lyric poet who addresses himself to this, the least rewarding type of audience.[66]

If the viewer is "alienated" within the perceptions of the forces of mass culture this reificaton occurs in such a way that the audience is "distracted" in Benjamin's terms. Baudelaire associated this reception with the "spleen" of sensuous pleasure. An "organic" or "disinterested" reception is replaced by the "spleen" as attachment to a commodity aesthetic. The "spleen", as lower part of the body (lowness of spirit) or moroseness in audience reception ("distraction"), suggests Benjamin's philosophical search for finding the "true" aesthetic experience of the masses. It is Baudelaire who as the "poet of the spleen" recaptures the subordination of nature as an ideal reference, and suggests a changed "finality" of nature within the illusions of mass culture.[67] If the audience is "distracted" then this reception includes reification within the representations of mass culture. The artifice of mass culture, where illusion has replaced Nature, finds solace in "spleen" as a guard against melencholy associated with the fragmentation of experience resulting from abrupt change;

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[65] Benjamin, "Central Park," p. 49.

[66] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," p. 155.

[67] T.J. Clark, The Absolute Bourgeois (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 174.

Baudelaire's "spleen" writes Benjamin is a "dam against pessimism".[68]

It is "spleen" that has buried the "transcendental subject" of aesthetic discourse.[69] But as art leaves the realm of "beautiful semblance", Benjamin makes it clear the task of the aesthetic sphere is not merely a culture of enjoyment, but holds a capacity for social change.[70] And most importantly, for Benjamin, as well as in the "eminently sensuous refinement" of Baudelaire's poetry, this cultural engagement remains free of bourgeois affirmation. It is affirmation through comfortable, aesthetic appreciation, rather than a critical enjoyment, that Benjamin refers to as "cosiness" (made easier as a result of mechanical reproduction) which denies the "true culture of the senses":

> This fundamental incompatibility of sensuous pleasure with cosiness is the decisive mark of a true culture of the senses. Baudelaire's snobbery is the eccentric formula of this inviolable renumeration of cosiness, and his "satinism" is nothing but the constant readiness to disrupt it where and wherever it should appear.[71]

Aesthetic pleasure, viewed within the developments of technology, demonstrates a compatiblity with such "comforts", but primary for Benjamin's criticism, aesthetic pleasure is a receptivity to the complexities of urban sense-perception and cultural values without losing sight of the crisis of modern experience. We must be aware that the "cosiness" that Benjamin aligns with certain pleasures of capitalist culture enforce a paralysis of social change.

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[68]Benjamin, "Central Park," p. 32.

[69]Benjamin, "Central Park," p. 35.

[70]Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 222.

> (A)djustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.

[71]Benjamin, "Central Park," p. 45.

Conclusion

A society, defines Susan Sontag, becomes modern when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images.[72] This concept of modernity concludes the framework for Benjamin's analysis of the origins of mass culture, applications of technology, and the role that he designates to new forms of reception. Cultural formations tied to exchange of commodities and images of representation establish consumption practices as a specific experience of cultural modernization. Consumption is defined through social and symbolic relations within a world that is greatly illusionistic, in Benjamin's terms, because it is understood through mass produced images and changes in perception rather than claiming the stability of the original - the aura. Benjamin defines this disintegration of the aura as a way to approach the changed forms of experience that occur through contact with a commodity aesthetic and cultural forms associated with technologically influenced experience.

As the position of the subject is displaced from the static position of a contemplative aesthetic, cultural conditions of reception grasp the experience of the commodity aesthetic as a move away from nature to artifice. Accepting artifice, or illusion, as a cultural concept within techniques of production is not a falsehood or deceptiveness in reception, but a condition of modern experience (within commercial culture) that defies an aesthetic "totality" of the autonomous concept of nature. Benjamin's description of the mediation of aesthetic pleasure is critically valid in that defining reception as the "distance to be pierced" a tremendous fragmentation of traditional experience and cultural values occur. This analysis of perception, within the forces of cultural modernization, takes place in such a technological condition of cultural displacement that the utopian element that Benjamin includes defines the audience as forming an active relationship as a collectivity. Here Benjamin's analysis remains utopian in its political priorities. But although Benjamin's analysis of aesthetic commodification does not comprehend much of the actual social and political character of contemporary culture, his

[72]Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1973), p. 153.

analysis of reception is particularly exemplary in defining the aesthetic sphere as historical and cultural formations of sense-perception and signification that influence everyday experience. This "phantasmagoria" of pleasure is experience inseparable from technological means of reproduction.

CHAPTER V

POSTMODERNISM: CONDITIONS OF PERILOUS PLEASURE

> We read a text (of pleasure) the way a fly buzzes around a room: with sudden, deceptively decisive turns, fervent and futile.[1]
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> (W)hat is called reproduction - as women well know - is never simply natural, or simply technical, never spontaneous, automatic, without labour, without pain, without desire, without the engagement of subjectivity.[2]

Introduction

In the previous chapters, aesthetic discourse and the values which legitimate concepts of pleasure were discussed within social and economic influences. The systematization of aesthetic discourse during the eighteenth century isolated the aesthetic sphere from other areas of cultural signification especially commercial exchange and other influences of cultural modernization. The adversarial position of high and low cultural forms set the precedents for the now over determined traditions of modernist art. But modernism is also a theory of modernization and the placement of aesthetic pleasure within a historical and social framework reveal the privileging of aesthetic autonomy as the primary means of negating the technological and commercial developments of cultural productivity and exchange.

In The Anti-Aesthetic, Hal Foster outlines the necessity to extend beyond values of aesthetic discourse as terms of cultural negation, or a subversive position as "a critical interstice in an otherwise instrumental world".[3] Eighteenth century aesthetic discourse as a methodology of "pure" knowledge, through Romanticism to an aestheticism of *l'art pour l'art*, to an aesthetic negation as subversive, are values, or as Foster defines "narratives of

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[1]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 31.

[2]Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington, Indiana Univeristy Press, 1984), p. 55.

[3]Hal Foster, "Postmodernism a Preface," in The Anti-Aesthetic, p. xv.

modernity", that are no longer persuasive. Critical cultural theory, as an attempt to re-evaluate aesthetic pleasure within the complexities of modern culture, must now not only qualify the terms of modernist aesthetic values, but also question the conditions of framing a "higher" aesthetic pleasure as a polemic of going beyond modernism to search out the conditions of the postmodern. But the high modernist aesthetic with its values of autonomy and self-referentiality is not to be reduced to an oppostional framework that is devoid of the influences of mass culture. Positions of cultural practice must be recognized as constituted within complex histories and ideologies hence the formations of diverse social and subjective forms of aesthetic experience. Placed in this context, it is important to note that the modernist concept of aesthetic autonomy has different social and historical determinations, for example, Kant's early aesthetic formulation in The Critique of Judgment, differs from Adorno's cultural criticism during World War II, than it does for aesthetic experience today.[4] Thus we must ask is the postmodern condition merely an adjunct to modernism or a definitive departure? Or is postmodernism the valorization of a specific aesthetic and critique?

Postmodernism: Power and Resistance

Whether all these transitions are foremost in postmodern artistic production and cultural criticism is open to specific historical and social influences, but utilizing postmodernism as an investigation of the codes of perception and signification which define contemporary cultural experience *displaces* the terms of the modernist aesthetic negation. Calling this postmodern experience is not so much a further condition for aesthetic pleasure within an evaluation of specific cultural values, but a process within which to examine aesthetic experience and pleasure as defined by practices and institutions of cultural production and technologies of reproduction. This concept of postmodernism must, most importantly, strive for aesthetic

[4]Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in After The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 45.

codifications beyond the modernist legacy of eighteenth century aesthetic discourse and the liberal bourgeois subject privileged within an autonomy aesthetic.

Foster outlines aesthetic experience as complicit in a postmodern condition of cultural *resistance*.[5] This term of resistance, unlike modernist principles of autonomy, implies neither the ideal of aesthetic "purity" nor the tactics of aesthetic transgression (the avant-garde), but a deconstructive strategy based on an aesthetic of cultural experience encoded within multiple discursive pratices and signifying forms. While articulating this difference, Foster's position reaffirms the historical practices of the avant-garde in terms of power relations; the early avant-garde tradition is defined as transgressing the terms of aesthetic discourse and the limitations of academic institutionalized culture, bourgeoisie patronage, and social norms. A critical postmodern condition is similiarily opposed to official culture, but the process of resistance is viewed as occuring in deconstructive terms which include (rather than attempt to transgress) those relations of "art as institution" and the representations of mass culture.

This critique revokes any transcendental "purity" or "natural" origin outside ideology; by putting "interest" back into aesthetics there is no representation "not invested or troubled by desire".[6] Refusing the high modernist condition of aesthetic negation and limiting the related dichotomous terms of form and content by putting interest (as resistance within power relations) into conditions of aesthetic experience, aesthetic pleasure is viewed as immanent within cultural practice. Such a polemic of cultural resistance is an acknowledgement of *difference* rather than hierarchical and oppositional aesthetic values. This concept of difference is a point of destabilization which interacts with binary systems of signification. Oppositional terms are displaced through semiotic movement (tied to post-structuralist theory) as a *shift* delegated to privileging the signifier over the signified. While difference as a political term denies the homogeneity of ideological identification, difference is not an allowance for

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[5]Foster, Recodings, pp. 149-151.

[6]Foster, Recodings, p. 150.

pluralism as an acceptance of multiple social and economic codes, but a political economy of cultural formations which are viewed as organized and inscribed within the multiple representations which determine modern experience. Foster describes the pluralistic acceptance of cultural forms as a neoconservative eclecticism of historical and cultural elements, which are recycled as stylistic forms which inhibit attempts to re-examine signifing functions.[7]

It has become clear in this analysis of aesthetic pleasure that no experience exists apart from signification, hence we must ask what are the activities or representations that are hegemonic? Or what are the cultural transformations that are hegemonic in placing subjectivity as an on going identification with cultural forms and the pleasures derived from these same forms? This approach engages the oppositional cultural forms of high modernism (especially the cultural ideologies which articulate a paranoic appraisal of a commodity aesthetic) and introduces into social codes and images of representation conditions of aesthetic pleasure that are open to cultural transformation. Barthes refers to this *shift* as an aestheticism of erotic and critical values:

> Simply, a day comes when we feel a certain need to *loosen* the theory a bit, to shift the discourse, the ideolect which repeats itself, becomes consistent, and to give it the shock of a question. Pleasure is this question. As a trivial, unworthy name (who today would call himself a hedonist with a straight face?), it can embarrass the text's return to morality, of truth: to the morality of truth: it is an oblique, a drag anchor, so to speak, without which the theory of the text would revert to a centered system, a philosophy of meaning.[8]

Pleasure as a Critical Principle

Barthes' The Pleasure of the Text turns to pleasure as a critical principle to avoid the philosophical, psychological, and scientific orthodoxies of aesthetic discourse. Barthes extricates pleasure from traditional values of aesthetic discourse, claiming for aesthetic theory no single

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[7]Foster, Recodings, p. 121.

[8]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, pp. 64-65.

judgment of a subjective position within a single continuum of meaning and reception:

> What shall we call such discourse? *erotic*, no doubt, for it has to do with pleasure; or even perhaps: *aesthetic*, if we foresee subjecting this old category to a gradual torsion which will alienate it from its regressive, idealist background and bring it closer to the body, to the *drift*.[9]

Aesthetic pleasure as a shift in discourse is "precarious" or a "friable pleasure", that is in Barthes' concept it acts through the body as an "individual" pleasure neither entirely given as a subject of social codes (structuralism) nor constituted as the autonomous subject of western metaphysics:

> (We) must introduce into this rational image-repertoire the texture of desire, the claims of the body.[10]

Barthes depicts the subject of pleasure as considered apart from the *doxa* of social codes, that is not in a discourse that encloses the personal or metaphysical "I", but within a more familiar term "individual".[11] Barthes does not claim the personal or private as the site of "individual" pleasure, but rather a subject position we can call difference in its breach of the false dichotomies of practical life and contemplative life.[12] This "individuality" is what grounds the hegemonic interplay between (cultural) pleasure and (non-cultural) bliss (*jouissance*); thus Barthes writes himself as an "anachronic subject" adrift in the notion of the privileged signifier.[13]

The semantic difference between a culturally defined pleasure and a non-cultural *jouissance* relies on this movement of the signifier to engage a conflictual position of aestheticism. Pleasure (*plaisir*) is a general term easily acceptible within the social discourse

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[9]Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 84.

[10]Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, p. 71.

[11]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 62.

[12]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 58.

[13]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, pp. 62-63.

(culture); *jouissance* (inaccurately translated as bliss) is an "immense subjective loss" or shattering of the metaphysically consitututed and ego-bound subject (the term *jouissance*, there exists no English correspondent, includes enjoyment, pleasure, possesion and sexual orgasm). Most importantly for Barthes' text of pleasure *jouissance* includes both the erotic and the political. The theoretical notations of *plaisir* and *jouissance* are caught in the distinction beween a consciousness of complicity in cultural forms and those that "fight for hegemony".[14] Thus the text of pleasure is defined as both internal and external from cultural codes:

> Whence, perhaps, a means of evaluating the works of our modernity: their value would proceed from their duplicity. By which it must be understood that they always have two edges. The subversive edge may seem privileged because it is the edge of violence; but it is not violence which affects pleasure, nor is it destruction which interests it; what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut; the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss (*jouissance*). Culture thus recurrs as an edge: in no matter what form.[15]

Barthes' pleasure of the text, with its privileging of the signifier and its post-structuralist placement of the subject as "loss" or displacement, is generally praised as a canonical text of postmodernism. But Huyssen, in the essay "Mapping the Postmodern", faults Barthes' distinction between *plaisir* and *jouissance* as better suiting the hierarchical values of high culture and the aesthetic codes of modernism, rather than the postmodern condition that is more fully inclusive of a commodity aesthetic.[16] To support his claim Huyssen provides the following quote from The Pleasure of the Text:

> The bastard form of mass culture is humiliated repitition: content, ideological schema, the blurring of contradictions - these are repeated, but the superficial forms are varied: always new books, new programs, new films, news items, but always the same meaning.[17]

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[14]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 28.

[15]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 7.

[16]Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," in After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 209-211.

[17]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 41-42.

But Barthes also recognizes pleasure in vernacular forms. Against the inscription of the "same meaning" and "humiliated repitition", Barthes elicits an *erotic* repitition. It is pleasurable if it is "extravagantly repeated" or on the contrary, unexpected as an inscription of *jouissance*.[18] Granted it is a restrained acknowledgement of the standardization and reproduction technologies of mass culture, but it is through means of both repitition and fragmentation, that pleasure is named a subjective "loss".

Hedonism for Barthes is more than the belief that pleasure itself is both a desired and proper principle: a utilitarian role-model. The capacity for pleasure is a condition which renders impossible any notion of stable identity, as Barthes explains in a deconstructive reference to the models of structuralism: "(A) subject split twice over, doubly perverse."[19] There are no conditions of "finality" in pleasure; there is not, as Barthes suggests in his rejection of a philosophical and scientific harmony, the distinct positions of subject and object, but aesthetic elements which proceed by way of a displacement that acknowledges and incorporates the heterogeneous elements in economic and cultural determinants. Reminiscent of Bakhtin's observation of the social transformation of cultural pleasures, Barthes writes: "On the stage of the text, no footlights."[20]

Sexual Difference: Social Vision and Subjectivity

The analytic concept of difference is central to the postmodern condition and has led to theories of reception and the identification of subject positions. Postmodernism as an evaluation of cultural experience is therefore a political as well as an aesthetic strategy. Thus aesthetics are defined not as a "drag anchor" (Barthes) but as transitional in their means and

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[18]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, pp. 41-42.

[19]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 14.

[20]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 16.

difference is used productively to apprehend the modernist oppositions between art and society - the transcendental and immanent subject. Two critical components of cultural evaluation evolve out of this criticism: the aesthetic conditions of a commodity culture and the feminist deconstruction of social and subjective signification within the terms of sexual difference.

To conceive sexual difference within the often pervasive phallocentricity of modernist discourse is an integral part of the postmodern experience and a methodology to examine the relations of sexuality, power, and cultural instrumentalization. The *subject* of postmodernism is therefore not only a semiotic subject, but also a gendered subject.[21] By accepting sexual difference as a component of subjectivity, the conditions of women's political and economic oppression are exposed as closely tied to a phallocentric ordering and its system of signification. Thus we must also accept that terms of resistance not only take hold and are constrained by these same hegemonic elements, but also claim access to a heteronomous space "not represented yet implied (unseen)":

> Now, the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which I propose characterizes the subject of feminism, is a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable. It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space-off, the else-where, of those discourse: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed hegemonic discourses and in the instertices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community. Therefore two kinds of spaces are neither in opposition to one another nor strung along a chain of signification, but they coexist concurrently and in contradiction.[22]

De Lauretis' description of sexual difference exposes cultural representation as linked to socially determined situations of vision:

> (S)pectacle-fetish or specular image, in any case ob-scene, women is constituted as the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to man.[23]

A complex series of social relations as gender specific are lodged within representation.

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[21]Silverman, p. 31.

[22]Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 26.

[23]De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, p. 15.

Women's experience within both the objectified female image in signification and the subject position in reception is socially designated within cultural forms of representation. The woman as spectator is bound to representation as both image and as subject, thus signification engages her desire and forms her pleasure while making her complicit in the production of an image of "(her) woman-ness".[24] Before examining de Lauretis' analysis of the "mapping" of social vision into subjectivity through cinematic representation, it is useful to turn first to relations of sexual inscription within the early forms of mass culture.

The prostitute unlike the *flaneur* did not fair so well in the commercial culture of nineteenth century Paris. The prostitute, writes Benjamin, is both "saleswoman and wares in one".[25] The *flaneur*, as voyeur, projects a pleasure in vision, in looking. The "gaze" directed at the prostitute on the urban streets of Paris, reified as form of exchange, is a taking of pleasure through substituting a person as object or a pleasure in scopophilia. Freud isolated scopophilia - in which the process of looking is itself a source of pleasure - as one of the components of sexuality which exist independently of the erotogenic zones.[26] Scopophilia, as visual pleasure which incorporates desire into another person as object, in this case within the terms of sexual commodification and commercial exchange, is significant in its portrayal of woman as image and man as possessing of the "look" (the indispensable term which is now integral to pleasures of the cinematic gaze). This voyeuristic vision of the spectator as masculine is also constructed in nineteenth century high culture, for example, Manet's paintings *Olympia* and *Dejeuneur sur l'herbe* signify this social vision by evoking the commercial and sexual exchanges of pleasure.

Benjamin describes this structuring of vision as shaped by the conditions of a commodity culture. The prostitute within the "object world" assumes the expression of the

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[24]De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, p. 15.

[25]Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," p. 157.

[26]Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen, 16, 3 (Autumn, 1975), p. 8.

commodity:

> The commodity attempts to look itself in the face. It celebrates its becoming human in the whore.[27]

The prostitute stands in for the significant role that the commodity takes when it becomes a primary mode of exchange in the urban geography of the city. This enables Benjamin to ask how has signification and new modes of perception altered the relation of the subject within mass culture? This relationship is historically centered around pre-existing conditions of the division of labour and sexual inequality. Benjamin refers to how the process of commodity production takes both objects and subjects out of their usual relationship. Thus in both a political and aesthetic sense prostitution exemplifies reification; the erotic body becomes the instrumentalized body as it is subjected to the commodity form. Or as Benjamin defines: "The objects of our most intimate use have increasingly become mass-produced."[28] Benjamin links prostitution to the economic and social influences which established the historical conditions of the formation of the urban masses. The rise of the masses is simultaneous with mass production, but in the prostitute, the women herself is an article of mass production.[29]

During the nineteenth century developments of commercial culture, the exclusion of women from a range of social practices and institutions takes on new and increasingly poli. al connotations; as Huyssen points out in his analysis of cultural transformation, those excluded from high culture are the masses, which also include women.[30] Nineteenth century aesthetics gendered mass culture as feminine and inferior, high culture remained the privileged realm of hierarchical values which are decidely associated with masculine practice. Continuing into the twentieth century, this exclusion in critical cultural theory, even if recognized in historical analysis, remained in language:

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[27]Benjamin, "Central Park," p. 42.

[28]Benjamin, "Central Park," p. 40.

[29]Benjamin, "Central Park," p. 40.

[30]Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in After the Great Divide, p. 47.

> Thus Adorno and Horkheimer argue that mass culture "cannot renounce the threat of castration," and they feminize it explicitly, as the evil queen of the fairy tale when they claim that "mass culture, in her mirror, is always the most beautiful in her land".[31]

The aesthetic displacement of the dichotomies established between high and low culture is influential in a postmodern critique, but inseparable from this analysis is the twentieth century interventions of women into the sphere of cultural practice and the accompanying critique of what is at stake in the cultural codification of femininity. In this context, subjective processes are individually formed yet explicitly social.

Cinematic Vision

De Lauretis' analysis of cinematic vision defines a "technology of gender" as a primary reference for an understanding of sexual difference and visual pleasure.[32] Technology of gender takes its conceptual premise from Foucault's theory of "technology of sex" and proposes that gender as discourse is the product of combining "social technologies" such as cinema with other cultural discourse.

Cinema, as de Lauretis proposes, is most effective as an "imaging" technology.[33] A feminist critique of the process of "imaging" within cinema, and its representation of woman as the object or image to be looked at, defines a voyeuristic gaze as a primary factor in the construction of visual pleasure. The process of "imaging" designates how meanings are attached to images; it positions the spectator both subjectively and socially and constitutes an articulation of desire and reception in spectatorship. Thus desire lodged within "technologies of gender" determine signifying practices in the larger symbolic order and at the level of subjective identification. As the subject is positioned in the technologically formed process of

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[31]Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," p. 48.

[32]De Lauretis, Technologies of Gender, pp. 1-30.

[33]De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, p. 56.

vision, a "mapping" of social relations into subjectivity occur; within this concept of mapping it is important to note, that within these relations of perception and signification, vision is not merely "a patterned reponse but active anticipation".[34] "Active anticipation" transfered to visual pleasure sustain the social network of power relations between male and female. Thus the positioning of woman as object within a symbolic framework of social vision raise two important issues regarding visual pleasure. What are the signifying constructs within the terms of cultural vision (extending beyond cinematic vision) which establish a specific sexualized image? Here the components of subjective identification with the objectified image is foremost. And secondly, how do these inscriptions of pleasure encode the position available to woman as spectator?

In the well known essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey outlines in reference to mainstream (Hollywood and their imitations) film a spectatorship of "masculinisation" pervading a voyeuristic "to-be-looked-at-ness" that represents not only the women as image, but through narrative form, editing, lighting, etc. creates a vision that defines woman as object, thereby producing "an illusion cut to the measure of desire".[35] Mulvey's arguement depends largely on an oppositional framework of dominant and subordinate, active and passive values that instill desire and outline the repression of certain pleasures. Socially and subjectivity, she approaches a break with cinematic pleasurable expectations in order to conceive new conditions of pleasure:

> It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of the article.[36]

Aesthetic pleasure tied to "ways of seeing" has historically separated high and low cultural forms. Modernist aesthetics privileged vision as superior to the other senses, as fine

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[34]De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, p. 54.

[35]Mulvey, p. 17.

[36]Mulvey, p. 8.

art practices sought their conditions of authenticity as a "pure" and autonomous means of contemplation. Within the formations of mass culture, reproduction technologies employed perceptual optics reliant on vision tied to cultural formations of modernization. Benjamin has discussed "closeness" and "distance" in relation to the aura and the image within conditions of technological reproduction. Mary Ann Doanne links this condition of reception to a subjective identification that includes a proximity and separation in the codification of the gaze that structures the sexualized image.[37] The male spectator maintains a distance between himself and the image to posit a specific voyeuristic quality of pleasure. The position of woman as both subject and object constitute a closeness for the woman as spectator, but also must define female identification as a subjective vision or identification which remains a fetishized image, thus the woman can only adopt a passive and often masochistic position. This fetishism is enacted in phallocentric terms (as vision) positioned within a symbolic process of representation and self-representation. Doanne links these relations of reception to the illusions of masquerade.

Resistance through masquerade lies in its denial of the production of femininity as immanent presence in the image -- as closeness.[38] As Doanne writes:

> To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image.[39]

If representations of "(her) woman-ness" establish desire and serve as a voyeuristic pleasure must women accept the pleasure of such a scopic drive? Doanne's answer is that the masquerade, "the female pretence that she is other", is the flaunting, as well as the acceptance of such a cultural femininity, thus as excesssive "play", or as Barthes might say

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[37]Mary Ann Doanne, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," Screen, 23, 3-4 (September/ October, 1982), p. 77.

[38]Doanne, pp. 81-82.

[39]Doanne, p. 82.

as extravagent repitition, cultural femininity is constructed as a "flirtation at a distance".[40] Feminist practices have reconstructed hegemonic discourse, but these terms of masquerade can lead also to pleasure within the subjection to a passive narcissism and forms of objectification that are primarily masochistic in that decoding is similiarly locked within cultural codes.[41] Hegemony, we are remined in the notion of resistance through masquerade, is inseparable from the signification of pervasive representation and social hierarchies, thus hegemony is not without ideological representation imbedded in cultural practice.

Pleasure, Privilege and Desire

Feminist theory interprets the ideological interests of such vision, for perception and signification never constitute a "disinterested" aesthetic experience, but preserve conditions that link the aesthetic gaze with sexual privilege. As Luce Irigaray describes:

> Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations ... The moment, the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.[42]

The socialized vision of modern culture subjects the body to the signification of the image. As such, vision defined through a "technology of gender" is a relation of the technical to the social, that posits the female body as a specific site of sexual imagery and visual pleasure.

Volume One, of Foucault's The History of Sexuality outlines sexuality as a discourse

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[40]Doanne, p. 81.

[41]Instances of masquerade can be drawn from both high art and popular culture. Madonna and Cindy Sherman demonstrate this cultural practice with limited effect.

[42]Cited by Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in The Anti-Aesthetic, ed. Foster, p. 70.

within a technology of power, hence both formulating and dispelling conditions of pleasure.[43] This "technology of sex" was formed within eighteenth century developments in education, medical practices, and economic influences. The body became the deployment of power as these specializations elaborated discourse: the pedagogization of the sexuality of children, psychoanalysis and anomalies of sexual practices, population control and the regulation of the family, and the sexual codification of the female body. Mechanisms of power and knowledge are articulated on the body and not only define repression, but produce sexuality as a social and political force evaluated within normality and fetishism. Thus "technology of sex", as the production of sexuality and formations of pleasure, is a discourse of power inscribed on the human body:

> (S)ex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals to place themselves under surveillance.[44]

This sexualization of the body created socialized structures of desire and here lies the problematic for the analysis of pleasure within a postmodern critique of cultural forms. For example, as Foucault outlines, the desirability of sex and the rhetoric of a liberation of sex makes us think we are affirming the rights of the body against conditions of power, when in fact within the representations of sex, the body is the very configuration of power and knowledge:

> We must not place sex on the side of reality, and sexuality on that of confused ideas and illusions; sexuality is a very real historical formation; it is what gave rise to the notion of sex, as a speculative element necessary to its operation. We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality. It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim - through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality ... The rallying point for the counter attack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasure.[45]

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[43]Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

[44]Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 116.

[45]Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 157.

Although Foucault does not acknowledge gender inscriptions in his inquiry into sexual discourse, it is this same rhetoric of sexual liberation that has failed to overcome the eighteenth century positioning of woman's pleasure as disruptive of the social order. These historic constructs of sexual categorization, that are greatly influenced by Rousseau, subjugate woman's *jouissance* as an absence of pleasure within representation.[46]

The possibilities of resistance are identified not in the sexualized body - an effective discourse of desire - but as a difference, as Foucault writes, "of bodies and pleasure". We can now return to Mulvey's critique, that to analyse pleasure is to destroy it; this is not a feminist puritism but a deconstruction closely related to conditions of pleasure. It is therefore formations of pleasure that are central to the postmodern critique as an attempt to expose the technologies of power that authorize certain representations while excluding or denying others - in fact this questioning risks the validation of the "other". Feminist criticism has given additional meaning to this analysis by defining sexual difference as the means to recognize "imaging" and cultural pleasure as positions of masculine privilege. The movement of feminist resistance "in and out of gender", as defined by de Lauretis, is a transitional space between the representations of *woman* and most importantly what that representation has made unrepresentable. "Oedipul pleasure", as Barthes defines, is the need "to denude, to know, to learn, the origin of the end"[47]; feminist pleasure is a more multiple concept of "mapping" complex signifiers of perception and signification played against the determinate codes.[48]

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[46]Cora Kaplan, "Wild Nights: Pleasure/Sexuality/Feminism," in Formations of Pleasure, p. 16.

[47]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 10.

[48]De Lauretis, Alice Doesn't, pp. 68-69.

Conclusion

The postmodern condition exposes pleasure as a social and political issue. The exclusive, scientifically rendered notion of an aesthetic of high modernism, largely inherited from Kantian metaphysics, is revealed as dependent on preserving an aesthetic autonomy and artistic authenticity against the encroachments of mass culture. Postmodernism attempts to cross the "Great Divide", in Huyssen terms, between high art and mass culture, the aesthetic sphere and the social, by establishing an aesthetic as formed within cultural codes and transformed within the diversities of cultural practice. This positioning of the subject allows for a cultural "occupation" of multiple and contradictory sites (the hegemonic discourse of which both Barthes and de Lauretis speak). Thus not responding to the whole, as Barthes states, consists in materializing the pleasure of the text and extending the sensory and the erotic to cultural objects of all sorts.[49] Barthes' reference to the body avoids traditional aesthetic values, by positing a reliance on a subjective position tied to language and cultural codes, but also Barthes conceptualizes the means to shift the terms of this hegemonic condition. This diversity in aesthetic experience denies "manipulation" by positioning a reliance on the possible displacement of meaning within the signifier and the signified. Saussure addresses this shift in meaning as an impression being formed within sense-perceptions:

> The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and name but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material" it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract.[50]

The differential values that lie within this concept of the sign as sensory form a "space" or "gap" between signification and reception, therefore experience and pleasure are structured within a shifting symbolic order of sign and referent.

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[49]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, pp. 58-59.

[50]Saussure, cited in Allen, p. 71.

Mulvey's article is formative in outlining the differential positioning of the masculine and feminine in cinematic vision as comparative to the social relations of men and women. These conditions of signification and perception gained social and political hegemony within the commercial exchange and technological conditions of the nineteenth century. The voyeuristic practices of the *flaneur*, for example, stand in stark contrast to the reification of the prostitute within a scopophillic gaze. The body – in this case the woman's body of the prostitute – attracts the gaze and appeals to the sense–perceptions lodged within the signification of forms of cultural exchange and spectatorship. Gendered subjective identification is therefore tied to technological reproduction and social forms. These complex signifiers of perception and signification are not "disinterested" but bound to systems of privilege, which most importantly for an analysis of pleasure posit the image over the materiality of the body; to repeat Irigaray's words: "The moment, the look dominates, the body loses its materiality." As the look dominates, woman is image, thus pleasure becomes spectacle and the material *difference* of the body becomes a loss or denial.

CONCLUSION

> Certain forms of so-called low-brow art, like the circus tableau in which the elephants stand on their hind legs each carrying on its trunk a pretty ballerina in graceful pose, are unintentional archetypal images of the very same truth we try to decipher in art.[1]

Disparities of pleasure articulates the demystification of a "systematic" aesthetic. This thesis examines the origins of aesthetics as an autonomous, methodolically rational and institutionalized discourse. Traditional conceptualizations of aesthetic pleasure are marked by the scientific doctrines of the eighteenth century, especially developments in the natural sciences. The influences of the Enlightenment were formative in defining an aesthetic autonomy that is committed to an abstract "purity" in aesthetic judgment, citing universal values almost entirely divorced from representational or conceptual content. Classifying an aesthetic experience as "natural" and untainted by interest, desire or cognitive expression established for art theory an aesthetic "distance" from economic and social change.

This aesthetic stratification is discussed in the thesis as leading to the now familiar dichotomies of cultural forms: beauty and utility, the fine arts and commercial culture, art and entertainment, high art and popular culture. The thesis examines the cultural developments that led to these dichotomies within the urban, technological and social conditions of cultural modernity, especially the rise to economic and political power of the bourgeoisie and conditions of a culture of consumption. To explore historically specific definitions of pleasure as an integral part of aesthetic experience "deconstructs" the myths of universality and the related valorization of a unitary, subjective expression that is closely tied to the ideologies of classical liberalism. Thus I have articulated a socially symbolic cultural ordering which privileges diversity in aesthetic reception over the values of the now academic terms of traditional aesthetic contemplation. The thesis is consequently concerned with how aesthetic experience is formed within external influences, such as cultural meanings and ideologies that are inseparable from social change and technologically influenced forms of

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[1]Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 401.

perception and signification (or within signifying practices and representations).

Reference to *disparities of pleasure* formulates a means to critique the values of an autonomous "higher" aesthetic sphere or the principles of "purity" within aesthetic pleasure that structure a separation of the aesthetic sphere from everyday life, or a "disinterested" sphere of aesthetic values detached from the larger symbolic order and that of culturally defined lived experience. The thesis therefore examines diverse cultural models of aesthetic experience and the theories which support them. Each chapter strives to demonstrate through a variety of conceptual strategies and historical interpretations that aesthetics can not be studied apart from the hegemonic conditions of social and commercial influences, thus aesthetic pleasure is never "disinterested". The conclusion is reached that aesthetic experience is highly mediated and can be identified within multiple and differential signifying and perceptual processes, which, most importantly, can not be viewed as separate from technological forms of reproduction and aesthetic and social vision or ways of "seeing".

Crucial to defining pleasure as a critical principle in cultural analysis is a theoretical interpretation of the historical and social designation of the autonomous position of high art and a universal, aesthetically valid appraisal verses qualities "lower" in value or a form of debasement entrenched in conditions of reification linked to capitalist modes of production and exchange. This concept of reification, as discussed within a philosophical and ontological reference to Marx's notation of "natural" needs, suggests idealized conditions of cultural production not associated with the commodity form. For example, as defined by Adorno and Horkheimer, the economic and social conditions of reification are so deeply entrenched in the cultural object that the signifying processes of culture deny the possibilities of purely abstract "higher" values, hence the necessity of aesthetic negation through formalist principles in seeking the possibilities of a subjectivity separate from the relations of standardization and manipulation associated with the culture industry. But by transposing critical interpretations of aesthetic production and reception from a focus on production qualities and limitations of

commercial exchange to a process of cultural perception and signification, an analysis of cultural practice and pleasure seeks the experiences of the socially symbolic and the subject immersed within a commodity aesthetic. The thesis examined these cultural relations through the writings of Benjamin, especially his analysis of the nineteenth century origins of mass culture. The influences of cultural modernization, as defined by Benjamin, bring changes in modes of reception and as art forms become reproduced, hence more accessible, aesthetic experiences are not only situated within a broader cultural framework, but are posited as material and sensuous conditions leading to immanent pleasure within consumption practices.

These distinctions lead to the terms of postmodernism which challenge the internalized, oppositional aesthetic principles of an institutionalized high culture that reject the relations of the social world and a low culture that is entrenched in all its external dissimilitudes. These principles of high modernism lodged within an autonomy aesthetic are revealed as historically and socially formed. Thus in rejecting the terms of aesthetic negation, the strategies of postmodernism claim no sacred ground; multiple forms and levels of meaning and cultural communication are defined as giving pleasure, but also incorporated within the concept of pleasure is the necessity to acknowledge a social construct of power relations. Within cultural signification, pleasure is therefore a social and political issue, which, as an analytical principle, extends to the deployment of gender based "technologies" of signification. As the image of woman is portrayed as a particular ideological representation which engages social and subjective identification, sexuality is viewed as a site/sight of both power and pleasure. Following this positioning, aesthetic pleasure is structured, as the thesis demonstrates, not according to the "natural" but to the cultural. Cultural discourse makes impossible any direct unmediated relation to the body, the social, and to pleasure.

Although this thesis has articulated concepts of pleasure within a wide historical and theoretical framework omissions are noticeable. Decidedly, most important is the work of Bertolt Brecht. This is due to the already extensive emphasis that is given to this historical

period in the analysis of the work of Adorno, Horkeimer, and Benjamin. My response to defining concepts of pleasure also does not include the work of Freud and Lacan. Although touching indirectly on this work are the references to "technologies of gender", which are largely articulated as a theory of femininity and psychoanlysis. This was not explored in length, but a more extensive analysis of pleasure is readily available in critical film theory, which provides a more indepth focus on the image and the signification of woman as the object of cinematic vision.

The concept of materialising pleasure which structures the overall theoretical movement of the thesis and forms the basis of the analysis of the transformative qualities of cultural modernity find their theoretical beginings in Barthes' The Pleasure of the Text. My approach to the deconstruction of a systematic aesthetic discourse is influenced by the work of Foucault. As the thesis is grounded on the recognition of commercial, technological, and social influences within a cultural and historical context, the concept of pleasure cannot fail to incorporate conditions of a commodity aesthetic. Thus, in conclusion, the concept of disparities of pleasure is closely linked to the "pleasure of the consumer"[2], because most importantly within consumption, pleasure has both material and sensuous form.

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[2]Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, p. 59.

> Imagine an aesthetic (if the word has not become too depreciated) based entirely (completely, radically, in every sense of the word) on the *pleasure of the consumer*, whoever he may be, to whatever class, whatever group he may belong, without respect to cultures or languages: the consequences would be huge, perhaps even harrowing.

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