Art at the Limits of Perception:

the Aesthetic Theory of Wolfgang Welsch

by Jerome Carroll, MA

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, October 2004

PAGE

NUMBERING

AS ORIGINAL

Contents

Section 3: Art at the Limits of Perception

Abstract

This thesis presents and critically assesses the aesthetic theory of the contemporary German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch, in particular his ideas of the intersection of philosophical aesthetics and contemporary culture. The three aspects of his ideas which frame this discussion and which I present in the first chapter are his project for reconfiguring aesthetics as a study of sensory perception, his characterisation of postmodern culture as aestheticised, and his conception of a new focus for aesthetics, the anaesthetic or imperceptible. Welsch's ideas intersect with several key issues in philosophical aesthetics which I outline in the second chapter, namely the status of the sensory and its relationship to the quality of indeterminacy, the subjective and cognitive nature of the aesthetic experience, the idea of the aesthetic as an epistemological ground that is in some way distinct from rational or conceptual knowledge, and finally the aesthetic characterised as an essentially modernist quality of defamiliarisation. The interlocutors here are Alexander Baumgarten, Kant and the Russian Formalists. This is followed in the third chapter by a more focussed discussion of Welsch's ideas on the sublime, a crucial aesthetic category which offers a theoretical background to his ideas on anaesthetics. Welsch reads the sublime as pivotal to the aesthetics of Adorno and the aesthetic thinking of Lyotard, and the main argument in this chapter compares the postmodern fascination with diversity or heterogeneity as values in themselves with a more ideologically informed conception of the cognitive and social function of modern and postmodern art as challenging existing modes of perception. I also read the limit experience of the sublime as a model for the modernist aesthetic of defamiliarisation. A critical discussion of Welsch's own variant of the sublime, the anaesthetic, follows in chapter four. The key issues here are the tensions between Welsch's disparate uses of the term, the ideological implications of each variant, and to what extent each allows a re-engagement of indeterminacy with everyday culture, or tends towards a more autonomous aesthetic. The final two chapters apply Welsch's ideas and the issues raised to examples of art, specifically drama, that operates at the limits of perception. The aim here is to assess whether Welsch's sensory terms offer the articulation of art and contemporary culture, or whether with some modifications they might. An overarching concern of the thesis is to distinguish between the transcendental significance of the aesthetic and its more marginal validity as cultural intervention.

Introduction · Transcendental or Marginal Aesthetics

The impetus for this thesis is the contribution to aesthetic theory of the contemporary German philosopher and aesthetic theorist, Wolfgang Welsch, and the intersection his work articulates between certain strands of traditional aesthetic theory and contemporary culture. Welsch is the author and editor of some six books and numerous articles on aesthetics, in addition to his work on theories of the postmodern and the nature of rationality. His corpus offers a comprehensive discussion of the disparate concept of the 'aesthetic' in its historical usages from Baumgarten to the present, and he argues convincingly for its increased significance for contemporary culture, both in terms of everyday experience and more philosophical issues of what constitutes knowledge. His ideas are broad in scope, indeed the fact that they have been little treated in secondary literature might in part be due their overly ambitious range, as well as their sometimes cavalier, unsystematic and often repetitive approach. Claims are sometimes made about the role of art and the status of aesthetics without much theoretical argument or empirical support. Potentially crucial preceding debates or ideas are barely referenced, and subtleties and complications are ignored for the sake of broad argument. But in my view his contributions to aesthetics do point to significant and under-thematised areas of aesthetics, such as the focus on the (more or less complex) sensory aspect of the aesthetic, the essentially dialectical nature of the (in my view essentially 'modernist') aesthetic, which is at

the heart of his ideas on the sensory and non-sensory (in his terms, the 'aesthetic' and 'anaesthetic'), the interesting area of the aesthetics of the imperceptible, the cognitive significance of the aesthetic (what I mean by this will become clear in what follows), as well as the general 'opening up' of aesthetics to accommodate a theorization of the interaction between perception and cognition in art and in their more everyday forms. I take this to provide the impetus, if not the tools, for furthering discussion of the scope and significance of aesthetics in the context of contemporary culture. The key aims of this thesis are therefore to present Welsch's contribution to aesthetics in terms of its debt and continuity with previous investments in the aesthetic, and to assess it in terms of its internal consistency and general plausibility, its ideological investment and finally its usefulness as a way of describing practical examples of art and their interaction with everyday experience.

Broadly Welsch's project attempts to combine a renewal of certain historical strands of philosophical aesthetics, most prominently the sensory nature of the aesthetic experience, with a characterisation of contemporary, postmodern society as essentially 'aestheticised'. These two elements of his formulations are interrelated, with Welsch's conception of the aesthetic as a 'Schlüsselphänomen unserer Kultur' [Welsch 1993 7], turning on a renewal of the understanding that the terms of the aesthetics are broader than simply that which relates to art and beauty. Of course, aesthetics has long been more than merely the philosophy of

art, evidenced in Plato's higher ideal or Kant's indeterminate 'aesthetic idea'. But Welsch's ideas return to the understanding of aesthetics as the study of sense perception, central to Kant's early estimation of aesthetics as bereft of any transcendental value [see Kant 1913, Crawford 1974 19], but also to the earlier formulations of Alexander Baumgarten, in whose *Aesthetica* (1750) the aesthetic is seen to offer an alternative mode of knowledge to the rational, which he paradoxically calls 'sinnlich' or 'sensory'. The question of what this 'sensory' can imply will be a central one for this thesis. Of course the purely sensory nature of the aesthetic on its own has not sustained interest in it for the last two hundred and fifty years: Kant's 'aesthetics of the sublime' thematises an experience whose sensory nature is precisely problematic, and what he infers from the experience is about that which transcends the merely sensory experience: the point is that for Kant this indeterminacy is seen to be precisely a quality of the *super*-sensory, rational mind. I will say more about this philosophical significance of the aesthetic in chapter two. As far as art is concerned, the migration of the aesthetic 'contentless experience' or 'failure of representation' into the artwork has been crucial to art's usefulness as a response to determinate thinking, whereby the seemingly paradoxical nature of this 'aesthetic idea' or 'thought without concept' is echoed in much of twentieth century writing about art as 'saying the unsayable' or 'representing the unrepresentable'. Much has been made of this repressive side to thought and understanding in twentieth century theory, most prominently in Adorno's critique of 'identity-thinking'. The paradoxical or

'negative' nature of these claims to authenticity will be a crucial point of discussion when I come to focus on the idea of the claim to authenticity in Welsch's idea of 'anaesthetic' art – that which deploys the imperceptible – in chapter four.

The aesthetic's 'unsayable' also has a more affirmative aspect, such as in early Romantic thinking, which both echoes and crucially diverges from Kant's philosophical project. For the early Romantics the aesthetic is seen to mark the limits of discursive philosophy. In this respect the aesthetic experience is seen to admit of an irreducible particularity, which cannot be broken down into laws or rule-based categorisation. Like its more 'negative' variant above, this is opposed to determinate conceptual thought, which is seen to entail, in Andrew Bowie's words, 'a possible repression of my particular imaginative relationship to the object'. [Bowie 2003a 34] The question for Welsch's ideas on the sensory will be, if such determinacy characterizes the repressive aspect of thought might this suggest a role for the sensory, traditionally the indeterminate precursor of thought, in resurrecting a more critical kind of indeterminacy? Can the conception of the aesthetic as sensory ever live up to the more sophisticated accounts of the role of the aesthetic in grounding thought and conceptualizing resistance to repressive models of thought?

Welsch's interest in the sensory coincides with what I will identify as resurgence in interest in the constitutive nature of the 'material' aspect of reality, which begins with Aristotle and maintains a strong thread in modern social and cultural theory. This more recent interest has many – not necessarily compatible – aspects, ranging from Marx's materialist concerns that centre on the essentially economic basis of social relations, through Nietzsche's vitalist calls that turn against the legacy of the Enlightenment *in toto*, to phenomenology, which asserts the primacy of the sensory in our experience of the word. The question for Welsch, whose first book begins on the fairly philosophical terrain of Aristotle's *Sinneslehre*, will be where his ideas are located in this disparate collection. An underlying assumption for my discussions is that this question of the status of the sensory goes to the heart of what is at stake in philosophical aesthetics and what is specific to the 'aesthetic' experience. Rather than Kant's merely discarded and forgotten husk of the experience, abandoned once the universal kernel has been obtained, I will assess the critical value of the specifically sensory nature of aesthetic experience as it is deployed in certain artworks.

Certainly much modern art, from Impressionism onwards, has focused our attention on the building blocks of sensation and perception. This new interest in sensation and perception may be seen as a response to the changing nature of everyday sensory experience in the modern age, in which our relationship to time and space has been crucially destabilised by such phenomena as television,

telephony and photography. [See Fischer-Lichte 1995 1-3] Welsch's formulations are on the same terrain when he characterises non-perception as in some respects *more* characteristic of our experience of a reality that has been technologically altered, underlying his conception of postmodern reality as characterised by a bewildering oscillation between sensory excess and sensory absence.

This question of the relationship of art to our experience of everyday reality also touches on a key issue for the specifically philosophical significance of art and aesthetics, which is important for my treatment of Welsch's ideas. This is the question of whether these qualities of the sensory or the indeterminate admit of *ideological* analysis, or whether in fact the aesthetic describes that aspect of art that precisely cannot be reduced to ideological terms. [See Bowie 2003b 78] The implication of this latter position is, and Welsch will assert a version of this idea himself, that ideological interrogations of the artwork can only be framed in terms that are already ideologically informed, and any ideological critique obscures the political import of a work of art. This significance of the aesthetic beyond any ideological position has been reasserted in recent years [see Joughin & Malpas 2003], but does this exclusion of ideological questions convincingly evade the criticism that this position is already ideologically loaded, not to say ideologically flawed? In this respect I will refer in chapter four – in relation to Welsch's anaesthetics – to Herbert Marcuse's sceptical view of such aestheticist restrictions.

As far as Welsch's ideas are concerned the question for me is whether this aestheticist position is compatible with his ideas of a broader conception of the status and relevance of the aesthetic. Underlying the exclusion of ideological questions seems to be the sense that the ideological interrogation is deleterious to the indeterminacy that the aesthetic 'does best', or at least does harm to the indeterminate nature of the aesthetic experience. This seems to involve a balancing act, as Bowie points out. On the one hand 'there are dimensions of cultural articulation which transcend what we can say about them'. [Bowie 2003b 78] On the other hand,

> it should be remembered that the 'non-identical' of aesthetic experience, its resistance to explanation, would be mere mystification without the attempt to render it more generally accessible through critical dialogue and the development of cultural communication. [Bowie 2003b 77]

This mysticism is something that Welsch's ideas on imperceptible art arguably run the risk of, as I will discuss in relation to Marcuse's ideas on difficult art. Emblematic of this is the essential *reflexivity* that is seen to be crucial to the aesthetic and its usefulness in offering any insight into how we are able to speak about meaning at all, but that might also curtail its usefulness for other spheres. Of course, Bowie's point is that the philosophical nature of such artworks

demands mediation by criticism – suggesting a quintessentially Romantic openness to the external world, and a point that echoes Benjamin's sense in the *Kunstkritik* essay that (good) art is that which opens itself to criticism. [See Benjamin 1974 I 1 65] Nietzsche's remarks on the incomplete artwork imply essentially the same point. [See Nietzsche 1973 V 2 110] The balancing act in this critical process is presumably to bring out the significance of the work without reducing it to determinate concepts. A key question is whether this has to be a philosophical significance or in what ways this indeterminacy is fruitful in terms of a more everyday consciousness divested of its philosophical implications.

Whilst it is all very well to conclude that art is not *best* equipped to present themes, what is the cost when we relinquish the presentation of objects and issues to concepts, and only the highest principles to such indeterminate modes of presentation? Might not such a restriction of aesthetics' field of influence unwittingly reinforce the rationalisation of everyday life? As Bowie again puts it,

> [t]he notion of the unrepresentability of the most essential aspect of our existence compels one to ask whether art can ultimately only sustain itself at the expense of any substantial relationship to the empirical content of social life'. [Bowie 2003a 45]

John Joughin and Simon Malpas refer to the relegation of the specificity of the aesthetic experience by those on the right and the left of the political divide [see Joughin & Malpas 2003 5], but is it too glib to suggest that this annexing of aesthetic experience to transcendental conclusions enacts a similar relegation of the particularity of experience?

At the heart of these discussions of indeterminacy and ideology is of course the crucial and vexed issue of aesthetic *autonomy*, which goes back to Kant's ideas on the disinterested nature of judgment and the indeterminacy of the sublime experience. I will discuss the significance of the sensory aspect of the aesthetic for ideas of aesthetic autonomy in greater detail in chapter two, but it is worth noting here that the conceptualisation of the aesthetic in sensory terms might also be taken as signalling the intention of dismantling, if not autonomy, then certainly the aesthetic mode's fundamental difference from other modes of perception. The risk is that one thereby kills the golden goose, but there seems to be a fine line between dismantling the difference between the special capacity of the aesthetic and everyday experience and encouraging their interaction. The restriction of aesthetics' importance to that which does not admit of ideological questions might in this respect pander to the society of the specialist. This characteristic of modern society is something that Habermas in his essay 'Modernity – an Incomplete Project' sees art as potentially militating against: his notion of 'unconstrained interaction' between what he calls the 'aesthetic-

expressive' sphere and 'reified everyday praxis' [Habermas 1985b 11-12] might need a more nuanced discussion of the ways this interaction can happen, and what effects art can hope to have, particularly if one of the aspects of this reified life-world is its aestheticisation, but I second Habermas' assertion that the virtues of the aesthetic sphere autonomous nature are best deployed where 'aesthetic experience is drawn into an individual life history and is absorbed into ordinary life'. [Habermas 1985b 12] A central issue for my thesis will be whether the reconfiguration of aesthetics as a study of (albeit a special kind of) sense perception allows an analysis of the way the experience of art interacts with everyday experience. Whether Welsch's ideas on art fulfil this possibility, or merely pave the way for its conceptualisation, will be discussed. Moreover, Habermas' idea of the 'absorption' of the aesthetic experience into ordinary life implies for me the significance of the moment of the *reception* of the work. I will say more about the contested status of this point of the 'aesthetic event' in chapter two, and the examples of art which I will analyse in the final chapters, and in particular the dramas by Samuel Beckett, Peter Handke and Heiner Müller, will be seen to demand and in some senses depend on *active* completion by the audience.

The receiving audience is also crucial to my discussions of the role of the sensory inasmuch as they are the point at which art is able to mediate with both the habits and the cultural contents of everyday perception. A key issue for my

thesis is to ask whether a more marginal reading of the aesthetic might not offer aesthetic indeterminacy more scope for interaction with everyday habits and norms of perception. In particular I will suggest that a more fruitful interaction of the indeterminate and art might be sought in terms of the modernist aesthetic of *defamiliarisation*. Such art might be seen to allow freedom from determinate thought, deployed in the evident freedom of expression from the constraints of conventional understanding and linguistic usage that has been the decisive feature of modernist art.

The sense of the aesthetic as caught between its empirical cognitive effect and its transcendental value, between perception and rational recuperation, might be read as emblematic of the aesthetic's *dialectical* nature. This is certainly a recurrent theme in Welsch's ideas, and an important continuity between eighteenth century ideas and twentieth century modernist ideas of the importance of the aesthetic, crucial to which is the sense of the aesthetic as a meditation on *limits*, whether of sense perception, representation to mind or within the artwork. Emblematic of this discussion of limits is the interest in the sublime, which I will discuss in chapter three in the light of Welsch's reading of Adorno's ideas on art in *Ästhetische* Theorie as an aesthetics of the sublime. And perhaps it is symptomatic of this dialectical instability that elements of the transcendental and elements of marginal aesthetics are evident in Welsch's formulations. I have already referred to his crucial category of the 'anaesthetic'

in terms of a seemingly autonomous aesthetics of the imperceptible. But I will

show that his use of the concept is wide-ranging, in some of its variations add a

certain cognitive complexity, and moreover thematise the norms and habits of

perception that I have referred to above.

This will be the terrain of my thesis, on which I will seek to present and assess

Welsch's ideas on the intersection of philosophical aesthetics and contemporary

culture. In the first chapter I will begin with a more detailed presentation of the

main points of his theories of contemporary culture, his ideas on art, and his

ideas for the discipline of aesthetics. This will be followed in chapter two by a

fuller discussion of the issues sketched above, with reference to his historical

precursors in philosophical aesthetics, namely Baumgarten, Kant, and the

Russian Formalists. The concern there will be to trace the function and

significance of sense-perception – and indeed the absence of the sensory – in

philosophical aesthetics, as well as stating what I see as the pivotal role of the

cognitive faculties of the subject in the modern discipline of aesthetics. In

chapter three I will turn to Welsch's ideas on the sublime, with particular

reference to its historical treatment by Kant and Schiller, and to the two thinkers

whose ideas on the sublime Welsch appropriates, Adorno and Jean-François

Lyotard. In chapter four I will discuss in greater depth Welsch's own variant of

the sublime, and a pivotal idea for my thesis, the 'anaesthetic'. In the fifth

chapter I will attempt an application of Welsch's anaesthetics to examples of art,

focussing in particular on recent drama as operating at the limits of perception (and indeed representation). Finally, in chapter six I will depart from Welsch's ideas for art, though not his terms, to ask whether the seemingly opposite idea of excessive perception in art, again exemplified in recent drama, might not offer a more fruitful and convincing alternative to addressing some of the issues which motivate Welsch's turn to the anaesthetic, whilst remaining true to the re-conceptualisation of the aesthetics in terms of sense perception.

Section 1 · Sensory

Chapter 1 · Aesthetics beyond aesthetics:

the theoretical contribution of Wolfgang Welsch

I have already noted the ambition and breadth of Wolfgang Welsch's work on aesthetics, which ranges from the beginnings of modern aesthetics in the writings of Alexander Baumgarten, whom he cites as a crucial antecedent for his proposal of rewriting the discipline in terms of sensory perception, to what he sees as the pivotal role of the aesthetic in postmodern thinking and everyday culture. These elements are not as unrelated as they sound: for Welsch the thematisation of sensory perception is not just of historical-philosophical interest, but makes the aesthetic particularly relevant for describing phenomena in contemporary everyday reality. He refers in particular to the widespread (and in Welsch's formulations fairly disparate) effects of aestheticisation, such as the veneer-like makeover of our built environment, the ramifications of allegedly 'aesthetic' notions of truth (by which Welsch seems to mean anti-foundationalist and 'plural'), and the sensory excess that seems to be the inevitable mode of the consumer world. The loosely connected nature of this collection of characteristics reflects what Welsch sees as the many intersecting meanings of the term aesthetic which must contribute to an 'erweitertes Verständnis der Diziplin'. [Welsch 1996 141] These include the aesthetic as sensory, which refers to both sensation and perception, as 'hedonism', as 'subjective', as 'versöhnt', as related to beauty, as in some way 'cosmetic', as artistic or related to art, as

'aestheticist', and finally as 'virtual'. [See Welsch 1996 23ff] The domains that are touched by this wide-ranging term extend from what he calls 'epistemologische Ästhetisierung' [Welsch 1996 96] to the more experiential aspects, such as the beautified, excessive and increasingly 'de-realised' world, and the persistent significance of art as a still distinguishable sphere. In response to some of these phenomena Welsch proposes a seemingly modernist idea of art as 'anaesthetic', which among other things entails an arrest or problematisation of perception. But as well as an art response the anaesthetic is seen by Welsch to be an inevitable response to the excesses of modern life, as well as, at a significantly different categorical level, a necessary precondition of perception at all. In this respect Welsch cites Wittgenstein's idea of 'Familienähnlichkeiten' [Welsch 1996 24, see also 101], and whilst this might provide the flexibility Welsch's use of the term requires, a concern in my discussion is that this might not be enough to resolve the sometimes direct contradictions between individual usages of the term. In what follows I will introduce these three main elements of Wolfgang Welsch's contribution to aesthetics, namely aesthesis, aestheticisation and the anaesthetic, in greater detail. As well as indicating moments of particular innovation, I will identify areas which I consider problematic, both of which will provide the background for the subsequent elements of my thesis.

Aisthesis: the return to the sensory

Welsch's central concept of *Aisthesis* returns to the theoretical formulations of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the founder of modern aesthetics, whose concept of aesthetics refers not to art, but to an epistemology that is limited to the sensory realm, 'eine Wissenschaft der sinnlichen Erkenntnis'. [Baumgarten 1983 79] Whilst Baumgarten is a key antecedent for his rewriting of the discipline of aesthetics, Welsch's revalorizing of the sensory as 'ein generelles Verstehensmedium für Wirklichkeit' [Welsch 1990 7] actually goes back even further, to Aristotle's challenge to the Platonic hierarchy which saw primary truth as inhering in the Ideal, and only mere contingency in the sensory and empirically experienced. In his first book, *Aisthesis: Grundzüge und Perspektiven der Aristotelischen Sinneslehre* (1987), Welsch identifies Aristotle as the 'Schlüsseldenker' of the sensory, the only thinker to refuse the 'anti-aisthetischen Kampagne' of classical philosophy. [Welsch 1987 26, 6] Aristotle ascribed to the sensory its own autonomy and significance, such that the realm of the sensory was no longer dismissed as contingent or a mere copy of an ideal realm. [Welsch 1987 27] But Welsch sees this historical attempt at a rehabilitation ('Nobilitierung') of the sensory as having been abandoned before its completion, referring to a 'von der philosophischen Ästhetik eröffneten, aber nicht durchgeführten Aufgabe.' [Welsch 1987 24-5] For Welsch, the subordination of sensory knowledge to rational knowledge occurs at the same moment as its elevation to the status of knowledge: 'Die Wahrnehmung ist, indem sie als Erkenntnisgestalt festgesetzt wird, zugleich nobilitiert und inferiorisiert.'

[Welsch 1987 35] This inferiority is ascribed to two characteristics of the sensory. Firstly, Welsch cites the absence of any analytical faculty in the sensory: 'Sie vermag nur das Daß zu konstatieren, nicht aber über das Warum.' [Welsch 1987 35] This derives in turn from the distinction made in classical philosophy, most famously in Plato's realm of ideas, between the general and the particular. Whereas sensory perception is suitable and necessary for immediate access to particular sense impressions, it cannot make the leap from the particular to the general necessary to organize those impressions into determinate experience. For Welsch this capitulation of Aristotle's *aisthetik* ultimately reveals its subordination to the rational mode of knowledge, and becomes an 'Aisthesiologie'. [Welsch 1987 29] And whilst this capitulation to the rational is probably quite a reasonable position in everyday terms, the situation might not be so clear cut for art and the aesthetic. I have made clear in my introductory paragraphs the crucial role of the indeterminate experience that resists any subsumption under general laws in aesthetics since Baumgarten and Kant. The crucial issue for Baumgarten will be what it means to give the sensory a largely independent position in relation to rational or intellectual knowledge, and to what extent his conception of 'sensory knowledge' is not necessarily intended as a *challenge* to rationalist philosophy, an issue that will be a recurrent theme in my discussion of Welsch, the sensory and modernist aesthetics. If the specifically sensory obtains at all in Kant's later work on aesthetics it is in terms of the sensory representation of the absolute or sensory pleasure precipitated by

beauty, which is seen to derive from the harmonious play between understanding and imagination – imagination being that which mediates between sensuousness and understanding. This focus on the pleasurable or harmonized nature of the sensory-aesthetic experience, as much as the more philosophical fruitful indeterminacy, is what Welsch's focus on the sensory seems to depend on, as I will discuss below in terms of his conception of 'aestheticisation'. In view of Welsch's characterization of contemporary culture in terms of this all but discredited tradition of aesthetics, the question will be what are Welsch's intentions for the return to the concept of *aesthesis* and do they promote or detract from art's critical potential? What is the benefit of conceptualizing art and non-art experience in terms of the lowest, most basic form of experience (if we are to accept that this merely sensory is plausible)?

One significant motivation of the focus on basic perception seems to be erasing the dividing line between perception in art and non-art, such that aesthetics might describe a spectrum of sensory experience which includes both. As Welsch explains, the new aesthetics would still include art, but would also encompass what Welsch refers to as the 'ästhetische Auffassung der Wirklichkeit'. [Welsch 1996 148] Hans-Rudolf Schweizer, in his discussion of Alexander Baumgarten, already sees the turn to aesthetics as a study of sense-perception, described as 'konkrete, sinnliche Wirklichkeitserfahrung' [Schweizer 1983 vii], as offering a way out of art's isolation in the institution. [See Schweizer

1973 9-10] If all phenomena are treated as different modes of a sense-perception, there is no particular categorical difference between art and non-art. A key question for Welsch's ideas in my thesis will be whether his ideas on aesthetics and art support and sustain this interaction.

The idea of aesthetics as a philosophy of art which is departed from here is only a relatively recent phenomenon. As I noted in the introduction art and the aesthetic have only in the last two hundred years become so closely identified. Plato for instance is famously disparaging about the painter's merely third-hand representation of reality (after the ideal and material versions of the thing respectively) whilst maintaining faith in the poetic-aesthetic as the highest ideal of truth. [See Plato 421-35] Similarly, one of Kant's most influential discussions of the aesthetic as a category, the 'Analytik des Erhabenen' in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), excludes art as a means to achieving sublime effect (though many of the features of the sublime migrate into the artwork in later theory, with implications for the idea of culture that will be made in chapter three.) But of course for Plato and Kant the aesthetic is understood in precisely the opposite terms to Baumgarten's sensory perception; for both, albeit in markedly different ways, the aesthetic is precisely that which allows access beyond indeterminate and ungrounded knowledge, but crucially for my considerations taking us away from what might crudely be called the 'content' of that knowledge. Certainly, Welsch's suggestions for aesthetics seem to involve a less 'transcendental' role

for the aesthetic, inasmuch as he pits the everyday experience of sensory excess against different moments of non-perception, which he calls the anaesthetic. But what are the costs and benefits of theorizing art and non-art perception together, in dismantling the categorical differences between them? Clearly Welsch's idea of dismantling the art/non-art distinction goes to the heart of the crucial issue of aesthetic autonomy. The different mode of the aesthetic experience when compared to other types of experience and knowledge, and specifically its indeterminacy, is seen by theorists from Kant to Adorno to safeguard its status as free from merely contingent truth or, more recently, the manipulatory tendencies of identity-thinking. So do his ideas on the aesthetic relinquish the philosophical dimension of aesthetics offered by indeterminacy and freedom conceived in super-sensory terms? Does this necessarily mean sacrificing the ability to theorise art's autonomy and, again, its critical and oppositional critical capacity? Then again, in spite of his comments regarding the sensory, like other theorists of the aesthetic Welsch is only interested in *certain kinds* of perceptual experience. Shklovsky's notion of the 'poetic' as a special mode of perception is characteristic in this regard, and will be crucial for my discussions. This is why art and autonomy slip back into his broader understanding of the aesthetic, in particular in the notion of art as 'anaesthetic', which will be the main focus of my fourth chapter and about which I will say a little more below.

One aspect of the focus on the sense-perception that I mentioned in my introduction, and that should not be overlooked in relation to Welsch's ideas, is that it underlines the nature of aesthetics as essentially subject-oriented, inasmuch as it focuses on the effects of the artwork on the mind of the recipient. This general focus on reception raises important questions about individual agency. Twentieth century theories which focus on aesthetic reception tend to suggest that the recipient has a determining role as far as the meaning of a work of art is concerned, as in Hans Robert Jauß's idea of a politicized reading of the formal aspects of the modernist work of art in his *Rezeptionsästhetik*. [See Jauß 1970] But Welsch's focus on our reception of sense data has, as in Adorno's formulations, a more pessimistic view of the recipient's role, inasmuch as he is skeptical about the possibility of contemplation in the face of the pressures of everyday life, which he conceives in terms of 'Desensibilisierung' and 'Anäthetisierung'. [Welsch 1990 14] I will refer to this in greater detail in chapter four, but the difficulty is that his suggestions for art might reinforce the passivity which he perceives in aestheticisation, perhaps a result of the general focus on reception in the first place. As Habermas points out, there might be other aspects to be gained from Aristotle apart from his 'Sinneslehre', namely the *praxis* paradigm, with its central idea of the individual as unfolding his essential powers through his own productive activity. [See Habermas 1985 96-7] (That said, in the same passage Habermas refers to man not only as productive, but also as a 'gesellschaftliches Produkt'. [Habermas 1985 97]) Welsch's ideas on

perception seem not to engage with any such (essentially early Romantic) 'reflectionist' ideas of the individual subject's self-constitution in and through the 'life-world', whereby the objectifications in which subjectivity takes on external shape 'sind gleichzeitig der symbolische Ausdruck eines bewußten Schöpfungsaktes und eines unbewußten Bildungsprozesses'. [Habermas 1985 97] The significant point for Welsch's theorization is that this theoretical tradition, culminating in Husserl's concept of objectification, might allow for a critique of reification which might assist an analysis or critique of aestheticisation. As Berger and Luckmann put it, '[r]ationalisation is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will.' [Berger & Luckmann 1966 89] Berger and Luckmann's 'dehumanised world' is paradoxical because we alone have created it.

Another curious omission is that Welsch's reception-focus and indeed his emphasis on the sensory dimension of experience seems to share the terrain of phenomenology, but makes barely any mention of the philosophical movement in his formulations and lacks any engagement with its terms. In *Der Krise der europäischen Wissenschaften* Edmund Husserl cites the abstraction of modern science – of which Galileo's 'Mathematisierung der Natur' is referred to is the archetype, the 'Vorbild aller echten Erkenntnis'. [Husserl 1954 61] – as positing an infinite rational universe which is accessible only to an infinite, rational and

systematic mind. [See Husserl 1954 19] Scientific measurement and analysis of causal connections detracts for Husserl from the sensory aspect of our relationship with the world around us:

Was wir im vorwissenschaftlichen Leben als Farben, Töne, Wärme, als Schwere an den Dingen selbst erfahren, kausal als Wärmestrahlung eines Körpers, der die umgebenden Körper warm macht und dergleichen, das zeigt natürlich 'physikalisch' an: Tonschwingungen, Wärmeschwingungen, also reine Vorkomnisse der Gestaltenwelt. [Husserl 1954 35]

In light of this Husserl's suggests a return to '"sinnlich" erfahrende Anschauung' [Husserl 1954 108], to the empirically intuited world of bodies which make up the *Lebenswelt* as the 'selbstverständlich geltende Voraussetzung' [Husserl 1954 105] of any description of how we can know anything. One question will be whether Husserl's references to the 'Selbstverständlichkeit' of this 'Körpererfahrung' [Husserl 1954 108-9] is a philosophical *basis* in itself, which might suggest a return to a crude empiricism, or a *corrective* to scientific knowledge. Certainly Husserl's idea of the 'life-world' as a meaning-giving context might help to clarify certain elements of Welsch's formulations.

In Welsch's terms, of course, the sensory is particularly suitable for describing the 'life-world' as we experience it today. For him a revolution is needed in thinking about the aesthetic in order to describe a society which Fredric Jameson summarises as 'consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society'. [Jameson 1991 3] As Welsch puts it, 'ästhetisches Denken [ist] heute in besonderer Weise zum Begreifen unserer Wirklichkeit fähig,' [Welsch 1990 7] and furthermore, '[sie ist] mittlerweile zu einem Schlüsselphänomen unserer Kultur geworden. Spricht man heute vom Ästhetischen, so tut man es inmitten seiner alltäglichen Präsenz.' [Welsch 1993 7] It is in this sense that he describes his rehabilitation of Aristotles' 'Sinneslehre' as 'einen Beitrag zur Gegenwartsverständigung'. [Welsch 1987 6] Welsch's justification for our interest in the aesthetic as divorced from the artistic centres on his concept of the *Ästhetisierungsprozesse* of modern reality. These are introduced in greatest detail in Welsch's *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* (1996), but had already been discussed in *Ästhetisches Denken* (1990) and are treated again in *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (1997).

The main characteristic of postmodernity as presented in *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* is its general aestheticisation. Welsch distinguishes between two levels of aestheticisation, *Oberflächen-* and *Tiefenästhetisierung*. [Welsch 1996 10-17] The

former includes the cosmetic effects of the more or less façade-like renovation in the built environment and the presentation of everyday events such as shopping and eating as an 'experience'. The latter is concerned with two aspects; firstly, the predominance of the aesthetic mode in the field of production, and secondly, the constitution of reality through media rather than material. I will discuss each in greater detail in what follows.

The veneer-oriented beautification and commodification of the life-world seems to have two aspects, which might be categorized as quantitative and qualitative. The first refers to the saturation of the life-world with images and information, which Welsch characterizes as sensory excess. The consumer society depends on saturation advertising, which invades many aspects of our lives, from petrol pump handles to every spare inch of our computer screens – every space is saleable, every event is sponsored. Similarly, the pervasive presence of TV in our homes, almost permanently switched on, has the effect of switching us off, inducing passivity, the implications of which might be deep-seated and as yet inestimable. [See Linklater 2003] But as much as this quantitative sensory overload which Welsch focuses on, which is seen to render our contemplative faculties obsolete, this commodification operates by particular, qualitative organization of our experience that might be characterised as a 'harmonization' of our experience. Welsch sees this beautification as the exploitation only of art's 'vordergründigste Momente' [Welsch 1996 12], but how does this 'most obvious

moment' get translated into the everyday? This might be along the lines of the so-called 'perfect ratio', that is to say the understanding that there is a universal anatomical ratio which is seen to be most pleasing, governing much of our perception, from musical intervals or geometric proportions. However it works, this perfected quality generates its own kind of passivity by virtue of the object's completeness. Of course, the idea of aestheticisation as a veneer-like perfecting of our experience of the world returns to a traditional focal point of the theorization of the sensory in art, namely the idea of beauty as sensory perfection or sensory pleasure. Welsch's descriptions of reality as 'Erlebnisraum' and as an 'Unterhaltungsindustrie' are still on this terrain, his point being that the traditional ideas of harmony and perfection associated with beauty as an end in itself have precisely been hi-jacked as a pleasurable means to other (usually commercial) ends, and certainly subverted as a means of truth. As a consequence the unpleasant or at least unsettling experience of indeterminacy has been more significant in the special qualities of the aesthetic, from Kant's aesthetics of the sublime, Shklovsky's defamiliarising 'poetic', to Adorno's determinate negation of meaning, a shift I will trace in the next chapter, and discuss further with specific reference to the changing theoretical investments in the sublime in chapter three.

It would churlish to ignore the benefits that derive from the beautification of our environment, but the meditation in terms of pleasure or displeasure seems to be

quite separate from those aspects of Welsch's aestheticisation which describe the changing *nature* of reality and our knowledge of it, such as those phenomena which Welsch gathers under the idea of *Tiefästhetisierung*, namely the predominance of the aesthetic mode in the field of production and constitution of contemporary reality by media rather than material. By the former Welsch seems to be referring to the greater application of computer-aided design and manufacture, which allows simulation, as well as to new scientific and technological processes which are seen to permit influence over reality at deeper levels, such as gene-technology: 'Durch intelligente Eingriffe in ihre Mikrostruktur ist sie in jeder Faser veränderbar. Die Wirklichkeit ist – von heutiger technologischer Warte aus gesehen – aus formbarstem, leichtestem Stoff.' [Welsch 1996 15] For Welsch, the simulation has overtaken the original: 'Für die meisten sind bereits jetzt die Originale gegenüber ihren Simulationen bloß noch enttäuschend' [Welsch 1990 21], which he suggests might give rise to a nostalgia for the real. [Welsch 1990 181-2] This is echoed by Todd Gitlin's reference to the feeling of 'a perpetually vanishing present streaking by'. [Gitlin 2001 20] Below I will also read Welsch's own anaesthetic in these terms as an idea of art as 'anti-fiction', but a key question will be whether these features can be adequately analysed in terms of the sensory. Indeed, the very distinction between *Tiefe* and *Oberfläche* does seem to set limits to the validity of Welsch's thesis about a shift in the nature of our perception of reality being analysed simply as a sensory phenomenon. Moreover, it should be said that computer-

assisted methods of design are still only design, and into that moment must be imported the same constraints of reality as more traditional methods of design. The very fact that such interventions in reality require such a high level of technological mediation questions whether our experience of them, the implications they have for the life-world, can be ascribed to the realm of the sensory. One thinks of genetic engineering or nuclear physics, both of which occur at levels far below the threshold of unmediated human perception. Welsch's conception of the anaesthetic focuses precisely on the *inaccessibility* of these phenomena to unmediated senses, a point I will return to in my presentation below.

Above I have indicated that the focus on sensory perception might be identified with the conception of the aesthetic as subjective. This is not to suggest that Welsch identifies ideas of self-constitution and world-formation as key aspects of 'aesthetic' function. These issues of self-determination might be even more crucial in view of the packaged and commodified life-world which is generally understood by the term aestheticisation. But here Welsch seems to be moving from a sense of the aesthetic as sensory to the aesthetic as *constructed* and infinitely *alterable* ('modellierbar' [Welsch 1996 16]), which might suggest an idea of the subject unfolding his essential powers through his own productive activity. Welsch does discuss the implications of an aestheticised reality for the individual subject, identifying the deleterious effects of a preoccupation with

image: 'Allenthalben erleben wir ein Styling von Körper, Seele und Geist – und was die neuen Menschen sonst noch alles haben mögen (oder sich zulegen).' [Welsch 1996 18] Welsch draws ethical implications from this, in what he sees as a gradual supplanting of traditional social and ethical norms by a sense of an aesthetic imperative, whereby life must be seen to be led according to a certain standard of taste: 'In solchen Prozessen wird der *homo aestheteicus* zur neuen Leitfigur. Er ist sensibel, hedonistisch, gebildet und vor allem von erlesenem Geschmack.' [Welsch 1996 18] This concern with appearance and style does seem to be a significant characteristic of the last couple of decades. Is it only predominant in the Sunday colour supplements and style magazines, or is it in some way characteristic of a postmodern era? There are more home-makeover shows to 'choose' from, but are they in essence no different from the first of their kind forty years ago? And can the aesthetic really be said to displace the ethical as a consequence of this preoccupation with appearance and fashion, rather than, say, reading aestheticisation as itself a consequence of the erosion of traditional values, or viewing the two as only loosely related phenomena? It is probably safe to say that any putative ethical breakdown in society does not tend to come from the readership of the style magazines, and might be said for instance to have more to do with the age-old issue of financial insecurity or the newer one of drug dependency. That said, below I will discuss another aspect of Welsch's ideas on our thoroughly mediated reality (which for him also falls under the purview of aesthetics), namely the *isolating* effect which derives from the

technological mediation of our experience, discussed below in the context of his ideas on the anaesthetic, which might have significant practical implications for ethics.

It does seem appropriate to measure any sense of the opportunities for self-determination in the increasingly aestheticised world against the deleterious implications of an experience which impinges on evaluative thought. Aestheticisation for Welsch manifests itself in an over-stimulation of the senses, which Welsch traces back to Romantic-Idealist views on the human subject and its need for sensory gratification and intellectual exercise:

> Früher hatte solche Anregung kontemplationsfördernden Zweck. Kant beispielweise schrieb, die Einbildungskraft werde beim Anblick veränderlicher Gestalten – 'eines Kaminfeuers, oder eines rieselnden Baches' – in ein 'freies Spiel' der Phantasie versetzt und zu autonomen Bildungen angeregt. [Welsch 1990 14]

Contemplation for Welsch has been replaced by an empty euphoria and subsequent apathy. What was once beautiful in an engaging way now comes across as an empty perfection and veneer, exploited in a widespread process of commodification, which Welsch refers to as aestheticisation. But this failure of contemplation and its relation to processes of commodification suggest a

problem that is more than merely sensory, a complexity that is supported by Welsch's insistence on the 'dialectical' relationship between the aesthetic and anaesthetic. The *cognitive* nature of the anaesthetic, over and above its sensory aspect, will be central to my discussions below.

Moreover, Welsch's idea that we are not afforded the mental time and space for (presumably evaluative) contemplation might be less significant than the fact that we are not always given the full information to come to a complete judgment. As such, besides the implications for our capacity for reflection, the increasing de-realization that Welsch identifies [see Welsch 1990 16] might well be an aspect of the economic media complex. This might suggest that Welsch makes the mistake of focusing on the individual capacity, rather than setting his sights on the societal mechanisms which frustrate that capacity before it is given a chance. An analogous mistake is at the heart of Daniel Bell's criticism of modern culture. For Bell, the modern aestheticised realm is 'de-realised' precisely as a consequence of the demand for authentic self-experience and, in a parallel with Welsch's theoretical concerns, the subjectivism of a hyperstimulated sensitivity. [See Bell 1976 145] Bell blames the (modernist) aesthetic realm, with its characteristics of hedonism, its hatred of convention, and the notion of reality as an arena for unlimited self-realization, for the demise in standards, values and the work ethic in particular. But as Jürgen Habermas points out, this ignores the more mundane economic, social and political factors which might be more

plausible sources of alienation and disenfranchisement. [See Habermas 1985 6]

My point is that Welsch's focus on the failure of the capacity of the individual distracts from such economic or political factors, as well as leaving little room for change in the future. (Incidentally, Bell may perpetuate the problem with his proposed solution: for him cultural modernism ethical bankruptcy is exposed when general society 'adopts as its norm the life-style of a cultural mass that wants to be "emancipated" or "liberated," yet lacks any sure moral or cultural guides as to what worthwhile experiences might be.' [Bell 1976 145] But who is to act as guide in this respect? Bell's conservatism here seems to suggest a patrician attitude, though a more nuanced assessment of the balance of cost and benefit of aestheticisation might turn on the question of who is doing the stimulating and to what end.)

In Welsch's other characterisation of aestheticisation as the constitution of reality through media rather than material he does seem to acknowledge that this constitution of reality goes on *behind our backs*. Examples of this abound, from the overstatement that is an expected part of the consumer world to the infamous headline-grabbing 'spin' of public relations by which the government is seen to present policies as other than they are. The recent war against Iraq is an obvious case in point. Truth has always proverbially been the first casualty of war, but the blanket media coverage, with journalists 'embedded' in battalions of troops and the 24-hour news channels demanding a constant flow of information, has

led to an ever greater disjunction between the quantity and quality of information. One might have thought that the unprecedented centralised briefing arrangements would have guaranteed the reliability of information, but the concocted rescue mission of Private Jessica Lynch made it clear how close the regulation of media information came to propaganda. Some journalists were barred from the centralised briefings after asking difficult questions and comparing the arrangements to propaganda. More generally, in view of the uncritical response by the US media in particular, serious soul-searching has taken place afterwards about the independence of the media. Implications for the 'status of the real' are in limited respects hard to deny: the blurred line between news and speculation contributes to a situation in which events and people's perception of events lose their traditional priorities. For instance, without verification local uprisings were reported to have happened, and may have affected events. A similar mutual interpenetration of event and perception obtains in the stock market, with equally serious and real consequences. This confusion of the real and the perceived is perhaps only appropriate in a culture where the status of the real is played with daily, with 'reality TV' competing on the schedules with mock documentaries.

But is the distinction between the 'bad' and excessive signs against which we inoculate ourselves and the 'good' signs upon which we depend and which we might at the same time be attracted to so clear-cut? In his book *Media Unlimited:*

how the Torrent of Images and Sounds overwhelms our Lives, Todd Gitlin emphasises

that the products of the mass media are not only an imposition, but also a source

of pleasure, and that we are actually drawn into a 'never-ending quest for

stimulus and sensation'. [Gitlin 2001 5] What implications does this have for our

sense of identity; can we retain a sense of self that is prior to this experience?

Gitlin also cites Raymond Williams' idea of contemporary man as 'actor', and

that 'we have never as a society acted so much'. Drama, for Williams, has

become a 'habitual experience'. [Cited in Gitlin 2001 10] What Bürger might call

a 'falsche Aufhebung' of the difference between art and life, this notion of

modern man as actor suggests that man is disconnected from natural patterns of

behaviour, playing a role in which he is resigned to second-guess his actions. As

well as this artificial quality, acting suggests an excessive, demonstrative quality,

which might be taken as the active version of Welsch's seemingly passive notion

of excessive perception, against which all we can do is close ourselves off. But

how are we to know where acting starts and stops? What would be left if we all

stopped 'acting'? Similarly, the difficulty of distinguishing between 'bad',

excessive signs and those 'good' signs that are constitutive of the life-world

around us means that it is problematic, as Gitlin points out, to relegate this

aestheticisation to a mere 'accompaniment' to life that we can switch off. Rather

this 'acting' and these 'stimuli' have become a 'central experience *of* life'. [Gitlin

2001 17] The conception of this kind of experience as central to life also suggests

an alternative to Welsch's conception of the anaesthetic as an instance of

individual isolation. Gitlin sees mass media as a locus of social transaction and shared experience [see Gitlin 2001 10], presumably in the space left by the disintegration of local community in the process of urbanisation. This reiterates my point that new technologies can actually improve our ability to communicate.

The difficulty of differentiating the bad effects of mass media and technological change from its good points underlines the fact that, far from being limited to a phenomenon of sensation, this plethora of signs has deep-seated implications for what we consider to be 'reality'. Jean Baudrillard has famously conceptualised this destabilising of the status of the real in terms of the simulacrum. [See Baudrillard 1994] Perhaps a more mundane consequence of pervasive mass media is that perception and reality are so interwoven that the reality of events does not entirely precede their mediation by newspapers and television companies. A case in point is the recent war in Iraq, which was said to be as much a war of perception as much as military superiority, a war 'of hearts and minds' as much as of territory, flesh and bones. The US army drops radios along with bombs, and employs psychological divisions as well as local media outlets to convey particular messages about their motivations for engaging in conflict. Of course, it is not the first time that propaganda and perception has played a pivotal role in the unfolding of historical events. Broadcast media was important already in the Second World War, but the intensity of media coverage has certainly increased with 24 hour news and commercial pressures to achieve ever

higher ratings. In some cases this has led to a new kind of confusion in the causal priorities between events and perceptions, with reports of events, later understood never to have taken place, have been catalysts for real uprisings.

And akin to the surfeit of signs that constitute reality, and the difficulty of picking and choosing between those that are excessive and those that are necessary, fictionality might in some senses be something we cannot do without. Dieter Wellershoff, for instance, reminds us that even in allegedly factual accounts, fictionality has a role: 'Fast immer war das reale Geschehen stark überformt durch Klischees, Vorurteile, Mythen und Jargon.' [Wellershoff 1975 529-30] This is clearly not limited to visual or sensory 'perception': at very least language is also implicated in these pre-judgements and predeterminations. This reiterates the idea, contra Welsch's analytical framework, that whether we judge it as real or unreal, reality does not occur and cannot be tested at a merely sensory level, but in the varied ways that we constitute reality.

Welsch's *Anästhetik*

'Inmitten der Kommunikation bleibt er allein zuständig für das Unvermittelte, den Einschlag, den unterbrochenen Kontakt, die Dunkelphase, die Pause.' [Strauß 1999 28 (originally 1989), cited in Welsch 1990 40] With this citation from

Botho Strauß's 'Dankrede zum Georg-Büchner-Preis' Wolfgang Welsch closes his discussion of what he sees as a new category and a 'neuer Fokus' [Welsch 1990 7] for the discipline of aesthetics, and one that will be the central term for this thesis: the *anaesthetic*. In the essay 'Ästhetik und Anästhetik', published in the collection *Ästhetisches Denken* in 1990, he characterises the anaesthetic as a negation of sensory perception:

"Anästhetik" verwende ich als Gegenbegriff zu "Ästhetik". "Anästhetik" meint jeden Zustand, wo die Elementarbedingung des Ästhetischen – die Empfindungsfähigkeit – aufgehoben ist. Während die Ästhetik das Empfinden stark macht, thematisiert Anästhetik die Empfindungslosigkeit – im Sinn eines Verlusts, einer Unterbindung oder der Unmöglichkeit von Sensibilität, und auch dies auf allen Niveaus: von der physischen Stumpfheit bis zur geistigen Blindheit. Anästhetik hat es, kurz gesagt, mit der Kehrseite der Ästhetik zu tun. [Welsch 1990 10]

Contemporary references to the anaesthetic

Beyond Welsch's essay, theoretical interest in the 'anaesthetic' as a component of philosophical aesthetics has gathered pace in the last fifteen years, and with each application, the concept of the anaesthetic goes through a different permutation.

In Odo Marquard's *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica* the anaesthetic demarcates that which is not art, 'jene Wirklichkeit, die nicht Kunst ist' [Marquard 1989 11], at the same time as forewarning us, in a way that anticipates Welsch's concerns, of the increasing difficulty of distinguishing art from not-art ('warnt vor der Gefahr des Umschlags des Ästhetischen in das Anästhetische: vor der Verwandlung von Sensibilität in Unempfindlichkeit, von Kunst in Betäubung' [Marquard 1989 12]). For Marquard, as for Welsch and many other theorists of the postmodern, this is a particular danger in an increasingly aestheticised reality: 'Vor allem dann, wenn die ästhetische Kunst – kunstgrenzvergessen – die ganze Wirklichkeit in den Traum und Rausch der Kunst hineinzieht und gewissermaßen die Wirklichkeit durch Kunst ersetzt.' [Marquard 1989 12] For Donna Kerr, the anaesthetic is an obstacle to aesthetic utopia, an obstacle which arises from either 'routines and understandings which are psychologically too comfortable' or 'abrasive environmental conditions – conditions that can psychologically deafen and blind or psychologically numb or disable.' [Kerr 1978 13] The former are classified as 'conceptual' anaesthesia, whereas the latter are 'perceptual', a distinction which will be pertinent for our later discussion. Moreover, both these ideas of habits of perception and excessive sensory input will be central issues in what follows. Guy Sircello and Neil Leach employ the concept of anaesthetics with even more polemic force. The object of Sircello's invective is the 'negative' trend in the general discipline of aesthetics away from objects and experience of beauty in particular, and the 'aesthetic attitude' in general. This is supplanted by

46

an 'anaesthetic' preoccupation with philosophical issues and a consideration of the modulations of the arts as an institution. [Sircello 1991 39] Neil Leach's polemic is directed against the 'intoxicating world of the image' which he sees as characterising contemporary architectural and general cultural practice. [Leach 1999 viii] This cultural veneer is seen to erode critical awareness and precipitate mindless consumption and a defensive indifference in the face of over-stimulation. In opposition to this involuntary response, Monica Sassatelli refers to the anaesthetic as a strategy whereby art reacts against this 'banalization of the aesthetic.' [Sassatelli 1998] The parallels between these positions and Welsch's (various) investments in the anaesthetic will become apparent in what follows.

Aside from Sircello's reactionary call for aesthetics to absolve itself of its conceptual and institutional complexity and to return to a consideration of beauty,[1] it is possible to distinguish a key split between two conceptions of the anaesthetic in this brief review: firstly, the anaesthetic as *involuntary* response to the excess of aesthetic and aestheticised experience; secondly, the anaesthetic as art's *strategic* response to or thematisation of this state of affairs. This split is also evident in Welsch's work, and my central argument will be that this causes a

---

[1] Sircello's desire to close off the discipline of aesthetics from its meditations on philosophical issues is implausible, as these have been its inevitable destination as soon as it became a discussion of limits and universals in Kant's writings on the sublime and the beautiful.

problematic tension within his formulations on the anaesthetic. But Sircello's reactionary idea of aesthetics' return to the theorisation of the beautiful, and Kerr's aesthetic utopia, also plays an essential part in Welsch's theorisation of the anaesthetic. Welsch also makes a connection between classical art's preoccupation with the beautiful and harmonious – which he associates with a claim to be able to present everything [see Welsch 1990 40] – with the characteristically postmodern aestheticisation effects, against which the anaesthetic is a reaction. This issue of total presentation might be said to return to the discussion of the sublime as a meditation on the limits of human control. But in contrast to the idea of the anaesthetic artwork as a sublime-type exploration of the limits of human control, there is a reading of this kind of imperceptibility as a Kantian return to the self.

For Welsch the anaesthetic occurs where conditions of the aesthetic, that is the predominance or pre-eminence of the sensory, have been overturned: 'die Empfindungslosigkeit – im Sinn eines Verlusts, einer Unterbindung oder der Unmöglichkeit von Sensibilität'. [Welsch 1990 10] This includes various and quite disparate instances where sensory experience is absent: 'Anästhetik meint *jeden Zustand*, wo die Elementarbedingung des Ästhetischen – die Empfindungsfähigkeit – aufgehoben ist.' [Welsch 1990 10, my emphasis] As such this notion of art as non-perception is only one of several ideas that are referred to by the term, which causes problems for Welsch's ideas, but is also

crucial to the idea of the dialectical and cognitive nature of the aesthetic which I find so fruitful. In Welsch's view, the relationship between the aesthetic and the anaesthetic cannot be understood in terms of simple opposition, as Welsch explains in the essay in which he sets out his conception of the anaesthetic, 'Ästhetik und Anästhetik', published in the collection *Ästhetisches Denken* (1990):

> Anästhetik hat es, kurz gesagt, mit der Kehrseite der Ästhetik zu tun. [...] Daher ist Anästhetik von drei anderen, benachbarten Positionen zu unterscheiden. Sie ist erstens keine Anti-Ästhetik: Sie verwirft die Dimension des Ästhetischen nicht pauschal. Zweitens geht es ihr auch nicht um das Un-Ästhetische – also das nach ästhetischen Kriterien als negativ Qualifizierte. Und drittens hat sie es auch nicht einfachhin mit Nicht-Ästhetischem zu tun, also mit solchem, was keinerlei Bezug zu ästhetischen Fragen hätte. Unter dem Titel des Anästhetischen geht es vielmehr um das grenzgängerische Doppel der Ästhetik selbst. [Welsch 1990 10-11]

The idea of this 'grenzgängerische Doppel' is opaque, but derives from two crucial features of Welsch's anaesthetic: firstly, that the anaesthetic is in several ways *dialectically* related to the aesthetic; secondly, that he uses the term in a number of different and possibly conflicting ways. Welsch asserts that the anaesthetic comes from within the aesthetic: 'Meine Hauptthese ist, daß die

Anästhetik der Ästhetik nicht von außen zustößt, sondern aus ihrem Inneren kommt.' [Welsch 1990 31] This dialectic is central to Welsch's claim as to the particular *contemporary* relevance of this dialectic of aesthetic and anaesthetic. Welsch distinguishes between three epochs during last millennium (or so), *Metaphysik, Moderne* and *Postmoderne*, each of which has its own characteristic relation to the aesthetic: 'Metaphysik setzt auf Anästhetik, die Moderne auf Ästhetik, die Gegenwart sucht nach einer komplexeren Figur, eben der von Ästhetik und Anästhetik.' [Welsch 1990 24] Welsch sees the postmodern era as characterised by 'die Verkoppelung, auf das Wechselspiel, auf die Verflechtung von Ästhetik und Anästhetik'. [Welsch 1990 30] Such a generalising demarcation of epochal tendencies is of course a little crude, but it is interesting to draw the parallel between a pre-modern (and largely religious) fascination with the imperceptible and an imperceptibility that is allegedly characteristic for the technologically altered postmodern era. Is unquestioning belief really the same as technological incomprehension? Any differences are somewhat glossed over in Welsch's formulations; firstly, insofar as he treats (or *wants* to treat) everything at the level of the sensory; and secondly, by virtue of the fact that, in line with his conviction of the flexible nature of his terms, Welsch does not always explain exactly what he means with each particular application of anaesthetic or aesthetic. As with his treatment of aesthetics, at the outset of his essay 'Ästhetik und Anästhetik' Welsch precisely rejects a unitary idea of anaesthetics with one central meaning:

Ich meine dies auch als Entschuldigung oder Warnung. Ich werde nicht *einen* Begriff von Ästhetik und *einen* von Anästhetik aufstellen, sondern ich werde in der Folge zeigen, mit welch unterschiedlichen Facetten und Anwendungsflächen man in diesem Phänomenfeld rechnen muß – wenn man sachgerecht operieren will. [Welsch 1990 9]

Broadly I think one can discern four main uses of the anaesthetic: firstly, it is understood as an inevitable response to an aestheticised reality saturated with sounds and images; secondly, and at a slightly different categorical level, non-perception is understood to be a necessary precondition to perception at all; thirdly, the imperceptible is understood as a characteristic aspect of our technologically altered (and alterable) reality; and fourthly, it is conceptualised as a possible response to or representation of these phenomena in art. I will present each of these ideas in greater detail, before suggesting strengths and weaknesses in Welsch's formulations.

Anaesthetics as individual isolation and inoculation

Welsch characterises contemporary reality as one in which new technologies, and mass media in particular, mediate the individual's relationship to the

51

external world through images, generating a 'mediale Bildwelt'. [Welsch 1990 15]

In one sense this is akin to Jean Baudrillard's simulated world of the 'hyperreal'

[Baudrillard 1983 2], where the status of the 'real' has become fraught with

questions of simulation and fictionality. For Welsch, this is a further aspect of

the aestheticisation of reality which results in the 'Ununterscheidbarwerden von

Realität und Fiktion' [Welsch 1994 28], though the slippage from the idea of the

aesthetic as sensory to the idea of the aesthetic as somehow fictional is apparent

again here. This aestheticisation through a world of images precipites an

experience of the anaesthetic, insofar as the technologically mediated world

results in a 'telekommunikative Totalausrüstung', whereby the individual is

isolated from real contact with other people, precipitating the 'Umformung des

Menschen zur Monade im Sinn eines sowohl bildervollen wie fensterlosen

Individuums'. [Welsch 1990 16] Anticipated in the passage called 'Isolierung

durch Verkehr' in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*

[Horkheimer & Adorno 1969 233], this is seen to have 'drastische

Anästhetisierungspotentiale' [Welsch 1990 15], such as the effect of 'soziale

Desensibilisierung' [Welsch 1990 16], as well as a reduction of such categories as

empathy and solidarity, ethics and politics, to illusions fostered by the television

screen. On the other hand, the benefits of such a technologically mediated world

are seen to include individual self-sufficiency and the idea, updated from 1950s

science fiction, that tele-tourism might fulfil our desire to experience new vistas

whilst preventing damage to the environment. [Welsch 1990 20-21] As far as the

former 'soziale Desensibilierung' is concerned, recent experience has indicated that the implications of modern technology for social action is far from exclusively negative. The world-wide-web and mobile phone technology have fostered, at least in some respects, better, not worse, communication, and have certainly had an impact on the functioning of the public sphere, if one thinks of recent political protests that have been mobilised in part at least through new technology. This indicates the need to differentiate between the technology and how it is used. That said this kind of technological mediation does seem to bring about a centralisation of communication, the shaping of our world according to the editorial decisions of CNN or the BBC, which necessarily *homogenises* our experience of the world. This raises ideological considerations, which I have suggested Welsch's ideas on the sensory are at difficulties to accommodate, though this process seems to be being implicitly referred to when Welsch talks about a mediation of reality by images.

Some ideological concern is arguably also implicit in the idea of aestheticisation as beautification and veneer. Once again, the consequence for Welsch, as for Donna Kerr above [see Kerr 1978 13], is one of anaesthesia. In his view, aestheticisation '[schlägt] in eine gigantische Anästhetisierung um' [Welsch 1990 13], because we are desensitized by the over-designedness of everything. This motivates Welsch's assertion that 'Ästhetisierung [...] erfolgt *als* Anästhetisierung'. [Welsch 1990 14] The excess or overload of sensory

experience has the double effect of a narcotic, which dulls our senses as it stimulates them: 'Berauschung' and 'Betäubung' [Welsch 1990 14] In this way an excess of sensory experience is seen to precipitate an absence of the same: 'Anästhetik reicht vom Nullphänomen bis zu einem Hyperphänomen des Ästhetischen.' [Welsch 1990 11] The parallel is apparent between this interplay of extremes and Weiskel's comments on the sublime, which he notes to have both a sublime as *excess* and sublime as *lack*, which he labels 'metonymical' and a 'metaphorical' respectively. [See Weiskel 1976 28-31] It is in this inoculation that the dialectical relationship between the aesthetic and anaesthetic is most apparent, as Welsch notes: 'Je mehr Ästhetik desto mehr Anästhetik.' [Welsch 1990 16] (So does Welsch think that we are anaesthetised by good design as well as bad?)

Anaesthetics as cognitive or cultural necessity

At a significantly different categorical level, a further understanding of the anaesthetic in Welsch's formulations suggests the opposite priority, namely that aesthesis (perception) does not precipitate, but is itself dependent on anaesthesis:

> Das bedeutet freilich, daß dem Wahrnehmen selbst eine Art Anästhetik eingeschrieben ist. [...] Und diese interne Anästhetik ist eine notwendige Bedingung der externen Effizienz des Wahrnehmens. [Welsch 1990 34]

Welsch makes clear this different order of priority, stating that there is '[k]ein *aisthesis* ohne *anaisthesis*'. [Welsch 1990 32] This version of the anaesthetic understood as a precondition of perception – which I will refer to it as the *cognitive* anaesthetic – will be important for my argument in what follows, where I will highlight the role of expectation and habit in a more contextualised understanding of the dialectic of aesthetic and anaesthetic. It could equally be called *perceptual* anaesthetics, but in my view the idea of cognition implies a more complex and conscious process than perception, although of course, the point is that perception itself is a complex process, involving unconscious exclusion as well as conscious inclusion. This idea of more or less complex preconditions to and interconnections between perception and cognition is not new. The same idea was already at the heart of Spinoza's dictum 'omnis determinatio est negatio'[2] and Schlegel's 'eine "Lücke im Dasein", die – selbst unsichtbar – dem Sichtbaren seine Bestimmtheit widerfahren lasse.' [Both cited in Frank 1980 47] It is at the heart of hermeneutical tradition, and inhabits Hans Georg Gadamer's ideas of 'Vorverständnis' and 'Vormeinung' [Gadamer 1990 273], and his rehabilitation of the idea of 'Vorurteil', which in his view had been systematically discredited by the Aufklärung. [Gadamer 1990 276] These concepts are central to his critique of Kant's 'Lehre von der reinen Wahrnehmung', in which Gadamer

exposes the idea of 'interesseloses Anschauen' by introducing the concept of intention into perception; 'Verweilendes Schauen und Vernehmen ist nicht einfach Sehen des reinen Anblicks, sondern bleibt selbst ein Auffassen *als...*' [Gadamer 1990 96, my italics] This returns again to the struggle between Aristotle's sensitivity towards the 'konkrete und besondere Situation' and Plato's 'leere Allgemeinheit' [Gadamer 1990 317], the philosophical tension at the heart of Welsch's reclamation of the original terrain of the aesthetic. The suspicion remains however, in view of Welsch's characterisation of the postmodern as plural and of the sublime aesthetic as a moment of immanence, that Welsch's formulations are marked by hermeneutical insensitivity. After all, rather than the drastic concept of 'negation' is it not more sensible to talk about 'selection', a moreover selection which takes place in the context not of sheer indeterminacy but of all sorts of intersecting cultural norms and expectation, as Hans Robert Jauß points out:

Was Niklas Luhmann über die Funktion der Negativität im sinnkonstituierenden Systemen dargelegt hat erweckt den Anschein, als ob alles Erleben oder Handlen seine unumgängliche Selektivität gegenüber einer Weltkomplexität von unstrukturierter, noch ganz unbestimmter Offenheit zu bewähren habe. [Jauß 1975 506]

---

[2] Though this sentence is only ascribed to Spinoza, for example by Hegel in his

This complexity exposes the binary simplicity of any treatment of the an/aesthetic in terms of perception as switched on or off. The point is that sensory perception already includes what Welsch calls 'höherstufige, inhaltlich aufgeladene Wahrnehmungsformen' [Welsch 1990 34], the social and cultural conditioning which precedes even the most basic perception:

Bilder von Mann und Frau, von Geschlechtichkeit und idealem Zusammenleben, die uns in der familiären und sozialen Kindheit eingesenkt wurden, unser Wahrnehmen und Verhalten fortan imprägnieren und bestimmen.' [Welsch 1990 34]

These cultural predispositions of perception, now called anaesthetic, seem to be related to the slippage in Welsch's focus from the aesthetic as sensory to the aesthetic as somehow fictional, insofar as the aestheticised reality understood as fictional and constructed depends on excluding certain versions of reality. But presumably the recognition of these pervasive 'kulturelle Grundbilder' casts doubt on any claims that something is objectively and positively true beyond its cultural reception. As such, this 'fictional' element of reality is scarcely avoidable, as indicated by my references to Wellershoff above. (This should not

---

Wissenschaft der Logik. [See Hübener 1975 500]

distract from the fact that some departures from the truth are more problematic than others.)

Moreover, for Welsch this identification of the anaesthetic, a necessary blindness, as a basis of cultural conditioning means that the anaesthetic becomes not only a prerequisite of perception at all, but also acquires a potentially hegemonic status: 'So werden Anästhetik und Absolutismus zum Paar.' [Welsch 1990 34] This 'Absolutismus' seems to refer to the idea that cultural norms can become so rigid that they preclude any alternative view. But the tension is apparent between the conception of the anaesthetic as a hermeneutical *corrective* to objectivism and the anaesthetic as a possible *source* of 'closedness' to other viewpoints. The two ideas in themselves are perfectly valid, but the question is whether it is problematic that one term ends up referring to two seemingly diametrically opposed ideas. This contradiction is perhaps resolved if one considers that these positions are not diametrically opposed, but merely points on a spectrum: in absolutism context becomes absolutely determining, and blind to the contextualised and limited nature of its own perception. At the outset I likened this idea of the anaesthetic as unthematised cultural or cognitive preconditions to perception to Donna Kerr's idea of 'routines and understandings which are psychologically too comfortable'. [Kerr 78 13] This might provide a link between the anaesthetic and Shklovsky's idea of modernist art as operating through a disturbing of comfortable reception. But these more complex 'inhaltlich

aufgeladene [...] kulturelle Grundbilder' [Welsch 1990 34] do not belong to the same category of *sine qua non* precondition as the non-perception discussed above. Rather they seem to mark the point at which Welsch's theorisation moves from basic perception to more complex issues of ideology. The idea of the anaesthetic as unconscious selection causes obvious problems for Welsch's notion of art as an experience of the imperceptible. Quite apart from the question of capacity of critique of such minimalist art, it raises the question of whether it is plausible to speak of such non-perception *at all*. This cognitive anaesthetic, as well as indicating the dependence of any perception on unthematised or unconscious – that is to say, deeper – components of the cognitive process which accompanies perception, suggests that sheer non-perception is impossible. To paraphrase Welsch, 'Kein Anaisthesis ohne aisthesis'. This is aside from the fact that art which is said to defy perception, in order to register at all, must involve some kind of perception and arguably a moment of cognitive processing. It is doubly problematic that these latent elements of perception are also central to alternative type of art that Welsch proposes, in which they are the problem, or at least the material, that is to be exposed. In chapter four I will ask whether this awareness of the anaesthetic as cognitive or cultural norms and expectations comes back to haunt Welsch's idea of art-anaesthetics as an arrest of perception.

The anaesthetic refers not only to the latent preconditions of cognitive and cultural perception, but also those situations in which sensory perception is *arrested*. '"Anästhetik" meint jeden Zustand, wo die Elementarbedingung des Ästhetischen – die Empfindungsfähigkeit - aufgehoben ist.' [Welsch 1990 10] There seem to be two aspects of this phenomenon. Firstly, there simply *are* aspects of reality which are beyond our naked perception, such as Welsch's example of the radiation from the fall-out of the nuclear reactor disaster at Chernobyl in 1986. [Welsch 1990 18] Writing in the 1960s, Robert Martin Adams identifies a similar preoccupation with the imperceptible; 'Experiments which have captured the imagination of the time deal with weightlessness, silence, interruption of the sense-continuum.' [Adams 1966 3][3] The only example Welsch gives is cancer-inducing radiation, but there are significant recent scientific developments that support Welsch's ideas of a reality beyond the limits of sensation. Another example might be the invisible or non-luminous 'dark matter' that has challenged the so-called 'Standard Model' of physics since its existence was *inferred* some twenty five years ago [see Baugh & Frenck 1999], and

---

[3] It is worth noting that Adams, like Welsch, identifies the 19th century as one preoccupied with the physical (in Welsch's terms, 'aesthetic'). They differ, however, insofar as Adams also locates the interest in the anaesthetic (in his

60

of which a significant proportion of the universe (circa 90%) has recently proposed to comprise of. The presence of these imperceptible particles is as yet only *inferred*, on the basis that conventional, known sources of matter cannot account for the ways in which stars and gasses move. As far as technological change is concerned, arguably the limits of representation are reached some time before the splitting of the atom, for instance in the scientific discoveries which lead to germ warfare in the First World War. Indeed, the limits of the imaginable may already have been reached in the scale of death in trench warfare in the First World War, to say nothing of the epoch-changing Holocaust which sets the Second World War apart. And global complexity and the feeling that events are out of human control had already been experienced in the financial crises of the twenties, and is also attested (and sometimes celebrated) in modernist ideas and literature of the time, for instance in Futurism or Expressionism. The point is that the technological changes which Welsch sees as bringing about the imperceptibility (and non-representability) of contemporary events and existence might equally be classified as a quintessentially modern phenomenon, begging the perennial question of when exactly the postmodern era may be said to have begun. It might in fact be argued that, in some respects, the centralisation of global capital into a relatively small number of conglomerates makes the flows of wealth and the concentration of power more transparent. Of course, it is

---

terms the void or the infinite) in the literature of that century, whereas Welsch

questionable whether the awareness of this 'imperceptible' level at which reality or experience might be said to be determined makes any *difference* to that reality. After all, gravity has always been 'invisible', but this characteristic does not undermine our experience of it as a crucial element in reality in anyway. A key distinction here might be whether we are talking about imperceptible 'interventions' in a technologically altered reality, which splitting the atom might certainly be said to be, rather than merely those imperceptible categories or forces, like gravity, which we are used to and indeed depend on. Precisely such intervention is proposed by the new pursuit of nanotechnology, whereby matter is engineered at a level far below the range of an optical microscope, let alone the naked eye. This might indeed be seen to have far-going implications for the relationship between sensory experience and reality, and it is with such phenomena in mind that Welsch dismisses our sensory faculties as 'Agenten des Falschen'. [Welsch 1990 19]

Anaesthetics and the return to art: three concepts of art

The second aspect of the anaesthetic is the conscious strategy of problematising the possibility of perception, which marks the point at which art returns to centre stage in Welsch's formulations. [Welsch 1990 36] This return to art as intentional resistance to perception may be contextualised in terms of Welsch's conception of

---

sees the anaesthetic as a specifically recent, postmodern, phenomenon.

two directions in art. On the one hand there is the 'idealistische und romantische Tradition' which privileges the 'Ästhetischwerden' as 'Vollendung des Menschen und der Gesellschaft'. [Welsch 1990 20] The world has become increasingly aestheticised, in the sense of both beautification and sensory overload, in what Welsch describes as a 'moderner Programm ästhetischer Akkumulation' [Welsch 1990 38] and a 'moderne Utopie einer total-ästhetischen Kultur'. [Welsch 1990 38] On the other hand, art in twentieth century has been characterised by a suspicion of the aesthetic, and has aimed to defy and cut through this cultural accumulation:

> Am Ende ist eine anästhetische Grundhaltung – gegen all die schönen und etablierten Angebote des Ästhetischen – die Methode der Wahl zur Aufdeckung der Anästhetik alles Ästhetischen. Deshalb hat die Kunst dieses Jahrhunderts, der das Ästhetische als solches suspekt geworden war und die den ästhetischen Gewohnheiten – den alltäglichen der Sinne wie den durch Kunsttradition eingeübten – mißtraute, radikale Schnitte gesetzt. [Welsch 1990 37]

Welsch's account of the anaesthetic as a mode of art, as a consequence of his multiple and intersecting conceptions of the aesthetic and anaesthetic, seems to contain several distinct ideas of art, which I will categorise in what follows as the *sublime, cognitive* and *pragmatic* modes of the anaesthetic. Characterizing the

contemporary accumulation of the aesthetic as *sensory* excess allows Welsch to conceive of art's oppositional force in terms of an arrest of sensory perception:

> [Künstler] haben „unsichtbare Objekte" geschaffen, Werke der Unbemächtigbarkeit. Ich denke etwa an Walter de Marias Vertikalen Erdkilometer – ein exemplarisches Werk des Entzugs; oder an Werke der Minimal art – an diese Maxima von Anästhetik bei minimalem ästhetischen Aufwand. [Welsch 1990 40]

Walter de Maria's 'Vertical Earth Kilometer' is the only example Welsch gives, but since the 60s art has toyed with the evacuation of content from works of art, such as John Baldessari's 'no ideas have entered this work' (1966-8), a 'blank' canvas on which is written 'EVERYTHING IS PURGED FROM THIS PAINTING BUT ART, NO IDEAS HAVE ENTERED THIS WORK' [see Lynton 1989 332], or Joseph Kosuth's 'Mounted Definitions of *Nothing*' (1966). [See Lynton 1989 327] But Welsch's 'minimaler ästhetischer Aufwand', which I have labeled the *sublime* anaesthetic, suggests itself as a version of minimalist art which has gone one step beyond the evacuation of meaning from behind art leaving just a surface, to the absence (or at least problematisation) *even of surface*. Other examples in the sphere of sculpture might include Michelangelo Pistoletto's 'Cube' (1966, 'Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972' exhibition, Tate Modern, London, 31st May – 19th August, 2001), whose composition from six inward-facing mirrors makes the artwork at

once infinite and inaccessible, or Paul Ramirez Jonas' more recent 'Man on the Moon' (1991, 'Speed – Visions of an Accelerated Age' exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 11th September – 22nd November, 1998), in which the artist has transferred a recording of the moon landing via phonograph onto a number of wax cylinders. To attempt to access the sound from their now three-dimensional physical and visual form would gouge an obliterating groove into the wax. The works of James Turrell, the pioneering installation artist, operate similarly at the limits of perception. His 'space division constructions' and the 'ganzfeld' pieces, on which he has worked since the late 1960s, explore the qualities of light and the limits of visual perception. Both present undifferentiated fields of light whose dimensions and qualities are hard to assess, seemingly with the aim of promoting uncertainty and reflection. There has also been considerable recent interest in questions of the representation of the invisible or imperceptible, as exemplified by three exhibitions in the UK in 2001.[4] The imperceptible has also been deployed in the field of music, as in John Cage's infamous '4'33"', which, in a notable parallel with Welsch's idea of art as a resistance to everyday aestheticisation, Cage saw as a response to canned 'musak'. [See Solomon 1998] (With respect to both Turrell and Cage it is worth noting the parallel between art

---

[4] 'Signatures of the Invisible', Atlantis Gallery, London, 2-29 March 2001, 'Exhibition to be Reconstructed in your Head', Custard Gallery, Birmingham, April 2001, 'Nothing', Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, April 2001.

and science: both Turrell and Cage have used anechoic – or sensory deprivation –

chambers in their research, and the 'ganzfelds' were originally used as

experimental tools in perceptual psychology in the 1930s.) Silence had already

been seen as defying what George Steiner in his 'Language and Silence' essay

calls 'the clamour of verbal inflation' [Steiner 1969 67], akin to Welsch's

aestheticisation. And far from being a brief flowering of minimalist abstraction

which began and ended in the 1950s, there is considerable current interest in

Cage's work. A rendition of his even more extreme 'Organ 2/ASLSP', a 639-

year-long piece of music for the organ with spans of months and years between

chords, was begun in September 2001 in Halberstadt, Germany, with the first

note only to be heard after 18 months. [See Connolly 2001] A more recent variant

of this 'silent' music is 'Ellipsis', by Matt Rogalsky, in which he has collected the

silences removed from radio after new technology was introduced to strip out

the silences between presenters words, compacting talk time and leaving more

space for ad breaks. [See Poole 2001] Reminiscent of Heinrich Böll's Dr. Murke,

the common ground between this conception of silence as a refuge from auditory

excess and Welsch's formulations on the anaesthetic is apparent. Most recently,

visitors to the Edinburgh Festival 2003 were invited to pay £3 for the privilege of

seeing a piece with 'no actors or script, no set and no sound, where absolutely

nothing happens'. [Guardian 12.6.03] This show, by the Theatre of Relativity,

was described as 'complete nothingness, the antidote to the noisiest festival on

Earth'. This somewhat cavalier treatment of such diverse types of art in different

media might be problematic, but I think there are good reasons for drawing parallels in the way they explore the nature of the imperceptible. Moreover, if this approach can be both comparative and aware of the differences between these media it might be preferable to the tendency in art theory to privilege for instance 'auditive' culture as a means of overturning the hegemony of visual culture. [See Welsch 1996 231ff] (When I come to treat in greater detail actual instances of art which might be said to explore this limit of perception my focus will be on one type of art, namely drama.)

As well as this idea of an arrest of perception, Welsch's references to 'etablierte Angebote des Ästhetischen' [Welsch 1990 37] and the processes of 'Aufdeckung der Anästhetik alles Ästhetischen' [Welsch 1990 37] indicate that Welsch is not just talking about an absence of perception here, nor about the surface effects of the sensory. Rather there is a slippage to an understanding of the aesthetic as referring to conventions, whether in terms of the form or perception, that which is somehow *latent* and established. It is this latent cultural accumulation, which coincides with what I have labelled the cultural anaesthetic above, that certain examples of twentieth century art are understood to expose or break open: 'Am ehesten wohl über Bilderfahrung und Bildarbeit, die sich daran macht, diese vorgängigen Prägungen zu exponieren und ihre Anästhetik zu durchbrechen.' [Welsch 1990 35] I have designated this concept of art the *cognitive* anaesthetic, not in the normal sense of a generation of judgments and propositions, but in

view of its capacity for exposing the hitherto unnoticed and uncognized elements of perception. In this respect it is notable that John Cage, whose '4'33"' I have mentioned above as an instance of the sublime anaesthetic, is not interested in silence *per se*, but precisely the impossibility of silence: 'try as we may to make a silence, we cannot.' [Cage 1961 8] Silence is always disturbed by ambient noise, such as a heart beat or a cough, on which our attention is focussed. [See Cage 1961 22-3][5] This brings out the defamiliarising effect of silence, as Cage says, 'we had to conceive of silence in order to open our ears'. [Quoted in Revill 1992 164] Welsch perceives this function of art in 'alternative Wahrnehmungsformen – von Primitiven, Kindern, psychisch Kranken'. [Welsch 1990 36] With this, Welsch reverts to a (paradoxically) conventional idea of modernist transgressive art, examples of which might include Artaud's 'Theatre of the Cruelty', absurd theatre or the painting of the Fauves. Such art, it must be said, tends more towards an ecstatic mode, and thus seems hard to square with Welsch essentially minimalist anaesthetic. Indeed, in contrast to the everyday experience of veneer and excess, the use of the term 'aestheticisation' to refer to *accumulation within* art

---

[5] The common ground is apparent between Cage's focus on ambient, ostensibly *non-artistic* sounds and Welsch's project of dismantling, via the focus on perception, aesthetic's exclusive focus on the institution of art. For Cage, as David Revill notes, the silent piece, as the limit of representation, represents 'the ultimate elision of art and life'. [Revill 1992 165]

seems to be at variance with the idea of aestheticisation as a transferring of art to non-art phenomena.

Thirdly, anaesthetic art seems to make a claim to *truth* or *authenticity*, and moreover one that seems to have two distinct variants. Welsch is not explicit about this truth-function and the implications of his ideas are not entirely clear, but I have already noted the idea of the anaesthetic's particular suitability for *conveying the essence* of contemporary technologically altered reality, characterised for Welsch by the pervasive *imperceptibility* which has rendered our sensory faculties as 'Agenten des Falschen'. [Welsch 1990 19] Simple correspondence has been rendered anachronistic by contemporary industrial and technological phenomena, along with any faith in our ability to represent reality in all its facets: '"Wir können alles zeigen, alles vergegenwärtigen." – so lautete die implizite Botschaft. Dieses Macht-Phantasma aber zerstiebt heute angesichts der Realität der Industriegesellschaft.' [Welsch 1990 40] The echo of Brecht's concerns about the representability of the modern world is apparent, namely that the simple reproduction of the surface of reality – 'einfache "Wiedergabe der Realität"' [Brecht 1967 171] – has ceased to be informative about what matters. But Welsch's response could scarcely be more different to Brecht's: in Welsch's view the imperceptible elements in art seem to function as a *preparation* for the 'real' world, a kind of neo-impressionism that suggests a 'pragmatic' rather than 'critical' function for art, as much a reflection on our mode of perception as an

attempt to dismantle it. Of course, the *imperceptible* reality whose effect this art allegedly replicates is not the same as the *aestheticised* reality which this kind of silent art might be said to resist.

The second idea of truth implicit in Welsch's formulations returns to this issue of aestheticised reality, which as well as sensory and beautified, is characterised by its 'fiktionale Natur'. [Welsch 1990 7] This fictionality of the aestheticised – 'aesthetic' not only by virtue of its sensory appeal but also its 'constructedness' – implies, by antithesis, a second truth-claim for anaesthetic art. Welsch refers to a 'Kritik der Ästhetisierung im Namen der Wahrheit' [Welsch 1996 44], and indeed the 'unsichtbare Objekte' [Welsch 1990 40] of his sublime anaesthetic seem to promise a kind of truth by virtue of their inaccessibility and their moment of resistance to the veneer, excess and fictionality of aestheticisation in the same vein as Adorno's reference to art as an 'Negation des Unwahren'. [Adorno 1978 167] This idea of a seemingly 'negative' art resisting the excessive experience of life is not new, as Hans Robert Jauß notes: 'Asketische Kunst und Ästhetik der Negativität gewinnen in diesem Kontext das einsame Pathos ihrer Legitimation aus dem Gegensatz zur Konsumentenkunst der modernen Massenmedien.' [Jauß 1975 273]

The effaced – not to say compromised – status of the real has been a recurrent concern for art in the twentieth century, which has also attempted to recoup the

'real' and the 'present' in some way. The alleged *de-realisation* of reality, in a world where information is often generated according to vested interest and where impact has largely supplanted any other scale of reality, has motivated many conceptions of art as the refuge of the real. [See for example Žižek 1989 3] This 'real' is seen to inhere particularly in phenomena or experiences that defy perception, cognition, or representation (to mind or in art), and more specifically in that which defies the conventional symbolic structures and patterns of reality. But is it paradoxical, in view of Daniel Bell's misgivings about the aesthetic realm in general, to propose that this kind of art can do anything about this eliding of fact and fiction, of truth and interpretation? And the idea that the 'real' is generated simply by defying the conventional symbolic structures of reality arguably reinforces the conventionality of modernist art, but if defying convention becomes the only criterion of art's 'reality' the question arises as to whether art's authenticity is thereby reduced what Richard Sheppard refers to as a 'series of exercises in ingenuity'. [Sheppard 2000 102] More prosaically there is a sense in which the 'institution' of art, with its relative autonomy to present things in different lights, might be valued by virtue of its capacity for avoiding the pressures of vested interest and method that determine the outcomes of other modes of information. In this respect theatrical presentation of such episodes in public life as the enquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the Hutton Report, or the legalities of Guantanamo Bay by Nicolas Kent at the Tricycle Theatre in London offer a new and interesting departure for drama.

Moreover the meditation on the real and fictional seems also to be another point at which Welsch's ideas are at variance with his proposal to read aesthetics in terms of the sensory. (That said I have already referred to Welsch's idea of the invasion of knowledge by the aesthetic, which he calls the 'aesthetic-fictional' aspect of the aesthetic, which is seen to introduce an anti-foundationalist or in his terms 'horizontal' model of truth. [See for instance Welsch 1996 81-2] But this is hardly likely to offer a critique of fictionality, rather raise it to the status of the only truth that is available.) I have referred above to the difficulty, in Welsch's fairly disparate terms, of picking and choosing between those elements of the aestheticised world that are excessive or in some way injurious and those that are necessary. A more critically viable way of distinguishing between good and bad might start with the recognition that sensory excess in and of itself is not the main problem, but rather the deployment of such phenomena as instances of rationalisation and ideological control or homogenisation of experience. The intentional organization of our experience, referred above in terms of a passivity-engendering 'harmonization', whether by politicians or marketing executives, suggests that more than mere sensory excess, there are certain ideologies working at the heart of aestheticisation. Heidegger's remarks on the controlled nature of scientific experiment, in which results are always known *in advance* [see Heidegger 1950 78], might expand Welsch's ideas on aestheticisation here. (Heidegger's ideas might be traced back to Kant's notion of practical knowledge

as 'teleological' or aim-oriented.) Control is implicit in Welsch's ideas on

aesthetics, for instance in his understanding of Adorno's aesthetics as a sublime

aesthetics which precipitates a communion with nature beyond a relationship of

exploitation and control. I will discuss this in detail in chapter three. Related to

this is Welsch's conception of art's turn against its traditional claim of being able

to present everything and control its material, characteristics might be identified

with the classical veneration the artwork's formal unity or harmony between the

elements of the aesthetic object which are central to ideas of the beautiful. In

light of these preoccupations it is interesting that Welsch does not conceptualise

aestheticisation in similar terms, such as the removal of uncertainty from our

experience. In chapter five I will suggest a reading of art that operates at the

limits of perception in these terms of intentionality and control.

Finally, a more sophisticated theorisation of aestheticisation might also

accommodate an element of critique which seems to be lacking from Welsch's

formulations. In my view this might exploit Welsch's reflections on the more

complex processes of perception, a point I will take up in greater detail in

chapter four. Whilst I will suggest that the negation of perception and the refusal

of representation deploy art as a kind of consolatory guarantee in the face of a

devalued aesthetic, a more critical response to this issue of control is offered in

the use of extremes of perception to generate space and scope for freedom from

habits and expectations, in an attempt to unpick the processes of cultural

accumulation and control.

Chapter 2 · The sensory and the self: Wolfgang Welsch's precursors in philosophical aesthetics from Baumgarten to Shklovsky

Wolfgang Welsch's characterisation of late twentieth century reality as *aestheticised* depicts reality as invaded by characteristics traditionally associated with the aesthetic realm, such as harmony and beauty, a focus on the surface or appearance of things, and an emphasis on the sensory or sensual aspect of experience. Welsch is not only interested in describing contemporary society, but in rehabilitating this traditional terrain of pre-Kantian aesthetics, namely the study of sense perception – defined as an analogue to rational, concept-oriented knowledge – as particularly suitable for describing how we experience and understand the world today. In doing so, he opposes himself to a strong philosophical tradition which has often relegated the sensory-aesthetic to a philosophically uninteresting codicil to the realm of the rational as the means of explaining the possibility of knowledge of the world. In classical philosophy the 'merely subjective' appearance is contrasted with 'objective' reality – even if this latter is possibly unobtainable or only attainable as an 'idea'. At the threshold of modern philosophy, Leibniz and Wolff would dismiss the sensible as passive, inferior, and even as deceptive and in some way deleterious to rationally and logically established knowledge. In Kant's early work the limited and dependent nature of sensory experience – that which is given to the mind as distinct from

that which can be known – is compared unfavourably with the self-active and potentially free and infinite capacity of rationality and understanding.

By the same token, aesthetics itself – understood as a science of taste, a study of the way we judge what is beautiful – was also relegated to a subsidiary role in serious philosophy, at least according to Kant writing before the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. In his *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schonen und Erhabenen* [see Kant 1913, Crawford 1974 19], and even in his first *Kritik* Kant famously asserted the futility of ascribing any transcendental value to judgments of taste, due to the subjective and empirical nature of such judgments. [See Höffe 1983 70] (Even if the depreciatory assessment by Welsch and others of the postmodern world as 'aestheticised' is not measured against such a transcendental philosophical index, their residue is felt in such notions as the cynical 'veneer' at the expense of substance, and the excess of perceptual stimuli which is seen to deny space or time for contemplation.)

As such, as well as broadening aesthetics from its restricted status as theorising about art, this turn to the sensory is a philosophical manœuvre that returns to one of philosophy's fundamental debates, the tension between the idealist or rationalist position that says that meaning is imposed on matter from the mind or some other pre-existing, over-arching and necessary schema, and the materialist or empiricist position, which asserts the qualities of matter as in some

way preceding or exceeding this organization. Aristotle initiates this discussion by asserting the determining force of the individuated sensory experience in the face of the otherwise dominant Platonic notion of the real as inhering in a meaning-giving but ultimately abstracted world of forms. Below I will trace how this articulation of the sensory or sensible as somehow distinct and significant in various ways is taken up again at the outset of thinking of 'aesthetics' as a science in its own right.

The underlying questions raised by this rehabilitation of aesthetics as a science of the sensory are whether it makes sense to speak of an experience that is in some way 'only sensory'. Of course, this depends on what counts as sensory? Are we talking about J.L Austin's 'material things' and 'moderate-sized specimens of dry goods' here, or does the sensory inevitably open the door to broader questions of consciousness? Is it possible to register sense data without already ordering them in some way? Does this not encounter a paradox akin to the problem of 'particularity'? On the one hand, the particular seems to be constituted by its ability to generate an individual experience in the face of general rules and norms; on the other hand, this individual experience must at some point depend on an instant of comparison within a general schema. Does this type of sensory experience somehow *evade* rational organization, and if so in what way and for how long? The idea of the sensory particular evading rational organization gives rise to a more modern sense in which the purely sensory experience is thought to

be *ideologically immune*, that is to say offering a kind of ideological 'free-space', somehow evading habitual associations and political investments. Alternatively this valorisation of the sensory might rest on the notion of the mind as somehow invaded and overrun by alien qualities rationality and logic. In the same vein, the sensory has been linked to the experience of the 'indeterminate', though a crucial distinction in what follows will be between the idea of this indeterminacy as somehow constitutive of other, determinate experience and alternatively as in some way destabilizing such experience.

Alexander Baumgarten

Aesthetics and the sensory: confusion and perfection

A crucial figure in the rehabilitation of the sensory and the recasting of aesthetics is of course Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, sometimes referred to as the namer if not the founder of the modern discipline of aesthetics. [See Schweizer 1983 vii] In the second edition of his *Metaphysica* (1742), before the publication of the *Aesthetica* (1750), Baumgarten conceptualises 'aesthetic science' as a study of sensory knowledge, 'sinnliche Erkenntnis'. This idea of an alternative type of knowledge is far from homogeneous, and in the *Aesthetica* in 1750 Baumgarten famously refers to aesthetics as a 'Theorie der freien Künste, als untere Erkenntnislehre, als Kunst des schönen Denkens und als Kunst des der Vernunft

analogen Denkens'. [Baumgarten 1983 79]   This composite character of this definition of aesthetics, with its references to thinking, knowledge and the inferiority of the senses, indicates that Baumgarten still has a foot firmly in the rationalist camp. Indeed the same elements of his formulations might lie behind the many criticisms of Baumgarten as having in fact distracted from a separate and inclusive study of sense-perception, evidence by subsequent aesthetics' focus on beauty, taste and art. [See Dixon 1995, Wessell 1972, Croce 1922] This long-standing debate about the merit of Baumgarten's legacy probably motivates Eugenio de Caro's reference to Francesco Piselli as the 'rightful rediscoverer of Baumgarten' [see de Caro 1996], in an article which aims to rehabilitate Baumgarten's legacy. This does indicate that Welsch is not alone in returning to Baumgarten's contribution to aesthetics, as de Caro cites the plethora of articles and books on Baumgarten in Italian in the last fifteen years. But of course Baumgarten was never really lost, as Ernst Bergmann's *Die Begründung der deutschen Ästhetik durch Alex. Gottlieb Baumgarten und Georg Friedrich Meier* (1911), Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophie der Aufklärung* (1932) and even Leonard Wessell's more recent essay 'Alexander Baumgarten's Contribution to the Development of Aesthetics' (1972) attest. And as far as the issues in the debate about his contribution to a separate and coherent science of aesthetics are concerned, whilst his introduction of questions of thinking, knowledge and perfection to the aesthetic ensures Baumgarten's vilification, it also guarantees the longevity of his contribution, as will become clear below.

In my introduction I drew attention to the central significance within Kant's aesthetics of the so-called indeterminate or 'aesthetic' idea, whereby phenomena which challenge the cognitive faculties are seen as a means of accessing the infinite and super-sensory. This indeterminacy had already been identified by Baumgarten as the key characteristic of the sub-discipline of aesthetics some forty years before Kant's third *Kritik*, in his distinction between representations to the mind that are distinct and lead to logical knowledge and those that are confused and lead to aesthetic knowledge. This distinction between confused and distinct representation comes from Leibniz, but what is new is the valorisation of the latter, as Hans Rudolf Schweizer emphasises:

Vor allem aber gewinnt der Begriff der 'Dunkelheit' und 'der dunklen Vorstellungen' (perceptiones obscurae) – in Übereinstimmung mit der Lehre von den 'petites perceptions' bei Leibniz – ausdrücklich eine positive Bedeutung. [Schweizer 1983 xiii]

But more significant than mere 'preference' for confused representations, whereas for Leibniz these are on a continuum with logical knowledge and need clarification by logical categories in order to attain the status of knowledge, for Baumgarten, confused representations are of a different order to their conceptual cousins, and are not reducible by logical analysis to conceptual knowledge. It is

in this sense that Leonard Wessell asserts that for its object the aesthetic does not look to abstract conceptual categories but the 'individual in its immediacy as it is grasped in sensate experience'. [See Wessell 1972 339] But does this immediacy make sense? I have asked above how plausible it is to ask how plausible such a treatment of our sheerly sensory experience is. Can it plausibly be said to remain at a sensory level, without being immediately taken up by cognitive, rational processes?

There are (at least) two ways of looking at the significance of Baumgarten's sensory in this respect. On the one hand, Baumgarten's focus on the sensory is less problematic if one takes his formulations on *aisthesis* as an attempt to complete the rationalist project by investigating what he classifies as the lower cognitive faculties of feeling, taste and imagination [see Berghahn 1988 44-45], as such not necessarily incompatible with the ultimately rational basis to knowledge. [See Schweizer 1983 xi] Andrew Bowie asserts that the suggestion that the sensuous image might be primary before being subsumed into generalized abstractions comes only with J. G. Hamann. [See Bowie 1990 6] For Ursula Franke, Baumgarten's hierarchy of knowledge places sensory knowledge in an inferior and complementary position to that of conceptual and rational knowledge:

Die ästhetische Wahrheit ist eine Wahrheit des Analogons der Vernunft und als solche dem Verstand unzugänglich, so daß Baumgarten die ästhetische Wahrheit als Wahrheit der Kunst in der Bedeutung eines Komplementes der intellektuellen Erkenntnis auffassen kann. [Franke 1972 87]

According to this reading the aims and concerns of Baumgarten's philosophical project are crucially different to Kant's later transcendental philosophy. The latter is concerned to achieve a self-legitimating basis for knowledge. For Baumgarten, any legitimacy is still divinely guaranteed, and it is within the security of that legitimate order Baumgarten is able to valorise sensuous particularity. [See Bowie 2003a 5-6] It is in this sense that Schweizer associates Baumgarten's framework with Leibniz's conception of a universal rational order as the stable basis of knowledge. [See Schweizer 1983 xii] I have already referred to the idea of these references to knowledge and logic as a throwback to the rationalism in which he was schooled. In this respect the fact that his formulations seem to subscribe to a notion of logic, what Schweizer calls 'logisch im weiteren Sinne' [Schweizer 1983 xvi], might be taken to suggest that any resistance the sensory might offer to the unifying logic of rational organisation must be at best a fleeting, *pre-rational* moment.

On the other hand, Baumgarten's ideas are in several respects clearly about more than the rudimentary nature of pre-rational sensory of experience. Firstly, his meditations are not about any old sensory experience or pleasure but focus on the *perfection* of sensory cognition. Paul Guyer distinguishes between Wolff's interest in 'sensitive cognition of perfection' and Baumgarten's focus on the 'perfection of sensitive cognition'. For Guyer this separates Baumgarten's account of the potential pleasures in the use of our perceptual powers from Leibniz's metaphysics of perfection. [See Guyer 2003] This also underlines the danger of Schweizer's focus on confusion, noted above, insofar as it neglects perhaps the crucial step that Baumgarten takes towards what Howard Caygill calls 'an integrated doctrine of sensibility'. [Caygill 2003 168] This is better understood via this idea of sensory perfection, which reintroduces a notion of *organisation* into the aesthetic faculties. This allows Kant to conceptualise the aesthetic representation as distinct and not simply pre-logical, with crucial consequences for his notion of synthetic a priori judgment. [See Caygill 2003 167] Secondly, the fact that this sensory ideal is exemplified in the main by poetry in Baumgarten raises the question of how something as verbal as poetry offers specifically sensory knowledge already suggests that Baumgarten is referring to something more complex than the merely sensory. (This is also an internal problem in Baumgarten's formulations, but might indicate that his formulations anticipate, albeit obscurely the modernist renewal of language some century and a half later. Along these lines I will discuss Viktor Shklovsky's idea of language

as in some respects 'sensory' below.) Thirdly, the very fact that Baumgarten refers to sensory *knowledge,* and the paradoxical nature of this formulation, points to Baumgarten's understanding of the aesthetic as the 'Kunst des der Vernunft analogen Denkens', (originally 'ars analogi rationis') [Baumgarten 1983 79] – an analogue to rational knowledge. This begs the difficult question of where so-called sensory knowledge ends and where the rational, logical knowledge begins, and exactly what their relationship is.

Welsch himself insists that the sensory already contains an inherent reflexivity:

Schon von der einfachsten sinnlichen Wahrnehmung gilt, daß reflexive Strukturen in sie eingebaut sind, und zumal bei emphatischer Wahrnehmung ist offenkundig, daß sie von sich aus Reflexionen ausstoßen und einer solchen Fortsetzung auch bedürfen. [Welsch 1990 54]

This reflexivity makes room for the (albeit unconscious) complexity of perception whereby we are predisposed to notice certain things and not others. (It seems appropriate to refer to this complexity as 'reflexivity' in view of the fact that there is a certain circularity in so far as what we perceive is inevitably to some extent dependent on what we are already familiar with.) Welsch's own remarks on *aisthesis* do indeed hint at this more than merely physical-sensory element in perception: 'Ich möchte Ästhetik genereller als "Aisthetik" verstehen: als

Thematisierung von Wahrnehmung "aller Art", *sinnhaften ebenso wie geistigen,* alltäglichen wie sublimen, lebensweltlichen wie künstlerischen.' [Welsch 1990 9-10, my emphasis] This returns to the unconscious cultural factors discussed in chapter one under the concept of the cognitive anaesthetic. But once we have introduced the idea of an inherent reflexivity and hidden depth to sensory perception it becomes a moot point whether we are talking about physical sensation or the more cerebral processes of cognition. The insertion of this latter might detract from certain aspects of Welsch's *aisthesis*-project, such as its philosophical preference for the sensory over the rational, or the identification of the sensory moment as somehow 'immanent'. In other words, this idea that there is no such thing as simple or unmediated sensation highlights the difficulty of attributing an *essentially* political force to the sensory or the corporeal. Indeed the very idea that the sensory is invested with political force indicates that it is already ideologically invested. (Of course, as far as Welsch is concerned, there is a crucial sense in which his understanding of the sensory departs from Baumgarten's valorisation of the sensory. At least as much as it is a point of resistance, in Welsch's formulations it seems that the sensory is a crucial *weak point* in our faculties, and one which needs to be protected both by our cognitive facility for blocking out excessive experience and by recourse to a special mode of art.)

Perhaps most crucially divergent from the rationalist framework is the sense in which Welsch's ideas on the sensory mount a specific *challenge* to the rational and logical order. This is evident in Baumgarten's concern to rescue the specificity of sensory experience from the abstraction of conceptual thought, as indicated in the famous question: 'Was bedeutet Abstraktion anderes als einen Verlust?' (Originally 'Quid enim est abstractio, si iactura non est'). [Baumgarten cited in Schweizer 1983 xi] And whilst the alleged absence of an ultimate quest for legitimation and grounding in Baumgarten's work might suggest it belongs to an earlier generation, the fact that the indeterminacy in Baumgarten's work has none of the transcendental implications that Kant will later draw also inadvertently makes his formulations in other ways more modern than Kant's (or perhaps more accurately more *anti-modern*). He makes clear, for instance, what is at stake in the repressive intellectual process. Elements in Baumgarten's formulations are as sharply anti-rationalist as anything offered by the Romantics, such as his focus on the characteristically *indeterminate* 'confused' perceptual experience, which inspires what Andrew Bowie refers to as 'the attention to art as the counterpart of modern forms of rationalisation'. [Bowie 2003 10]

In its more extreme variants this precipitates a valorisation of the sensory motivated by an idea of the invasion of the mind by logic and rationality.

Baumgarten's disciple Georg-Friedrich Meier, for instance, preferred to see the different nature of sensible knowledge as a reason for *rejecting* rather than expanding logic, relegating rational thought to mere rhetoric, and elevating aesthetics to the sensible figuration of the abstract. [See Caygill 2003 172] This is a crucial trajectory for aesthetics after Baumgarten, of course, followed by Adorno and others, in which logic is seen as restrictive and predetermined, with the aesthetic preferred as the best way past its constraints. More than mere compensation, the aesthetic becomes the domain in which is addressed, in Bowie's words, the 'failure of the rationalist traditions [...] to do justice to the immediacy of the individual's sensuous relationship to the world'. [Bowie 2003 5]

The idea of aesthetics as a response to the perceived failure of the rationalist explanation of the world has a clear epistemological aspect. I have referred already to Husserl's idea of the self-evidence of the individual's 'Körpererfahrung', and the epistemological questions concerning the determination of knowledge *in toto* are given critical impetus by Baumgarten's valorisation of the sensory and particular. Nietzsche in turn refers to thoughts as always emptier and simpler than sensations: 'Gedanken. – Gedanken sind die Schatten unserer Empfindungen, – immer dunkler, leerer, einfacher, als diese.' [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 180] This is not the empiricism which for the essayist William Hazlitt was a particular trait of the English imagination, which

'constantly clings to the concrete, and has a *purchase* upon matter' [See Paulin 1998 30], but reflects Nietzsche's understanding of metaphysical questions about ultimate meaning as an invented second order, as something 'added on'. [See Nietzsche 1973 V 2 45, 75] Husserl's return to sensory experience is somewhat less cynical, seemingly aiming to mend the thread broken in our abstract scientific mode of knowledge. [See Husserl 1954 49] Martin Heidegger hovers between the two, calling for a return to the materiality of the world, and it is specifically in art's sensory nature that we can access a kind of grounding beyond metaphysical fabrications:

In dem, was der Gesicht-, Gehör- und Tastsinn beibringen, in den Empfindungen des Farbigen, Tönenden, Rauhen, Harten rücken uns die Dinge, ganz wörtlich genommen, auf den Leib. Das Ding ist das *aistheton*, das in den Sinnen der Sinnlichkeit durch Empfindungen Vernehmbare. [Heidegger 1977 10]

But this is not a valorisation of the world as alien object, for such a positivist separation of subject and object is precisely Heidegger's notion of 'Verstehen' aims to militate against: 'Welt ist nie ein Gegenstand, der vor uns steht und angeschaut werden kann.' [Heidegger 1950 30] For Heidegger the artwork is a crucial locus of what he calls the 'unvermittelte Begegnenlassen der Dinge'. [Heidegger 1950 59]   As well as refuting positivism or crude empiricism,

Heidegger's concern here is that the instrumentalising subject must also be resisted as that which enacts the process of abstraction. And if culture is also implicated in this abstraction, at least some art can exist in the space between the material 'Erde' and the cultural 'Welt'. This is couched in essentially Kantian terms of autonomy from any specific purpose: whereas material normally 'verschwindet in der Dienstlichkeit', art 'läßt, indem es eine Welt aufstellt, den Stoff nicht verschwinden, sondern allererst hervorkommen und zwar im Offenen der Welt des Werkes'. [Heidegger 1977 32] In comparable terms Adorno valorises the 'Sinnliche' as a locus of non-identity: 'das Verpsrechen einer Wirklichkeit des Gehalts, die zum Wahrheitsgehalt ihn macht, haftet am Sinnlichen' [Adorno 1970 412], albeit that he also characterises art's sensory element as the inevitably material or sensuous manifestation of the 'Idea'. Likewise, for Susan Buck-Morss, in her discussion of Walter Benjamin's formulations on phantasmagoria in the *Passagenwerk*, the valorisation of sensory knowledge suggests determination by the *object*, in view of the fact that the sensory is located *in the world* as much as in the individual subject: 'The circuit from sense-perception to motor response begins in the world.' [Buck-Morss 1992 12] In this way the pre-psychological nature of sensory experience is seen precisely to remove its determination from a constitutive subject. Buck-Morss even uses the same terminology as Welsch, reading the 'anaesthetic' as a similar return to the etymological beginnings of modern aesthetics.

But the disparate nature of these valorisations of a somehow sensory mode of knowledge – containing elements of empiricism, radical critiques of rationalism and metaphysics as well as notions of the sensory as enigmatic real or manifestation of the 'Idea' – return to the tension identified in my introductory paragraphs between the aesthetic as a point at which reason, in its interaction with the sensible, might be seen to *ground* itself and the idea of the aesthetic as a *marginal* counterweight to an overly rational view of our knowledge of the world. In my view, and importantly for my thesis, this valorisation of the particular and indistinct introduces a tension between the *marginal* quality which haunts aesthetics and the *transcendental* claims that the aesthetic experience is somehow central to legitimating and 'grounding' knowledge. The pertinent thing about Baumgarten's own formulations in this regard is that his ideas for aesthetics as an alternative type of knowledge inevitably part company with his essentially rationalist metaphysics [see Wessell 1972 337], and derive in fact from his ideas on *empirical* (as distinct from rational) psychology. It is in this respect that Wessell writes: 'Aesthetics is not interested in the distinct causes of sensation, etc. It remains with the phenomenon.' [Wessell 1972 338] Ernst Cassirer had already put it in similar terms in his glowing appraisal of Baumgarten in his 1932 work *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*. There he refers to the object of the new science of aesthetics as *'perfectio phaenomenon'*, an object marked by its 'immanence': 'Er gibt ihr [Sinnlichkeit] eine neue Vollkommenheit;

aber diese Vollkommenheit ist freilich daran gebunden, daß sie sich als rein immanenten Vorzug erkennt und versteht.' [Cassirer 1932 457]

The immanence that Cassirer refers to here derives from the paradox of the idea of a 'science' of aesthetics. Baumgarten's analysis has to offer an understanding of the scope and nature of aesthetics as a different kind of knowledge that is more than mere empiricism, if it is to offer a 'scientific' basis for aesthetics. [See Cassirer 1932 455-7] And the quality that aesthetics describes is not accessible to science's usual method of logical or rational analysis, and is even threatened by it:

> Sie versenkt sich in die sinnliche Erscheinung und sie überläßt sich ihr, ohne den Versuch zu machen, von ihr selbst zu etwas völlig-Anderem, zu den „Gründen" der Erscheinung weiterzugehen. Denn dieser Fortgang in die Gründe würde den ästhetischen Gehalt der Erscheinung nicht erklären, sondern vernichten. [Cassirer 1932 461]

This tension is echoed in Welsch's own formulations by the notion of *Aisthesiologie*, which sees the study of the sensory as turning this kind of experience into ontology or epistemology: contrast this for instance with Caygill's view of a distinct category of sensible knowledge as crucial to Kant's

synthetic a priori, though Caygill does make a similar point that this comes out of Kant's lectures on anthropology, not aesthetics or metaphysics:

> In order to invent an integrated doctrine of sensibility it was necessary for Kant to find a space for reflection free from the limits imposed by these disciplines. Such space was opened in the lecture course on anthropology that Kant offered for the first time in 1772-3. [Caygill 2003 164]

But understanding the conditions of possibility of thinking about a new kind of (basis for) knowledge does not get us closer to an understanding of what might constitute this 'aesthetic organisation'. Wessell usefully refers to some ways in which the specifically aesthetic type of organization of experience might be said to happen, focussing on such classical qualities as thematic unity and a consonance of form and content. This is entirely consistent with the artistic ideals of the period, but I will ask in what follows whether the legacy of Baumgarten's ideas on the sensory does not lead more seamlessly to a modernist aesthetic, in which the sovereignty of the rational and spontaneous mind is challenged and its mechanisms are overturned.

Immanuel Kant

As my discussions above indicate, the crucial figure in articulating the more 'philosophical' implications of the 'aesthetic' experience is Immanuel Kant. Kant's views on aesthetics are of interest here in the general sense that their terms, such as the crucial notion of aesthetic autonomy, have been seminal for thinking about art and aesthetics in the subsequent two hundred years, but also because they introduce certain ideas, such as the 'transcendent', to which Welsch's ideas owe a specific debt. It was the same schism between rationalism and empiricism that characterises Baumgarten's work that Kant was trying to overcome, and from an initial position of viewing the aesthetic as a limited, empirical study of sensory perception and subjective taste in the first *Kritik*, Kant comes to see the significance of the aesthetic for his transcendental project by the time of his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). Of course it cannot be taken for granted that Kant means the same thing by aesthetic as Baumgarten. I have already indicated that Kant is more interested in the indeterminate nature of the sensible experience than Baumgarten's sensory knowledge or perfection. Emblematic of this is Kant's crucial notion of the 'ästhetische Idee', which 'für sich allein so viel zu denken veranlaßt, als sich niemals in einem bestimmten Begriff zusammenfassen läßt'. [Kant 1963 246] For Kant this non-conceptual thinking gives access to the pure realm of ideas, and ultimately underlines the sovereignty of rationality. And this relationship of the aesthetic to rationality, which it was

Kant's ultimate aim to vindicate, is perhaps the most significant divergence from Baumgarten's position. Some reference to the sensuous nature of art is retained in Kant's text, this is only insofar as the task of the poet is to try and make the super-sensory domain of pure ideas, the invisible rational faculties – the 'Vernunftideen von unsichtbaren Wesen' – into sensuous images. [Kant 1963 247] These 'Vernunftideen' are one aspect of what Kant classifies as the 'transcendent', which is to say those objects which we cannot present *intuitively*, that we can never experience with our senses. This idea of principles which pass beyond the limits of experience, which Howard Caygill characterizes as advancing 'beyond the pursuit of understanding' [Caygill 1995 399], will be a touchstone for my further discussion of Welsch's anaesthetic in chapter four, and the closely related terms of Kant's sublime will be discussed in the next chapter.

Aesthetics and the universal

Distinct from this contentless and problematic experience of indeterminacy, another *Schwerpunkt* for Kant's discussions of the aesthetic is the *universality* of its judgments. Returning to Baumgarten's focus on sensory perfection, this occurs in Kant's discussion of beauty, which for Kant points a 'Gemeinsinn' or *'sens communis'* in us. [Kant 1963 123] And whilst Kant was not the first to attempt to overcome the antinomy in judgements of taste between subjective pleasure in art and the objective validity of aesthetic judgements, as Klaus Berghahn opines, his

third *Kritik* offered the most convincing elaboration of the allegedly binding nature of aesthetic judgements. [See Berghahn 1988 35] For Kant, taste only *seems* to be a question of subjective pleasure: 'Die Allgemeinheit des Wohlgefallens wird in einem Geschmacksurteile nur als subjektiv vorgestellt.' [Kant 1963 84] This universality is not to be interpreted as a precursor of the context-dependent and empirical consensus theory of truth contained in Stanley Fish's notion of the 'communal decision as to what will count as literature'. [Fish 1980 10] Precisely the point of Kant's judgement is that it is more binding than the normative poetics of the seventeenth century. [See Schulte-Sasse 1988 131] More than merely local agreement, this universal judgement for Kant is necessarily and a prioristically true. 'Das Geschmacksurteil beruht auf Grunden a priori.' [Kant 1963 96] As Andrew Bowie states, 'Kant's argument requires that the synthesis of the data of sensuous experience should entail a necessity which cannot be dismissed without contradicting the incontrovertible fact of self-consciousness.' [Bowie 1990 16] Famously for Kant we cannot directly, sensuously experience the 'Ding an sich', and whilst this might suggest that our view of the world is always determined subjectively, Kant's formulations precisely aim to escape from this subjectivism. His insight is to suggest that the conditions for perceiving the objective world are contained within our transcendental capacities and faculties. As Andrew Bowie puts it: '[t]he world as an object of truth is located in the structure of the consciousness we have of it'. [Bowie 1990 16]

But this necessity appears paradoxical insofar as for Kant this *binding* and *necessary* a priori is precisely the capacity within us for *freedom*, the capacity of our super-sensory faculties for autonomy: 'eine übersinnlichen Beschaffenheit des Subjekts [...], nämlich die der Freiheit'. [Kant 1963 97] Does this elision of necessity and freedom not propose a universality that is ultimately coercive? Kant argues to the contrary: for him the experience of beauty, whether in nature or in art, is an exemplary instance where the distinction between subjective perception and objective and universal reality is bridged. But this 'freedom from the particular' is not unproblematic. Firstly, there is a sense in which this freedom is presumably untestable. How can we tell that we are acting freely? How can we know that we are 'thinking for ourselves', exercising free use of our reason? This begs the question of the difficult relationship between Kant's transcendental philosophy and empirical reality. If Kant's philosophy describes the basis for the possibility of knowing at all, what relationship does it have to life as we live it? If his aim is to vindicate the authority of free reason, how does the contextualised and particular nature of our thinking impact on this? How are we to take account of issues of ideology and all the constraints on 'free' thinking? Does the aim of uncovering the 'conditions of possibility' propel Kant's aesthetics towards a kind of neo-Platonism, inherent in the view that what counts as real is determined beyond the particular, material and contextualised nature of experience? Does what makes experience possible become the sole criterion for judging the value of that experience?

Donald Crawford distinguishes between two different emphases in Kant's conception of the relationship between the aesthetic experience and the 'Ding an sich', which could suggest how Kant might evade this charge of Platonism. On the one hand, the 'expressive'[1] reading considers the aesthetic mode to be the only way of seeing beyond the located and subjective *Schein* and perceiving the objective and necessary *Sein*, emphasising the persistence of this realm of the *Sein*, in spite of its ordinary unattainability. [See Crawford 1974 92ff.] On the other hand, in the 'formalist' reading of Kant, against the pre-determined and teleological faculty of non-aesthetic knowledge Kant posits what Bürger refers to as a *'rein hypothetisch* erschlossenes Erkenntnisvermögen höherer Art'. [Bürger 1983 18, my emphasis,] This purely 'hypothetical' nature of the realm of objective knowledge need not be taken as a form of neo-Platonism, but might emphasize that such knowledge, as with the idea of universal agreement about taste, is not necessarily obtainable in fact, but that it is merely a 'regulative' [see

---

[1] Terminological difficulties are apparent here, as Crawford's nomenclature is clearly not compatible with other understandings of these terms. Compare for example M.H.Abrams influential monograph *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.* [See Abrams 1953 3-29] Similarly, Charles Taylor distinguishes between 'expressive' and 'designative' versions of meaning, whereby designative generation of meaning corresponds to Crawford's expressive truth, and expressive meaning refers to an essentially Romantic conception of meaning as manifestly present. [See Taylor 1985 218]

Kant 1963 388] or 'formal' idea. [See also Bowie 2003b 76] As such, the subjective

and merely particular is evaded, but crucially without proposing a prior realm of

Sein to which our knowledge must correspond but always fails to measure up. It

also suggests that any 'usefulness' that the aesthetic realm might have for us

must rest in the fact that it indicates a faculty that we are already reliant on, as

opposed to any unobtainable realm or object such as the 'Ding an Sich'. But if

universal agreement is only a (n albeit a priori) regulative principle – Kant's 'rein

hypothetisch' – must we also admit that this freedom from such particular

motivations can also never actually be achieved? Is the tension between freedom

and universality dispelled merely by claiming that that which is universal counts

as free? Does this replicate an irresolvable tension between our transcendental

capacities and their empirical restriction?

Interested disinterest

The tension between transcendental capacity and its empirical exercise is doubly

problematic in view of the fact that Kant's reading of the aesthetic experience is

not entirely without ideological pre-investment. For him the universality of

judgment of the beautiful is vouchsafed by its disinterested character, which

allows Kant to distinguish between the location of aesthetic experience in the

individual psychology, mere 'unmittelbare Wirkung' [Kant 1963 22], and the

determination of aesthetic judgment beyond that subjective realm. Kant

distinguishes the universal perception of the aesthetic object, which is an experience of beauty, from the individual's experience of that which is pleasurable or good. Whilst our experience of pleasure in the object is seen to have implications for our personal 'Zustand', the former event must take place under conditions of our complete indifference.

Whilst it is hard to overestimate its significance for later aesthetics, centring on the concept of aesthetic autonomy, it is apparent that Kant's positing of subjective disinterest might have its own particular, strategic *interest*. Certainly Adorno hints at the *ethical* motivation in his suggestion that Kant's disinterest conceals a 'wildeste Interesse', an interest moreover that saves it from mere indifference of which Hegel had accused it. [Adorno 1970 24] In Martha Woodmansee's sociological reading, idealist aesthetics' refutation of normative poetics gets its impetus from the rejection of the art that takes the upper class as its milieu by the growing reading middle class in eighteenth century Germany. [See Woodmansee 1994 11-33] Alternatively, Woodmansee points to Kant's Pietism as a possible theological origin of the idea of denial of self which is central to his concept of disinterest. [See Woodmansee 1994 19] This denial of the self is a central focus of Hegel's critique of Kant's 'contentless' understanding of ethics. His solution to the problem of ethical grounding seems to dissolve the ethical problem (by removing any possible content) rather than allowing it to stand as a problem. Emblematic in this regard is Hegel's discussion of Stoicism

in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, who is seen to return to the security of the 'reine Bewegung des Denkens'. [Hegel 1841 148] In Hegel's view, the Stoic's retreat into the self-reflexive mind only gains freedom from oppression at the price of closing the individual off from the 'vielfache sich in sich unterscheidende Ausbreitung, Vereinzelung, und Verwickelung' [Hegel 1841 147] of the outside world. In Hegel's dialectical terms this is philosophically unsustainable, and the implication for Kant's ethics is that it is presumably the self and its interest that generates problems for ethics: lose self-interested motivation, and the ethics are easy. The evacuation of the individual seems particularly problematic because it contradicts the constitutive role of free subjective imagination in Kant's attempt to ground knowledge. For Hegel such empty formalism is 'cognitively meaningless' [Kaminsky 1962 9], with the Kantian subject rendered indeterminate to the point of uselessness, distilled to what Adorno calls 'absolute Form'. [Adorno 1970 23]

The emptiness also seems to correspond to what Isaiah Berlin in his 'Two Concepts of Liberty' classifies as a 'negative' idea of freedom, which is characterised as the '"negative" goal of warding off interference'. [Berlin 1958 12] Berlin perhaps forces the point with the idea that this characterisation of freedom 'is not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy' insofar as it is conceivable that 'a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom'. [Berlin 1958 14] In this relation Berlin also refers to Stoicism,

which is taken as an apotheosis of this individual libertarian position: 'Ascetic self-denial may be a source of integrity and spiritual strength, but it is difficult to see how it can be called an enlargement of liberty.' [See Berlin 1958 20, 24] Whilst Berlin registers that the Stoic position needs to be understood in the context of the adverse prevailing political climate during the fall of the independent democratic city states, he also asserts that such a 'strategic retreat to an inner citadel' is an attitude of which 'every form of autonomy [...] has in it some element'. [Berlin 1958 20, 21] And whilst it would be tenuous to suggest any direct analogy between then and our current political climate, it is fair to say that quietism may be encouraged by other means, such as that articulated in the idea of the world as aestheticised. Certainly Welsch's notion of anaesthetic art might enact such a gesture of self-containment, and he also refers to the Stoic as the 'perfekter Anästhet'. [Welsch 1990 26] The Stoic's quietist position is discussed to similar ends by Julien de Lamettrie, Nietzsche and Herbert Marcuse, each of whom will be significant interlocutors in the course of my discussions. The point of these thinkers is often to emphasise that the exclusive focus on the self ignores or distracts from other more social elements which impinge on our freedom or ability to act ethically. It is no better turning inwards and ignoring external determinants, removing precisely that which for Hegel offers resistance to subjective determination and generates ethical problems, the concrete and real conditions of the object world. [See Kaminsky 1962 8] As opposed to Kant's notion of freedom as an inner light, Berlin again refers to 'positive' freedom as

'only intelligible in terms of the social network in which I am [...] an element'. [Berlin 1958 37, 40] Certainly it seems that the inevitable predetermination of our experience by cultural (ideological) norms and expectations suggests that freedom is always constrained by particular predisposition or context, which suggests that Kant's notion of disinterest is implausible anyway. As such, Berlin writes of freedom as self-realization within constraints, referring to the musician for whom 'the playing of music is not obedience to external laws, a compulsion and a barrier to liberty, but a free, unimpeded exercise'. [Berlin 1958 26] This idea of 'unimpeded exercise' might be overstated, bearing in mind the constraints within which musical performance occurs. (The same is probably true of any performance that is similarly 'guided' by a text which must in some way be reproduced.) But this sense of 'freedom within constraint' sounds very much like Kant's sublime, in which the freedom of our mental faculties springs from the unfreedom of various extreme experiences. But by contrast my concern will be to sketch out a more contextual or marginal idea of freedom in the face of convention and expectation.

Early Romantic thought

Reflexivity and the sensory particular

Kant's bad faith with the particular and the subjective was the focus of the early Romantics and others' criticism of his attempts to ground truth. As well as its unspoken interest, for the Romantics, Kant's disinterest was problematic insofar as they were doubtful that one could go from the reflection within and on the self to a positive foundation of truth outside. Access to knowledge starts and ends with the subject. Turning back on Kant's problematic step towards the objective basis of knowledge, Romantic thought reasserts the validity of the subjective and particular basis of knowledge. This revalorisation of the particular was not only a philosophical rejection of the possibility of attaining objective knowledge, free of its particular location, but already a turn against the process of exchange, as Jochen Schulte-Sasse notes,

> [i]n their assessment of what art and being an artist should mean in an age of commodity exchange, they were led to a valorization of the individual characteristics (*das Charakteristische*) of artists and artworks: the characteristic is that which remains identical with itself. [Schulte-Sasse 1988 122]

As noted above, Baumgarten's focus on the different nature of sensory experience already contained the seed of the challenge to Kant's later project of grounding self-conscious knowledge and ethics as rational and necessary. This however rested less on an assertion of the particularity of sensory experience,

and more on the conviction as to the different nature of its ordering. Sensory knowledge is granted relative autonomy, with indeterminate 'aesthetic' impressions not necessarily being converted into determinate cognitive judgments, but providing a different kind of knowledge.

But then, contrary to general assumptions, the early Romantic theorists do not see intuition as direct or immediate, but mediated by endlessly postponed chain of reflection. [See Bowie 1997 210] As Benjamin's discussion of Fichte and the early Romantics in the essay *Begriff der Kunstkritik* makes clear, even seemingly immediate and positive intuition is itself a reflection: 'Sein und Setzung hebt das romantische Denken in der Reflexion auf.' [Benjamin 1974 29] Moreover, it is not merely aesthetic perception, but all cognitive moments that are but links in the infinite process of reflection: 'Für sie war diese Deutung alles Wirklichen, also auch der Kunst'. [Benjamin 1974 62][2] The corollary of this thoroughgoing reflexivity is the process of infinite reflection which Romantic theory characterises as the search for grounds.   This confirms the significance of thinking on aesthetics as an articulation of the problems of grounding any

---

[2] Arguably this chain of reflection is already implicit in Kant's view of the subjective constitution of reality. Terry Eagleton refers to Kant's 'Copernican revolution' as amounting to the self-reflexivity of epistemology as a whole. 'This is to say that the self-referentiality of Kant's ethical subject or work of art has now been projected into the very structure of cognitive argument, which is always curled up on its own tail.' [Eagleton 1990 131]

epistemology. Charles Taylor's more recent distinction between 'expressive' truth and 'designative' truth suggests that, even in a thoroughly scientific age, epistemology has still not absolved itself of this aesthetic kernel. [See Taylor 1985 218]

Of course, Romanticism's more consistent treatment of the reflexivity at the heart of the subjective determination of knowledge and the concomitant endless reflection of groundless grounds for knowledge does not absolve the Romantics of Kant's search for an ultimate ground. As far as the Romantics are concerned, this subjective reflection itself guarantees truth's absoluteness, precisely by avoiding the objectivity that Kant's system demands. As Terry Eagleton writes,

> [i]f the founding postulate of a system is to be absolute, then it must escape all objectification and so cannot be in any way determinate. For such a principle to be determinate would imply some ground beyond which it could be determined, thus ruining its absolute status at a stroke. [Eagleton 1990 127]

The contrast is clear that grounding for the Romantics means avoiding objectivity, whereas for Kant it entails avoiding precisely the subjective interference which is seen by the Romantics to offer a ground. But to read this as a position of extreme subjectivism, pursuing an absolute ground to the exclusion

of any contact with the outside world (a tendency which Hegel's return to the object will aim to correct), ignores the significant role that the external world does play in the Romantics' conception of the process of reflection. For Schelling, the limiting function of the external world is constitutive in our own self-consciousness. [See Bowie 2003 109-10, Schelling I/3 390]

Kant, Romanticism and the turn against representation

To call Schelling's formulations subjective also ignores the key point that early Romantic philosophy deploys crucially different notions of truth to its sense as representative of a pre-existent status quo. Citing Novalis, Andrew Bowie notes that

> the Romantic view [...] does not conceive of truth as a ground or origin in any straightforward sense: 'Every real beginning is a *secondary moment'* because it must always be relative to what follows for it to be a beginning at all. [Bowie 1997 79]

Romantic theory's understanding of truth is no longer merely representative of pre-existent reality, a question of the correspondence of concepts by determinate judgement, but essentially *forward-looking*. As Schelling writes in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, '[s]elf consciousness is the source of light for the entire

system of knowledge, but it shines forwards, not backward.' [Cited in Eagleton 1990 127] This notion of truth as creative particularity predates many similar ideas of the way knowledge works by post-structuralist philosophers, and significantly for Welsch's ideas, already indicates a significant intersection of aesthetics and postmodern thinking. It also anticipates and underpins the rejection, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, of the conventional view of art as deriving its truth-value from mimetic representation. Art's casting off of the obligation to represent, which becomes an essential strand of twentieth century aesthetic theory and artistic practice, is arguably the main legacy of Romanticism to later philosophy and literary theory. [See Bowie 1997 21-5][3] And whilst this discussion of grounding and the limitations of the representational understanding of knowledge seems to have departed from the terms of Baumgarten's sensory aesthetic, this idea of art as anti-representational will be a strong thread through my discussion, apparent in the idea of art as non-perception, as in Welsch's anaesthetic theory and Peter Handke's theatre, and art as somehow immanent and immediate, as in Jean-François Lyotard's sublime,

---

[3] That said, again arguably the crucial step away from a model of truth as *representation of* or *correspondence to* an external 'object' is arguably already taken by Kant in his thinking about aesthetics. In his reading of the aesthetic as a reflection on our capacities, the value of art is separated from the artwork's mimetic function, enacting what Rüdiger Bubner calls the 'radikale Emanzipation der Künste aus den Zwängen des Abbildungsprinzips und der gesellschaftlichen Funktionen'. [Bubner 1971 21]

and art as sensory excess, as in Heiner Müller's drama. All will be seen to meditate in various ways on the competing issues of art as representation and art's 'reality status'.

Negativity and immanence

Also significant in my discussions in this regard will be what I see as an essential *ambivalence* in early Romantic philosophy's conception of truth, and the deferral and reflection on which it rests. On the one hand, this doubly 'secondary' nature of art – which follows from philosophy's age-old distinction between *Sein* and *Schein* but with some crucially different conclusions – does not lead the Romantics to renounce the search for the absolute, but rather to conclude that it can only be known *negatively*. In this sense Andrew Bowie notes that 'the attempt to arrive at cognitive certainty by defining something as true necessarily leads to the realization that every particular proposition negates itself by being dependent upon other propositions'. [Bowie 1992 35] For Terry Eagleton this ultimate nullity of the unobtainable object identifies the contradictory nature of Kant's idea of the 'Ding-an-sich': 'the thing-in-itself is posited and prohibited at a stroke.' [Eagleton 1990 121] At the same time, some recent theory has characterised Kant as the precursor to theories of the negative, such as Terry Eagleton's reference to the contradiction between this negative moment and the necessary universality which it claims to substantiate as the ambivalent status of

Kant's epistemology. [See Eagleton 1990 131, see also Žižek 1993] I will return to this idea of reflection theory as precipitating an aesthetic of negativity in the chapters below.

On the other hand, the particular is validated precisely by its refusal to refer to or be determined by an external framework in such a way that suggests that truth, if it is available at all, is necessarily *present* – albeit one whose grounds may never be attained. This seems to generate to two tendencies in anti-representative art. Firstly, that which deploys a seemingly inaccessible truth, as in what Welsch calls the anaesthetic artwork, which I have associated above with Kant's notion of the 'transcendent'. The danger for Welsch is that his sublime anaesthetic, as discussed in the last chapter, seems to present this failure of the senses as an end or truth in itself. Secondly, there is art which seems to gain its force by deploying a positive and irrepressible 'presence'. In this sense, Romantic thinking on art might be taken as a radicalisation of Kant's ideas on purposiveness and indeterminacy. This version of the turn against representation has been explicitly mobilised in art which operates at the sensory extreme, and I will relate this idea of truth as a creative function to Heiner Müller's theatre as a kind of enforced creativity that defies mere reproduction, but crucially not just for the producers of the work but also its recipients. These two ideas of art will be central to my theoretical analysis and my discussion of art in the final two chapters.

This sense of truth as an instance of the indeterminate and particular seems to militate against the conceptual organisation of experience, looking rather to an idea of knowledge as produced by and productive of particularities. But what implications might this have for the possibility of judgment in general and, more crucially for my concerns, the idea of art as *critique*? As far as judgment in general is concerned, in view of Welsch and others' diagnosis of the world as increasingly aestheticised, it is apparent that the suggestion that art or reality gains its truth by virtue of its immanent particularity, its mere appearance, is more problematic now than ever before. Does this kind of meditation on truth leave us without an ideological basis for a critique of what is going on either in art or in culture generally? Is this immanent particularity a discursive dead end? Of course, to ask of the fate of critique is to fly in the face of the idea, noted in the introduction, that the Romantic view of art as the location of particularity does not admit of an approach which aims to analyze it by external, in this case ideological, criteria. For Stanley Cavell, 'expressive' language is not only constitutive of 'discursive' meaning (to use Taylor's terms), but exceeds the capacity of this latter, which is incapable of shedding light on the specificity of the aesthetic experience:

> It is essential in making an aesthetic judgment that at some point we be
> prepared to say in its support: don't you see, don't you hear, don't you

dig? ... Because if you do not see something, *without* explanation, then there is nothing further to discuss. [Cavell 1976 93, see also Bowie 2003b 77]

This echoes the idea of 'sensuous knowledge' as a different kind of knowledge, and one which cannot be analysed in logical or discursive terms. In my introduction I asked whether allying the particular to the thorny issue of grounding might not lead to a very philosophical cul-de-sac for art, reaching an irreducible point of particularity at which one cannot compare anything or draw general lessons. Cavell is referring to aesthetic judgment in the broadest terms, but I wonder whether aesthetics' 'epistemological turn' marks the point at which it parts company with all but the most difficult art. Certainly some art does thematise this question of the possibility of meaning, and evacuates any kind of simply representative content, as we shall see in the case of Samuel Beckett and Peter Handke's theatre. But what does it mean to refer to this constitutive aesthetic moment as a necessary prerequisite of meaning if we do not need to re-enact this type of experience again and again? After all, even if Romanticism's expressive meaning is at the root of how what we say can mean anything, most of us have, by necessity, left this problem of grounding long behind us in our everyday use of language and meaning.

The alleged analytical or ideological incapacity of this conception of art might be especially problematic in view of the fact that traditionally artistic means, such as harmony, beauty and the sensuous, are deployed towards ideologically loaded ends, as some aspects of Welsch's ideas on aestheticisation suggest? Moreover, this ideological refusal does not entirely defuse the question of what ideology might be said to be operating in such philosophical arguments, and in particular the pervasive negativity noted above. I will return to this issue of ideology when I come to discuss Welsch's anaesthetics, and with particular reference to Marcuse's concerns about 'difficult' art, in chapter four.

The association of art and indeterminacy is also double-edged for another reason. On the one hand, associating this originary indeterminacy in meaning solely with art is problematic, in the sense that it has defused the implications of these insights for wider epistemology. Andrew Bowie makes the point that the migration of particularity to the artwork has arguably had the effect of distracting from any wider epistemological implications that Romanticism's truth-theory may have had, to the cost of more recent continental theory. [See Bowie 2003a 52] On the other hand the Romantic position might be taken to *undo* the conception of art as a special domain in which such indeterminacy is permissible. If this self-reflexive, creative constituting of reality is what we do *anyway*, what is the status of art in life, and what role might it be said to have?

But against this wider relevance of aesthetic indeterminacy, the heady combination of transcendentalism and the particular seems to motivate Bowie's concern, registered in my introduction, about the fact that 'the truth that art can communicate threatens to become marginal to the central concerns of the present'. [Bowie 1992 33] It should be remembered of course that Romantic theory contains an in-built ambivalence towards the autonomous status of art and the aesthetic. Friedrich Schlegel, for example, speaks of a reunification of art and life, in a manner which demands the application of aesthetic principles to other functionally autonomous spheres of life. [See Schulte-Sasse 1988 132] For Patricia Waugh even Kant's aesthetic autonomy, the separation of art from life, 'paradoxically also implies a form of aestheticism, the existence of art *in* life'. [Waugh 1992 17] Does this suggest that art is significant for something more prosaic than the philosophical issue of grounding meaning? Important proponents of this idea of inserting art back into everyday life were the various Dada movements, whose attempts to forge new connections I will refer to below. This discussion will be in the context of a less transcendental sense of the role and status of the aesthetic, arguably a sense which has its origins in Romantic thinking about art. Patricia Waugh also points to the continuity between Romantic thinking and postmodernity, specifically in the latter's 'radical fictionalising' and its 'situatedness in the world'. [Waugh 1992 15] I will return to the issue of fictionality in following chapters, but it is this 'situatedness' that I want to pick up on here.

As well as this primary constitutive moment that allows for the possibility of meaning at all, indeterminate art or art at the limits of perception might be said to work on more *located* and everyday meaning. The conclusions Kant draws from his analysis of the aesthetic experience focus on the transcendental qualities of mind, but his model of the subjective cognitive faculties not also point towards a more located and marginal understanding of the type of freedom art can offer, which might not sacrifice a connection to context and ideological analysis. According to Kant's model of the mental faculties, sense data must be mediated by *intuition*, which in turn cannot remain mere intuition, must be measured by the 'higher' faculties of judgment. So the way the world appears, whilst always ultimately accessed through our sense perceptions, is mediated and often substituted by our intuitions, which serve as short-cuts to knowledge of objects around us. It is these intuitions, rather that the more direct sense perception, that are unified by the rational faculties of the mind, the imagination and the understanding. As such, in Kant's model it is not so much the rational that the sensory must compete with for determination, rather it must meet the challenge of our intuitions, which are seen by Kant to take over responsibility for our awareness of objects from our sense perceptions. These intuitions for me indicate a point at which precisely the rational sovereignty that Kant is trying to establish is overturned, by such modest elements of consciousness as habits of thinking and cultural conditioning. Of course reliance on habitual

understandings, the reductive metaphors that Nietzsche bemoans as bereft of sensual force, 'abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos' [Nietzsche 1973 III 2 180], is at the opposite end of the perceptual spectrum from the originary aesthetic moment of indeterminacy. This more economical mode of perception and communication seems to be unavoidable, but also opens up a mode of art that retains a sense of indeterminacy, albeit a more contextualised and marginal one. The habits and cultural conditions that shape intuitions still set a challenge for freedom and spontaneity: how in the face of cultural predetermination is new perception or understanding forged, how are expectations overturned, what role is reserved for art in this, and how might it coincide with the sensory? For Kant and the Romantics, the pivotal factor in this generation of new experience is the insight of the genius, but my concern will be to look at the *reception* of the new, which is where I think art's political import has more likely resided. In my view this suggests a means of theorising a more contextualised connection between the aesthetic, the cognitive and the specifically *sensory* particular, in a way that has been significant for twentieth century art theory and practice. This coincides with Welsch's conception of the anaesthetic as the culturally informed non-perception that underlies perception at all which I have labelled the 'cognitive anaesthetic'. This is distinct from his seemingly more transcendentally inclined (in my terms) 'sublime anaesthetic', and beyond this latter's austere evacuation of content, might allow a relation to the wider consciousness-raising, or even an

interaction with every habits of perception of which aestheticisation might be conceptualised as an accentuated and ideologically loaded instance.

Viktor Shklovsky

Marginal poetics

The focus on intuition is interesting, in that it seems to be precisely in the face of intuition's automatisation of perception that the Russian Formalists at the beginning of the twentieth century conceived of the mode of operation of the aesthetic, variously, as defamiliarisation or foregrounding. The above sense of habit or even metaphor as a means to perceptual and cognitive *economy* coincides with the automatised perception that is central to the definition of the poetic in Russian Formalist thinking. Viktor Shklovsky, in his seminal discussion of modernist poetics in 'Art as Technique' (1917) [see Shklovsky 1965], makes the crucial distinction between the Symbolist conception of art which uses ready-made images and the poetic as precisely *undoing* such economies of perception. Of course, this kind of connection between perception within and outside of art is not what one initially associates with the Russian Formalists. They are usually likened to the New Critics, both being early twentieth century movements in literary criticism whose concern was to protect the 'literariness' of literature, opposed as they were to its function as something else (such as any kind of social

116

change). Stated in its most orthodox terms, their aim was to establish a science of literary technique that was separate from any question of meaning. Indeed, it was precisely this alleged absence of a social dimension that got the Formalists into hot water with Leo Trotsky and saw them ultimately suppressed in the 1930s. [See Lemon & Reis 1965 99, xv] But much like Baumgarten's ideas on aesthetics, there are ways in which this reading of the separateness of the literary only superficially holds up.

On the one hand, for instance, Shklovsky's formulations remain true to Kant's insistence on the disinterested nature of the aesthetic experience, inasmuch as the artwork's aesthetic nature is locked into a kind of self-reflexivity that is said to have nothing to do with what is represented: 'Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object, the object is not important.' [Shklovsky 1965 4] On the other hand, Shklovsky's ideas on defamiliarisation might be read as abandoning Kant's transcendental guarantor, disinterest, and allowing a more context-related and sociologically engaged conception of the relationship between cultural context and aesthetic experience. Central to this is the retention of the referent, which is implicit in Shklovsky's formulations insofar as he couches the strategy of defamiliarisation in terms of a distinction between our *experience* of an object with *knowledge* of it:

The purpose of art is to impart a sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. [Shklovsky 1965 12]

The retention of the referent departs from Kant's insistence that the aesthetic tells us *only* about our own unlimited faculties, and confirms the shift from transcendental terrain to the empirical. Of course, this begs the question of what is the status of that which is known. Bereft of its transcendental conclusions, is the ultimate purpose of defamiliarisation the indeterminate experience itself or a more specific consciousness-raising? Whilst this retention of reference may seem to be at odds with art that operates at the limits of perception, which sounds like an extreme 'formalist' position – underlined by the fact that I have characterised Welsch's anaesthetic art in terms of an attempt to evacuate any content – I will raise the idea of partial and problematised perception in chapter four (in theory) and five and six (in practice) as a means whereby partial reference retains some contact to cultural content.

Indeterminacy as sensory

Another question begged is how this retention of reference might combine with the analysis of the aesthetic experience in sensory terms. What overlap might there be between Shklovsky's aesthetics of defamiliarisation and Baumgarten's conception of the aesthetic as a kind of knowledge that is in some way sensory? Certainly the two thinkers' ideas share a concept of the aesthetic experience as a challenge to the rational or cognitive faculties. Moreover, Shklovsky does emphasise the specifically sensory nature of the aesthetic experience, referring for instance to the 'sensation of things as they are perceived'. This sounds like a kind of neo-impressionism, presenting things *as they appear to us*, but in fact he starts his essay by positioning himself against Potebnya's idea of the poetic as 'thinking in images'. [Shklovsky 1965 5] Similarly his idea of poetry as offering a 'vision' of the object, rather than knowledge of it [Shklovsky 1965 18] suggests a certain compactness, but in fact for Shklovsky it is precisely any such 'economy' of imagery that the poetic interrupts. Moreover he identifies the sensory nature of the aesthetic experience with this process of defamiliarisation: 'art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*'. [Shklovsky 1965 12] In particular Shklovsky's notion of 'roughening' language [Shklovsky 1965 22] seems to be claiming some kind of *sensory* essence to the poetic, whereby linguistic innovation is able to renew the 'stoniness' of the stone.

119

Shklovsky's distinction between the 'experienced' and the 'known' valorises an experience that is processed in a different way to rational or conceptual knowledge in an echo of Baumgarten's ideas. This merely begs the question of what this 'experience' means, what kind of status and value it has. In an early essay entitled 'Erfahrung' Walter Benjamin distinguishes between 'Erfahrung' and 'Erlebnis' [see Benjamin 1977 54], where 'Erlebnis' is the 'felt life' of 'the moment as it is lived in its intensity', as opposed to 'the accrued mass of such moments, no longer in their lived actuality'. [Docherty 2003 24] At the same time, it may be that Benjamin is drawing our attention to crucial elements of life that *cannot* be empirically experienced, 'daß es etwas Anderes gibt als Erfahrung, daß es Werte gibt – unerfahrbare – , denen wir dienen.' [Benjamin 1977 55] Only in this 'Unerfahrbare' are we seen to be free. This 'Unerfahrbare' seems to hark back to Kant's 'transcendent', but its paradox may only point to the idea that the experience is *intellectually* unknowable or that it cannot be stated discursively. This sounds like it is close to questions of grounding again: in more marginal terms, Marquard takes up the distinction (originally Gadamer's) between 'Erfahrung' and 'Erwartung' as a means of expressing the aesthetic experience as a means of defying conventional ways of seeing: 'in dem Maße, in dem die Wirklichkeit weg von der "Erfahrung" hin zur "Erwartung" tendiert, bewegt sich – gegenläufig: kompensatorisch – das Ästhetische weg von der "Erwartung" hin zur "Erfahrung"'. [Marquard 1989 98] It is worth noting that this acknowledgment of the conventionality of art detracts from the sheerly sensory

understanding of the experience. But again in my discussions in chapters five and six I will elaborate ways in which such alternative modes of experience that might be taken to emphasise the sensory are deployed in art, and to what effect.

Transcendental value or marginal effect

The conceptualisation of the aesthetic that I have elaborated here clearly involves a quite different sense of the value of art from Kant's abstracted aesthetic experience of the disinterested individual, which I have characterised as a divergence between reading aesthetics as transcendental and as marginal. This might also be conceptualised in terms of *value* versus *effect*. Kant's idea of the aesthetic as opening up a realm of freedom from the determinate is still essential to modernist art, but it is a more marginal freedom, inasmuch as it cannot be universalised, but must be re-enacted again and again. In chapter three I will conceptualise this cognitive process in terms of a fragile dialectic, which for Christine Pries is the crucial characteristic of the limit experience of the sublime. [See Pries 1989] The question remains as to where the *capacity* for such innovation comes from, but the danger is that this focus loses sight of the *practical* ways in which such interventions may interact with lived experience. Even in philosophical projects, like Heidegger's attempt to describe 'Being', the limited, sensory element of the aesthetic seems to recognise the contextual, local nature of how the world means anything. Compared to the ethical import of aesthetics in

the context of Kant's aesthetics, the import of art which enacts a marginal intervention in the perceptual realm springs arguably from a less universalising and more dynamic and marginal understanding of its *effect*. According to this reading, art's *truth-value* ceases to underwrite its ethical guarantee; rather, art conceived as critical intervention in the continuum functions by virtue of its *cognitive* effect. The marginality of this kind of aesthetic experience is already implicit in Andrew Bowie's characterisation of Russian Formalism as a breaking of rules, which he contrasts with Terry Eagleton's more scientistic linguistic reading of Shklovsky's notion of defamiliarisation. [See Bowie 1997 21] My only reservation with Bowie's characterisation of Russian Formalism is the identification of Shklovsky's defamiliarisation with the idea of the literary as an attempt to 'say the unsayable'. [Bowie 1997 23] This (possibly only) sounds close to precisely what Shklovsky was militating against, namely Potebnya's symbolist idea of art as a kind of shorthand expression of what is otherwise difficult to express. Might it not be possible to refer to art as a kind of 'unsaying' what has been said, a kind of dismantling of what has sedimented into the understanding of habit and expectation?

This more marginal understanding of the aesthetic might also offer a different sense of the articulation of subject and object in the aesthetic experience. I asked whether this 'unsaying' might not necessarily entirely relinquish its reference to the object, but it precisely does not aim to create what Charles Taylor calls a

'miniature universe' [Taylor 1985 230], rather by fragmentation and unsettling of perception art precisely denies the coherent construction of such a universe. Taylor is closer to this sense when he describes a constantly renegotiated border between stable and established meanings and problematic and unfamiliar usages of language as marking the territory of the poetic. At the same time, my concern above has been to argue that the value of this marginal aesthetic inheres largely in its destabilising effect, and this question of effect cannot but return to the self. Unlike Kant's rarefied disinterest, our subjective experience of art is a complex phenomenon, the epistemological and ethical import of which is shot through with contextual, conventional aspects, such as conventions on standards of decency and modes of representation, cut across by ideological investments, a sense of which might allow a more plausible model of the economy of the aesthetic experience and the marginal autonomy that is its lifeblood.

Cognitive aesthetics: retrieving the distrusted subject

The readmission of the empirical and marginal effect of art that the sensory emphasises does not just reassert aspects of the specificity of the aesthetic object, but also involves a restoration of the culturally located recipient as the locus of art's significance. Arguably it is not until the theoretical contributions of the Russian Formalists that an understanding of the function of the individual psychology takes its place in a way which allows equal weight to be given to

formal and psychological aspects of the complex interaction which characterises the aesthetic event. But the play of intuition and habit indicates the recipient's dual status as both the (in my view necessary) locus of art's effect and a limiting factor in art's claim to present any universal – or in other terms ideologically unbiased – aspect of reality. Indeed, the aesthetic is precisely the point at which the spontaneous and rational mind may be challenged and its mechanisms overturned. Philosophy's concern to establish universal grounds of knowledge has motivated the historical relegation of the subject in philosophy, emblematic of which is Kant's insistence on the disinterested nature of aesthetic perception. This insistence is probably a reaction against the close relationship of the aesthetic and the subjective, which stems in part from the sense that art's truth or meaning 'feels personal' and seems to depend on a quality that exceeds more than may be said to be objectively, quantifiably 'there'. The two terms are used interchangeably in much eighteenth century writing on art [see Berghahn 1988 41, and for instance Kant 1963 86], a parallel that Christoph Menke underlines when he notes the common birthplace of aesthetics and modern notion of the subject. [See Menke 2000 40-1] Even Romantic thinking, which I have characterised above as taking issue with Kant's bad faith with the subjective aspect of knowledge, is fundamentally ambivalent on the question of subjective reception. Novalis for instance refers to the ideal reader as an extended author: 'Der wahre Leser muß der erweiterte Autor sein.' [Cited in Benjamin 1974 68, see also Bowie 1997 71] This mistrust of the subject and the subjective also motivates

Hegel's content-oriented aesthetics, and recurs in Adorno's focus on the enigmatic art object. Heidegger is also heir to Hegel's preference for the guarantee of the aesthetic object, insisting more obliquely that the 'effect of the work does not consist in an effecting'. [Heidegger 1975 74] Indeed, this scepticism towards the subjective is summed up in Heidegger's understanding of the whole of European philosophy after Descartes as a misguided attempt to understand everything in terms of its relation to our consciousness. A similar scepticism is also evident in less 'philosophical' strands of thinking about art. M. H. Abrams for instance warns against I. A. Richards' attempt to base criticism and interpretation in psychology. [Abrams 1953 4] Georg Lukács refers disdainfully to modernism's obsession with the subjective, either as the mere registration of sense data or the more extreme representations of psychopathologies as somehow more authentic than any ordinary view of the world. [Lukács 1963 30] Lukács' polemical point is that this sacrifices any perspective from which an ideology presentation and critique of society might be mobilised. Of course, Kant's transcendental argument for the significance of the aesthetic that precisely takes issue with its status as a mere vehicle for ideological positions which could be better served by other means, but both investments in the aesthetic are agreed on the unreliability of the subject in their respective endeavours. Adorno's aesthetics combines the two concerns, giving a sociological gloss to an essentially philosophical problem (or perhaps vice versa):

125

in his view approaching the aesthetic object via reception will inevitably result in its colonisation by the manipulated (or at very least unreliable) consciousness.

But my point here is to suggest that Baumgarten's focus on sense perception introduces an empirical dimension that departs from universal issues of what determines knowledge and makes it possible, and introduces more located, practical – and even ideological – aspects of what affects our understanding of the world. This is implicit in Kant's meditations on the cognitive faculties, which are paradoxical in that they assert the possibility of a grounded transcendental position through an analysis of subjective elements. [On this see Adorno 1970 22] This role of the subjective moment is implicit in Nietzsche's understanding of the *incomplete* nature of the 'true' artwork. For him, imperfection is the most productive thing an artist can offer his audience. In the passage 'Reiz der Unvollkommenhait' in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (the word 'Reiz' in German indicates both an attraction and a stimulus or challenge) Nietzsche asserts that 'Sein Werk spricht es niemals ganz aus, was er eigentlich aussprechen möchte, was er gesehen haben möchte: es scheint, dass er den Vorgeschmack einer Vision gehabt hat, und niemals sie selber'. [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 110] Benjamin in his *Kunstkritik* essay similarly refers to the act of criticism as completing the artwork [Benjamin 1972 79], and even in Adorno's formulations the subjective and experiential nature of art cannot be suppressed indefinitely. A precursor to Welsch's sublime anaesthetic, he prefers the art object that conceals itself from

consciousness, which is already inevitably inhabited by false consciousness: 'bis heute existiert das richtige Bewußtsein nicht'. [Adorno 1970 196] This motivates his rejection of any hermeneutical understanding of aesthetic objects ('Kunstwerke sind nicht von der Ästhetik als hermeneutische Objekte zu begreifen' [Adorno 1970 179]) and his insistence in the section on art's 'Rätselcharakter' in *Ästhetische Theorie* on the mutual exclusion between art as enigma and the empirical 'experience' of the artwork ('Registriert, wer aus dem Kunstwerk heraustritt oder gar nicht in ihm war, feindselig den Rätselcharakter, so verschwindet er dafür trügend in der künstlerischen Erfahrung' [Adorno 1970 184]). But at the same time as the enigmatic quality is threatened by experience, the experience of the artwork – let alone the understanding of it – is always threatened by its *Rätselcharakter*: 'Unablässig wird die Erfahrung der Kunstwerke vom Rätselcharakter bedroht.' [Adorno 1970 189] Presumably this threatening of experience must take place *within* experience, but it is an experience which might not reduce the poetic to 'discursive practices' [Bowie 1997 19], nor discard the crucial idea of the aesthetic as indeterminate. Adorno's formulations here suggest a dialectical interplay of understanding and indeterminacy or enigma in which no term is absolutely preferred. That is to say that this scepticism towards the subjective moment does not necessarily contradict the central position of the subject and the moment of reception in aesthetics, and might indeed render implausible such antipathy towards the moment of subjective experience, particularly in the case of modernist strategies in art. Elsewhere in the *Ästhetische*

Theorie Adorno remarks that art's subjective cognitive effect precisely help 'Kunst aus dem Bann des absoluten Geistes herauszuholen' [Adorno 1970 20], echoing my distinction between universal and marginal readings of aesthetics.

This readmission of the recipient is not necessarily a turn to sheer psychologism, to an experience generated by the vagaries of the individual mind or locked into an incomparable and non-transferable subjective event (as Stanley Cavell's 'do you dig' suggests). Nor does this empirical view necessarily demand the kind of research into reception which Adorno refers to elsewhere as mere 'administration', marketing work for the culture industry. [See Adorno 1978 163] Whilst the shared nature of such cultural habits or modes of thinking might underlie some of the concerns regarding the susceptibility of the individual mind to ideological pre-determination, that same shared nature must allay some of the concerns about the difficulty of establishing any verifiable societal effect. It needs no arguing that formal elements can reinforce certain ideologies, as Max Weber indicated with reference to unified perspective in painting or the observation of the unities of time, place and action in drama vis-à-vis Enlightenment rationality. [See Bürger 1983 10] And Adorno makes the point that Kant makes good the old *Wirkungsästhetik* by restricting it 'durch immanente Kritik'. [Adorno 1970 22] Rather than this translation of art 'rein in die psychische Immanenz' the saving grace of Kant's aesthetics is its formal focus. [Adorno 1970 25] For me, moreover, Shklovsky's remarks on the poetic suggest

that the subjective experience and the formal qualities of a work of art can barely

be separated. This notion of an interaction between form and cognition is

implicit in Manfred Frank's ideas on the lessons German hermeneutics and

French structuralism and post-structuralism can learn from one another. He

accepts that talk about the death of the subject is analytically useful, but does not

believe any systems theory, like French structuralism, has been able to explain

the processes of signification and the alteration of signification that is crucial to

modernist aesthetics without the category of the individual. [See Frank 1984 18]

Specifically as far as Welsch's formulations are concerned I have characterised

the aestheticised world in terms of the particular mode of reception that it

encourages, namely a homogenisation of experience that engenders a kind of

cognitive passivity. I will take up this discussion of form and experience in

chapters five and six.

This formal nature of art – and here I am really talking about more or less

modernist strategies of defamiliarisation – also reinforces my remarks about the

significance of the psychological moment of the aesthetic experience. Whilst at

one level *all* art must at some point enter through the cognitive mechanisms of

the recipient, formally innovative elements do indeed seem to rely on an

activation of and a challenge to the mechanisms of the recipient's mediating

psychology more so than a merely theme or content based understanding of the

force of the aesthetic object. Adorno famously remarks that form is only

distinguished from content by a process of evolution – 'so ist die Vermittlung einigermaßen darin zu suchen, daß ästhetische Form sedimentierter Inhalt sei' [Adorno 1970 15] – and this 'sedimentation' of content into form in the artwork has an analogue in, and would be impossible without, the sedimentation of habits of perception within our own cognitive mechanisms. In my view the ways in which art is able to resist and overturn the habits of perception and cognition might be taken as an instance of the kind of indeterminacy that has been central to the investments in the aesthetic for the past two hundred and fifty years.

As far as my reference to shared, culturally established norms is concerned, it is in this sense that one might see art as disclosure working against art (or more broadly culture) as a kind of consensus dialectically. Even Adorno's indeterminacy or negation of meaning seems to recognise its dependency on cultural norms of meaning, inasmuch as it is *'determinate* negation' of what obtains in reality [Adorno 1970 158], the specifically *'gesellschaftliche* Antithesis zur Gesellschaft'. [Adorno 1970 19, my emphasis] Elsewhere he insists on this interplay between the societal and aesthetic aspects of art: 'Nichts an Musik taugt ästhetisch, was nicht, sei's auch als Negation des Unwahren, gesellschaftlich wahr wäre; kein gesellschaftlicher Gehalt von Musik gilt, wofern er nicht ästhetisch sich objektiviert.' [Adorno 1978 167-8] The difficulty with Adorno's 'gesellschaftlicher Gehalt', and the point at which in my view his formulations

become excessively bleak, is that for him the artwork loses all validity if it is reincorporated into the social whole.

Of course, the phenomenon of habit serves also to indicate the difficulty of ascribing art's value to its effect on the individual psychology: Adorno buries the artwork's value in its formal qualities precisely to preserve the autonomy of the work of art in the face of an all-consuming and all-determining subject. But rather than determining, the idea that the commodified lifeworld has a tendency of turning us into *passive* recipients suggests that the challenge is not to by-pass the subject, as Adorno advocates, but rather to reactivate it. A re-admission of the individual psychology, and the interests and contexts which inhabit it, might allow for a more sophisticated model of what may be described as the 'economy' of the aesthetic process. In my view both the mode of aestheticised perception and broader cultural norms might plausibly be seen to be addressed by Shklovsky's defamiliarising 'poetic', and in chapters five and six I will discuss art at the limits of perception in terms of this reflection of the mode and norms of perception and cognition. This will suggest at times, perhaps ironically in view of my above remarks on Kant's disinterest, a metaphorical relinquishing of subjectivity, but this I take to suggest a dismantling of the preconceptions and conditioning that we carry about with us. Quite distinct from Welsch's avowed scepticism about the possibility of individual contemplation in an aestheticised world [see Welsch 1990 14], this will offer a more sympathetic view of the

individual's position in contemporary culture and the aesthetic moment, an individual that must be sustained, with both its cognitive faculties and its cultural roots intact, in order to be interrogated and to describe the effectiveness of this kind of aesthetics of indeterminacy. And whilst this discussion of psychology, defamiliarisation and the cognitive effect of art seems to have taken us very far from the explicitly 'sensory' terms, in my discussions in the chapters that follow I will endeavour to show what role the sensory nature of the aesthetic, what Patricia Waugh's calls 'a different kind of discourse from the ratiocinative, involving body as well as intellect' [Waugh 1992 18], has had in this aesthetic economy.

Section 2 · Sublime

Chapter 3 · Welsch and the Sublime

A significant element in my discussions in the introduction and in chapter two has been the focus on the 'indeterminate' in the history of aesthetics in the last two hundred and fifty years. Emblematic of this has been the shift in focus from the harmonious aesthetics of beauty to the discordant aesthetics of the sublime. The sublime – which Kant reads in terms of what it tells us about the supersensory faculties – might seem to be fundamentally opposed to Welsch's rereading of the aesthetic as sensory, but I have suggested that Welsch's key category of art as sensory arrest, the anaesthetic, might be seen as a version of the sublime or at least analysed in the context of theories of the sublime. This analogy between the anaesthetic and the sublime is supported by Welsch's belief that the latter is also a crucial source of the oppositional force of the aesthetic. The sublime features in two of his theoretical contributions: firstly, in his reading of Adorno's aesthetics, as indicated by the title of his Adorno essay, 'Adornos Ästhetik: eine implizite Ästhetik des Erhabenen'; and secondly, in his identification of this modernist 'Ästhetik des Erhabenen' as decisive for Lyotard's theorisation of postmodern thought, as well as the underlying role the sublime plays in his conception of (an essentially modernist) oppositional art. These latter ideas are presented in two essays, 'Die Geburt der postmodernen Philosophie aus dem Geist der modernen Kunst,' and 'Für eine postmoderne Ästhetik des Widerstandes'. All three essays are contained in the collection

Ästhetisches Denken (1990), and will be the primary texts for this chapter. Welsch's focus on the sublime is part of a resurgence of interest in the sublime among theorists of the postmodern in the past twenty years [see Pries 1989], which includes all of Lyotard's diverse investments in the sublime (for example, the sublime as temporal caesura, the sublime as the infinite, the sublime as negative presentation of the unpresentable, the sublime as a turning against the will and a refusal of the dialectic [See Lyotard 1985 and 1990]), Jameson's concept of the sublime as 'cultural dominant' of the postmodern [See Jameson 1991 6], and a thread which identifies the sublime with the Lacanian *Real*, as evidenced in writings by Slavoj Žižek, Hal Foster, and Susan Stewart. [See Žižek 1989, Foster 1996 and Stewart 1991] My concern will be to present and discuss Welsch's treatment of the sublime in the context of ideas by Adorno and Lyotard, as well as the historical contributions by Kant and Schiller, as a means of offering points of critique of his more general positions in aesthetics and as a preparation for my subsequent discussion of the anaesthetic in chapter four.

The historical significance of the sublime

The legacy of Kant's sublime: reflexivity, anti-representation and the dialectic

The key theorist of the significance of the sublime for the aesthetic realm was Kant, and the sublime plays a central a central role in his thoroughgoing

'modernisation' of philosophy. But his position is not without ambivalence: as with the aesthetic in general, Kant identifies the sublime as an effect of the human mind, and therefore an essentially subjective experience. Its status as a subjective epiphenomenon leads him to exclude it from philosophical enquiry, stating even in the 'Analytik des Erhabenen' in the Kritik der Urteilskraft that the sublime is 'bei weitem nicht so wichtig und an Folgerungen reichhaltig' [Kant 1963 137] than the beautiful. Even in a discussion of aesthetics he relegates consideration of the sublime to a mere 'Anhang'. [Kant 1963 137] But ultimately the sublime does play a pivotal role in his formulations, allowing an inference of our supersensible faculties of mind abstracted from any interest or determinate context (insofar as the rational freedom that the sublime experience precipitates implies an exclusion of any kind of subjective purpose, as underlined by Patricia Waugh's characterization of the purity of the sublime. [See Waugh 1992 26]) This freedom is crucial to man's rational nature for Kant, who refers to the only true content of the sublime as being an inconceivable 'Idee der Vernunft' or 'Idee der Menschheit' [Kant 1963 154], and it is in this sense that Patricia Waugh characterizes the sublime as 'connected to the sphere of pure ideas as the beautiful is to the sphere of understanding'. [Waugh 1992 26] This inconceivable quality of the sublime seems to be analogous to the indeterminacy of Kant's 'ästhetische Idee' [Kant 1963 247], referred to in my introduction, which promotes thought but that cannot be reduced to concepts, and has prompted commentators to read the experience of the sublime as symbolic or indicative of a

136

moral or epistemological grounding. Certainly the sublime has been valorised by theorists since as an experience, albeit inferred, of the Absolute. Paul de Man's describes the sublime as the crucial 'articulation of a transcendental with a metaphysical discourse'. [de Man 1996 73, see also de Man 1996 120-1 and Bowie 1990 38]

The rational, supersensory core of Kant's sublime underlines the tension with Welsch's focus on the sensory nature of the aesthetic. Indeed his sublime, as Andrew Bowie puts it, precisely 'remind[s] us of the limitations of our sensuous relationship to nature'. [Bowie 1990 37] The rational basis of the sublime experience is precisely a consequence of this reaching of the *limit* of the sensory faculties, the limit of our sensuous relationship to that which surrounds us: 'Erhaben ist, was auch nur denken zu können ein Vermögen des Gemüts beweiset, das jeden Maßstab der Sinne übertrifft.' [Kant 1963 144] This experiencing of the limit of our sensuous intuition precipitates an experience of the limitless faculties of the rational mind, and points to two interrelated characteristics of the sublime which are crucial to its significance for later theory: its reflexive and dialectical nature.

Kant asserts the reflexivity of the sublime explicitly at the outset of the 'Analytik des Erhabenen': 'Ferner darin, daß beides [Schönes und Erhabenes] kein Sinnes- noch ein logisch-bestimmendes, sondern ein Reflexionsurteil voraussetzt.' [Kant

137

1963 133] This ultimately rational recuperation points to the dialectical nature of the sublime, which comprises two distinct phases: 'das Gefühl einer augenblicklichen Hemmung der Lebenskräfte und darauf sogleich folgenden desto stärkern Ergießung derselben'. [Kant 1963 134][1] Bowie identifies the dialectical nature of the sublime, in the sense that 'limitation entails the sense of its opposite, the fact that we also have a capacity for Reason not limited by sensuousness'. [Bowie 1990 37]

This pure and contentless reflexivity is not just important for *Erkenntnistheorie*, but underlies perhaps the most fruitful reading of Kant's sublime as significant for thinking about *art*. The application of sublime theory to art – which incidently goes against Kant's formulations, in which nature alone is the trigger for the sublime experience – transposes the reflexivity of the sublime as a mental experience and the failure of the representative faculties into the – essentially

---

[1] In the same vein Kant writes 'Aber das Gemüt fühlt sich in seiner eigenen Beurteilung gehoben, wenn es, indem es sich in der Betrachtung derselben, ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Form, der Einbildungskraft, und einer obschon ganz ohne bestimmten Zweck damit in Verbindung gesetzten, jene bloß erweiternden Vernunft, überläßt, die ganze Macht der Einbildungskraft dennoch ihren Ideen unangemessen findet.' [Kant 1963 152-153] And again, 'ein Gefühl der Unangemessenheit seiner Einbildungskraft für die Idee eines Ganzen, um sie darzustellen, worin die Einbildungskraft ihr Maximum erreicht, und, bei der

modernist – artwork. Here the failure appears as an analogous meditation on *meaning* and the limits of *mimetic representation*. Eradicating any dependence on external referent or ideology – and therewith any subservience as mere instrument of their enunciation – combines with the resistance such art objects offer to understanding by the rational mind. In practice this focus on meaning and representation can displace all but the most existential content – as we shall in the case of Samuel Beckett's dramas – a turn inwards that is crucial to ideas of aesthetic autonomy in twentieth century theory and art practice.

The idea of the work as resistant to processing by the mind makes clear the anti-modern, critical edge that the sublime takes on in its migration into the artwork. But in line with my general concern to emphasize the role of the recipient, this does not depart entirely from the terms of the sublime as a mental experience, and one that is expressed in similar terms of pleasure as Kant's sublime. The latter's indirect pleasure ('ein Lust welche nur indirekt entspringt' [Kant 1963 134]) becomes the more difficult pleasure of the autonomous modernist artwork, what Adorno will call the 'Glück an den Kunstwerken'. [Adorno 1970 31] The asceticism that Adorno intones in *Ästhetische Theorie* – 'Der Bürger wünscht die Kunst üppig and das Leben asketisch; umgekehrt wäre es besser' [Adorno 1970 27] – seems to be the model for Welsch's anaesthetic. In his view Adorno's idea

---

Bestrebung, es zu erweitern, in sich selbst zurücksinkt, dadurch aber in ein

of a 'Gefühl des Standhaltens' [Adorno 1970 31] as the source of pleasure in the artwork contains 'bereits alle Elemente von Adornos Stellungnahme zum Erhabenen'. [Welsch 1990 114] Again this idea comes from Kant's sublime, albeit in his pre-critical writings, which conceive of the sublime as a conscious experience of time, 'lange Dauer ist erhaben'. [Kant 1913 8] In his more modernist moments, Jean-François Lyotard echoes this idea of the work of art precipitating a sublime moment of suspension, opening up 'the possibility of nothing happening'. [Lyotard 1985 3]

This nothingness contrasts with Lyotard's own valorization of non-representative art as generating matter or an event that is somehow immanent. But again as far as Kant's formulations are concerned it might be that this gesture of immanence is a variant of the mistake of 'Subreption' that recurs in treatments of the sublime, which Kant defines as 'Verwechslung einer Achtung für das Objekt statt der für die Idee der Menschheit in unserm Subjekte.' [Kant 1963 154][2] On the one hand, any claim as to the immanent force of the sensuous object runs counter to Kant's famous insistence that the dubious pleasure in the sublime does not belong to the object experienced in the first phase, but in the experience

---

rührendes Wohlgefallen versetzt wird.' [Kant 1963 146]

[2] This idea is extended in Jacques Lacan, as read by Slavoj Žižek, to attribute determination of the sublime not to the object, but to desire for that object. [See Žižek 1989 194]

of rational recuperation of the second phase: 'aber nicht etwa ein Wohlgefallen am Objekte, wie beim Schönen [...], sondern an der Erweiterung der Einbildungskraft an sich selbst'. [Kant 1963 142] A crucial consequence of Kant's self-reflexive sublime is that its rational basis precludes attributing the experience directly to the sensory experience of the object by perception: 'Nichts also, was Gegenstand der Sinne sein kann, ist, auf diesen Fuß betrachtet, erhaben zu nennen.' [Kant 1963 143] This relegation of the object will be of issue when I come to discuss Adorno and Welsch's remarks on the sublime in art. In particular for Kant, freedom must always be a quality of the super-sensory faculties. But on the other hand there is arguably a sense of dubious self-sufficiency in Kant's own sublime, inasmuch as the sublime (like many categories that are crucial to Kant's philosophy) is empty of any specific content and resists any particular purpose:

daß er [der Begriff des Erhabenen] überhaupt nichts Zweckmäßiges in der Natur selbst, sondern nur in dem möglichen Gebrauche ihrer Anschauungen, um eine von der Natur ganz unabhängige Zweckmäßigkeit in uns selbst fühlbar zu machen, anzeige. [Kant 1963 136-137]

This resistance to purpose is another clear link with aesthetic autonomy, and precisely motivates Kant's mutual exclusion of man-made art and the sublime.

141

In this way the sublime is a radicalised version of 'interesseloses Anschauen' which for Kant characterises the experience of beauty, in as much as the object that precipitates the sublime experience defies any kind of initial judgment:

> Der wichtigste und innere Unterschied aber des Erhabenen vom Schönen ist wohl dieser; [...] das, was in uns, ohne zu vernünfteln, bloß in der Auffassung, das Gefühl des Erhabenen erregt, der Form nach zwar zweckwidrig für unsere Urteilskraft, unangemessen unserm Darstellungsvermögen, und gleichsam gewalttätig für die Einbildungskraft erscheinen mag, aber dennoch nur um desto erhabener zu sein geurteilt wird. [Kant 1963 135]

In chapter two I asked whether Kant's non-purposiveness was not a cloak for a very particular purpose: that of pietistic self-abnegation. How do his ideas on the sublime fare in these ideological terms? What politics or ideology is operating in Kant's idea of freedom, pulled from the jaws of constraint? [See Bowie 2003 44] In a sense this freedom seems incontrovertible, in as much as we can always retreat into the inner sanctum of self-consciousness. But does this free man's faculties of reason from any natural, external constraint, only at the price of locking that freedom in the mind? Do Kant's ideas end up in a dialectic

that turns the pre-modern fragility of the sublime into a one-way street, a 'royal road' to the self-confirmation of the subject?

Schiller and the sublime artwork

Friedrich Schiller's essay on the sublime, 'Über das Erhabene' written only three years after Kant's 'Analytik des Erhabenen' was published, is instructive here and in particular his distinction between the 'material' and 'ideal' realms which precipitate the sublime feeling. Like Kant Schiller valorizes the sublime as a sensory means of indicating that which is non-sensory, infinite, or absolute. 'Und so hat die Natur sogar ein sinnliches Mittel angewendet, uns zu lehren, daß wir mehr als bloß sinnlich sind.' [Schiller 1966 611] Similarly, Schiller's sublime follows its Kantian predecessor in that it is marked by a turning away from external and material reality. But arguably Schiller's reading suggests a more politicised polarisation of man and nature which may be taken as evidence of man's extreme alienation from nature. [See Schiller 1966 607] For Schiller, where man fails to overcome nature materially – in Schiller's terminology 'realistisch' – he can resort to a retreat into culture that Schiller labels 'idealistisch':

Entweder realistisch, wenn der Mensch der Gewalt Gewalt entgegensetzt, wenn er als Natur die Natur beherrschet; oder idealistisch, wenn er aus

der Natur heraustritt und so, in Rücksicht auf sich, den Begriff der Gewalt

vernichtet. [Schiller 1966 607-8]

In this way, by rational power alone man is able to will a realm of freedom, a

freedom that is indicated precisely by the feeling of the sublime:

Wir erfahren also durch das Gefühl des Erhabenen, daß sich der Zustand

unseres Geistes nicht notwendig nach dem Zustand des Sinnes richtet,

daß die Gesetze der Natur nicht notwendig auch die unsrigen sind, und

daß wir ein selbständiges Prinzipium in uns haben, welches von allein

sinnlichen Rührungen unabhängig ist. [Schiller 1966 610]

Like the claims made by commentators for Kant's third *Kritik*, this supersensory

liberation from nature is seen by Schiller to have ultimately moral implications,

in that it 'beweist unsere moralische Selbständigkeit auf eine unwiderlegliche

Weise'. [Schiller 1966 610] But this moral claim is problematic insofar as this

purely mental freedom that it furnishes might be said to *compensate* for

unfreedom elsewhere. There is also a sense in which this notion of a willed

realm of freedom posits freedom on an uncompromising basis of all or nothing, a

radical position which seems to be implicit in Kant's formulations. As Steve

Giles points out, Schiller suggests that we are only free if we can be said to be

absolutely free: 'Nimmermehr kann er das Wesen sein, welches will, wenn es

auch nur *einen* Fall gibt, wo er schlechterdings muss, was er nicht will.' [Schiller 1966 607, see Giles 1981 52] Schiller can only fulfil this absolute condition by recourse to the curious notion that one can 'overcome' external constraints to freedom by freely and autonomously subordinating oneself to them. [See Giles 1981 53] I have already referred to Isaiah Berlin's well-known essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in chapter two, and Schiller here seems to conflate the two conceptions of freedom that Isaiah Berlin would come to categorise as negative and positive, that is to say freedom as an absence of determining constraints and freedom as conditional and made possible by the constraints within which it must operate. [See Berlin 1958 26] This also raises the question of whether the 'ideal' realm of culture can really be described as a realm of absolute freedom. Does art's autonomy depend on its absolute independence from external constraints? On the contrary, I have suggested above, and will reiterate in my discussion of Adorno below, that art's autonomy depends precisely on its interaction with that which constrains its freedom and independence, and moreover, that this precipitates an inherent fragility that might be fruitfully traced back to the Kantian sublime. But even Kant's own writings on the sublime freeze the dialectic of the sublime at the moment where our capacity for reason comes to 'recognise itself'. This is arguably an arbitrary moment, and certainly shows Kant himself to be not immune from the problem of *Subreption*. This is made most apparent in the characterisation of our rational capacity as a

seemingly absolute 'Idee der Vernunft', which suggests itself as an (albeit inferred, essentially 'missing') *quasi-content* of the sublime.

One crucial contribution that Schiller makes, however, is to propose the transition from sublime as occurring in the mind to its manifestation in the art object. I have already referred to the reading of Kant's sublime as significant for thinking about art as contrary to his own intentions but as a very fruitful avenue for theorising on the sublime. The application of sublime theory to art transposes the reflexivity of the sublime as a mental experience and the failure of the representative faculties into the artwork, initially as a presentation of the absolute (what Schiller refers to as a 'Darstellung des Übersinnlichen' [Schiller 1966 614]), and ultimately as a meditation on meaning and the limits of mimetic representation in the – essentially modernist – artwork. This is also the first point at which the sublime becomes clouded (explicitly at least) with the idea of a specific *purpose*, in contrast to Kant's non-purposive sublime. Is Schiller merely making the underlying motivation of Kant's sublime explicit here or does this idea of purposefully presenting the sublime in art miss the point of the purposelessness of Kant's sublime altogether? Certainly the idea of 'presenting the sublime' in art in this way goes against the very nature of Kant's sublime, but it also proposes an idea of generating one's own freedom: Schiller's 'ideal' realm of freedom is precisely man-made and cultural, rather than absolute and pre-given. In this way, whilst Schiller's 'übersinnlich' may sound like an a priori and

transcendental category, as it is in Kant's formulations, it arguably takes an important step towards the idea that we must generate our own – *marginal* – freedom, and that art is the best place to do this.

The sublime as modern, anti-modern, modernist or postmodern

Even prior to Kant's contribution, the sublime had an essentially 'modern' aspect. Longinus, usually credited as the initiator of interest in the sublime, conceives of it in terms of a modernised and secularised religion, what Thomas Weiskel refers to as 'transcendence without any controversial theology'. [Weiskel 1976 4, 16] This is echoed in Richard Wolin's reading of the sublime as a modern legitimation of traditional authorities of myth and religion. [See Wolin 1984 11] This underlines the broader relationship between theology and modernist aesthetics, which, as Stanley Cavell puts it, 'is to be understood in categories which are, or were, religious'. [Cavell 1976 175] In the course of this chapter I will come to ask whether the postmodern variants of the sublime, including the anaesthetic, might not also unwittingly suggest, to paraphrase Weiskel, a 'theology without the controversial transcendence'. Weiskel and Wolin's readings of the sublime suggest a notably different relation to traditional mythical or religious authority than Kant's modern, rational project, namely the retention of certain pre-modern aspects, such as absolute authority and

impenetrability, rather than Kant's thoroughgoing reassessment of what it is possible to know.

That said the sublime is marked by ambiguity even in the pivotal role that it plays in Kant's formulations, an ambiguity which is of course crucial in its later theorisation as counterpoint to Kant's modern project. That is to say, even Kant's turn inwards to our own faculties [see also Buck-Morss 1992 8-9] is famously triggered by an experience that we cannot order, what Waugh calls 'an outrage on the imagination'. [Waugh 1992 26] As such, the rational centre of the sublime is precipitated by a sense of radical indeterminacy: sublimity is 'that experience of an object which invokes an idea of reason, but one that is necessarily radically indeterminate'. [Waugh 1992 26] That is to say, even Kant's sublime is forged by the experience of the limit, if not of subjectivity, then of subjective, rational control.

In this respect it is apparent that the seeds of what might be characterised as an 'anti-modern' or 'critical' (or what Thomas Weiskel has called the 'ultra-modern' [Weiskel 1976 38]) conception of the sublime are already central to this experience of pure rationality. The sublime's 'outrage on the imagination', in contrast to the modern shift in the focus of the sublime from the metaphysical to the rational and subjective, has been central to the theorisation of the sublime from Edmund Burke to the postmodern. Whereas the experience of beauty is

taken to be the result of a deep-seated harmony with nature, the transition to the sublime has been read in terms of the Fall, an alienation of man from nature which subverts pre-lapsarian harmony with imbalance and dissonance. [See Simpson 1987 247] And as far as the question of what is predicated on this dissonance is concerned, there seem to be two alternative views. Firstly, the sublime experience is seen to indicate that a rational limit has been reached in an encounter with the chaos of nature. This view agrees with Kant's conception of the sublime as a meditation on limits, but dispenses with his ultimate rational recuperation. Secondly, Edmund Burke understands this dissonance and disharmony as a quality not of nature, but of the human passions. [See Weiskel 1976 16, Burke 1773] This conception of the sublime, like Kant's, sees the sublime as a product of the human mind, but contrasts with Kant's reading in that it focuses on the irrational element of the human mind. Of course, Kant would be unlikely to disagree with this idea of the human mind as generating more or less rational passions, but he would most likely object to any sense of the primacy of these passions that Burke suggests. In Burke's view, rational ideas of order and clarity are imposed upon man's nature somehow from the outside, and are considered to be 'in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatever'. [Cited in Weiskel 1976 16-17] The common ground with the tension in Baumgarten's formulations between confused ('obscuritas') and distinct ('claritas') representations is apparent, and the parallel with my discussion of the sensory as either hand-maiden to or challenge to the rational in chapter two. Our way of

interacting with the world might have always been made up of these two tendencies, clarity and chaos, and the question of which one is primary has been a crucial one for philosophy since Aristotle.

Elements of this anti-modern investment in the sublime are central to its more recent incarnations. A pivotal factor in the postmodern sublime is the sublime notion of reaching the limit of man's faculties and specifically his ability to control the external world, and the idea of accessing a chaotic and essentially anti-human domain. Jean-François Lyotard, for instance, whose formulations I will treat in the last part of this chapter, refers to the sublime as an experience (specifically of art) which defies conceptual control. [See Lyotard 1991 110] It is in this sense that Lyotard will write of a freezing of the dialectic before the Kantian moment of rational-subjective recuperation. This refusal of rational recuperation reflects what Patricia Waugh identifies in postmodern theory as a 'pervasive cynicism about the progressivist ideals of modernity'. [Waugh 1992 5]

Of course key elements of Kant's sublime remain. The alleged non-purposiveness of the Kantian sublime, though disengaged from Kantian transcendental claims, underlies the aesthetic and political significance of the sublime as the locus of the non-conceptual. Kant had already identified the non-conceptual or indeterminate idea as central to the importance of the aesthetic, but Lyotard reads Kant's failure of the mind to represent the sublime object in terms

150

of Heidegger's 'infinitely simple' notion of *Ereignis*, that can only be approached by privation or suspension of conceptual faculties. [Lyotard 1985 2] As with my discussion of the sensory, it is questionable though whether this complete suspension or failure to recuperate rationally is plausible.

The irrepressibility of the rational faculties might be responsible for precipitating the migration of the sublime into the artwork, and from the issue of representation to mind to representation and meaning in art. So whereas Kant's modern sublime identifies the sublime as a dialectic within the rational subject, the anti-modern (or anti-rationalist) sublime wants to locate the sublime beyond the power of the rational subject, and one refuge for this is the artwork. This migration of the sublime into the artwork – artwork as a locus of non-representation – might seem to sidestep the question that was central to Kant's sublime, namely the grounds for representation of ideas to self. It is precisely because of this of course that such readings of the sublime are appealing to twentieth century theorists for whom the self is irretrievably tainted, such as Adorno, or relegated to an arbitrary moment in the horizontal, as in much poststructuralist philosophy. But I would like to reaffirm the significance of this issue of representation to mind as a crucial element in the force of art which operates at the limits of perception. The dialectical complexity and fragility of the sublime might offer a more subtle means of conceptualising the modernist imperative, not just of innovation, but of defamiliarisation. Against the idea of

art as somehow immanent I will emphasise the context of art's conventionality (and institutionality) as a key moment in the dialectic of art's innovation. This does not dispense with the sublime: both Kant's version and the anti-modern sublime rest on the idea of the sublime as emblematic of experience of limits. It is in this sense that Weiskel describes the sublime as 'a necessary complement to a psychology that stressed its own limits'. [Weiskel 1976 17] Christine Pries is on similar ground when she refers to the sublime as a 'Grenzerfahrung'. [Pries 1989] I will suggest that this might suggest the sublime might be allied to aesthetics (and indeed art) not in terms of the antinomy of transcendence or immanence, but as an essentially modernist aesthetics of rule-breaking. Of course, it might be countered that this conventionality does not discount, and indeed cannot do without, the moment of indeterminacy: for Lyotard, as we shall see, the dialectical process still requires an immanent moment that remains beyond conceptualisation: 'But this agitation [by which Lyotard here means innovation] [...] is only possible if something remains to be determined'. [Lyotard 1985 2] This might be akin to Adorno's 'Mehr', which occurs in the *Ästhetische Theorie* as that indeterminate element which evades the measure of the artwork as an agglomeration of facts: 'dies Mehr ist ihr Gehalt'. [Adorno 1970 322] (This 'Mehr' might be more obviously apparent in the mode of the sublime as excess, rather than an absence of determinate content, which Thomas Weiskel calls the 'metonymical' mode of the sublime. [Weiskel 1976 29] Not strictly relevant for my considerations here, this idea of excess will be pertinent for my reading of art

which deploys sensory excess as an alternative to Welsch's ideas on the anaesthetic.)

The evident tension between the idea of the sublime as a transcendental basis and claims as to its immanent nature is symptomatic of the character of the sublime as an unstable and nebulous category, a difficulty to pin down which is in part attributable to its location at the interstices of a number of different and often intractable antinomies. Is it resistant to human purpose or does it ultimately attest to our ability to turn even the most extreme experience to a certain end? Is it a quality of mind, does it belong in some way to material – refusing the mind access, or does it describe a certain mode of formal presentation? Christine Pries refers to the tension between the idea of the sublime as perfection and as raw and immanent, a tension that will recur in Lyotard's ideas on the sublime artwork. [See Pries 1989 3] Welsch himself speaks of a 'prekäre Dynamik des Erhabenen' [Welsch 1990 116], and Pries refers to the essentially *paradoxical* nature of the sublime: 'Das Erhabene ist gerade nicht das "Aufgehobene". Es ist ein Paradox.' [Pries 1989 11] For Pries, its paradoxical nature derives from the sublime's thorough-going ambivalence: 'Das Erhabene bleibt unentschieden, in der Schwebe, es schwankt. Dieses Schwanken bedingt die grundlegende Ambivalenz des Erhabenen.' [Pries 1989 11] This might make the figure of the sublime emblematic of aesthetics as a whole, which itself oscillates between the poles of aiming to provide a transcendental basis for the

philosophical project as a whole to a valorisation of that which defies such schematic or conceptual recuperation. But this ambivalence is not unproblematic: most is arguably at stake in the conflicting ideas of the sublime as somehow providing a mode of resistance to identity thinking and the sublime as Jameson's postmodern 'cultural dominant'. [Jameson 1991 6] What implications does the sublime's central ambivalence have for its oppositional force? Is it useful for articulating a position somewhere between its modern and anti-modern poles? In the same vein as this ambivalence Pries characterises the sublime broadly as an experience of limits – a point emphasised by the term's etymology: 'Es bezeugt das Bewußtsein dieser Grenze.' [Pries 1989 11] For my concerns this experience of limits suggests the sublime as in some way crucial to the modernist aesthetic, not as sheer self-reflexive autonomy – though this will be discussed in terms of the sublime below – but in terms of a more located exploration of the limits of perception and understanding.

In the sections that follow I will firstly present Welsch's main ideas on the sublime, centring on his treatments of Adorno's aesthetics and Lyotard's theorisation of a postmodern aesthetic, indicating the main points for analysis and criticism. I will then turn to Adorno and Lyotard's respective comments on the sublime, which might offer possible correctives for Welsch. As well as evaluating Welsch's ideas on the sublime in their own terms, my concern will be to evaluate whether his terms justify the sublime's claim to a increasing

relevance to the postmodern era, or whether it is a category that is too indebted to its modern, and even modernist, roots.

Welsch's on the sublime

Adorno's 'Rehabilitierung des Erhabenen'

In his essay on Adorno's aesthetics, which he subtitles 'eine implizite Ästhetik des Erhabenen', Welsch refers to the Adornian sublime as a 'Rehabilitierung' of Kant's 'hohles Erhabene' [Welsch 1990 116], which even amounts to 'eine Negation des ehemaligen Sinns des Erhabenen'. [Welsch 1990 117] Welsch sees Adorno's critique of the Kantian sublime as centring, firstly, on the ideological basis of the sublime's 'Respekt vor Macht und Größe' [Welsch 1990 117], and secondly, on Kant's 'Verwechslung von Inhalt und Form'. [Welsch 1990 117] These two criticisms are reflected in Adorno's own dual investments in the sublime, namely the 'politicisation' of the sublime as a mode of resistance against the sovereignty of the subject, and the shift of the locus of the sublime from questions of content, which for Kant by virtue of the nature of the sublime experience had to come from nature, to the formal idea of the sublime as characteristic of the mode of modernist art. [See Adorno 1970 293-4] Welsch's discussion of Adorno's sublime focusses on four main aspects, the first three of which fill out the politicisation of the concept: firstly, the sublime as a

'Wiederherstellung unterdrückter [...] Natur' [Adorno 1970 198, cited in Welsch 1990 126], which leads to the idea of man's proximity to nature (an 'Erfahrung möglicher Teilhabe an Natur und gemeinsamer Freiheit mit ihr'. [Welsch 1990 119][3]); secondly, the idea of sublime art as an experience of 'unvereinbare, unidentische, aneinander sich reibende Momente' [Adorno 1970 263, cited in Welsch 1990 125], which is conceived as a moment of art's transcendence of or problematisation of its own terms or concept (such as the artwork's formal or

---

[3] Adorno's view here might be likened to Wordsworth's idea of the sublime as precipitating a purifying communion with nature, contained in the *Prelude*. [See Wordsworth 1928 410] It is interesting to note the parallels and differences between Kant's conception of the interaction between man and nature in the sublime and that expressed in Wordsworth's *Prelude*. For Wordsworth, the sublime experience of the 'huge and mighty forms' of nature [Wordsworth 1928 410, line 393] allows man's grandeur to come to light, in accordance with Kant's understanding of the sublime as enabling self-knowledge;

> With life and nature, purifying thus
> The elements of feeling and of thought,
> And sanctifying, by such discipline,
> Both pain and fear, until we recognise
> A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. [Wordsworth 1928, lines 410-414]

But the difference is that Wordsworth's sublime is a purifying communion with nature, rather than a turning away from nature, with none of Kant's antagonism between man and nature, which arguably anticipates the anti-modern investment later.

thematic unity); thirdly, the related idea of the sublime as an anti-totalising mode of 'Gerechtigkeit'. The fourth idea is a recognition of the sublime as the subjective experience of an objective content (in spite of a focus on the capacity of the sublime for freeing us from the 'Subjektivitätsprinzip' [Welsch 1990 120]).

Indeed, the idea of an identity with nature seems to be akin to Schopenhauer's sense of resignation of the will, a compassion towards all beings that results from the insight that all are fundamentally one [see Audi 1995 718], which also recurs in Nietzsche's idea of post-metaphysical philosophy as a 'translation of man back into nature'. [Audi 1995 533] This surprisingly positive depiction of the subject's relationship to the outside world in Adorno is tempered in Welsch's formulations by the caveat that it is only an 'anticipation' of communion: 'Denn im Erhabenen war es, wie gesagt, von Anfang an um die Emanzipation der Natur aus der Unterdrückung durch den Geist und um die Antizipation einer Versöhnung mit ihr.' [Welsch 1990 127] 'Geist' here, the overcoming of which is a prerequisite for the liberation of nature, I take to mean subjectivity, in such a way that conceptualises Adorno's ideas on the sublime, as one might expect from the co-author of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* and in line with Kant, in terms of the tension between subject and object. This also identifies Adorno with the anti-modern, that is to say largely anti-subjective, sublime that I identified in the opening paragraphs above. Art for Adorno is by its nature 'kritisch am Ende gegen das Ich-prinzip'. [Adorno 1970 365, cited in Welsch 1990 118]

157

Further, Adorno's 'emancipation' of nature from subject, and the subsequent reconciliation of the two takes place in the context of a rejection of a bad version of reconciliation, a domination by the subject which Welsch identifies with humanism ('Humanität – das klassische Pendant von Versöhnung' [Welsch 1990 134]). This is taken up further in Welsch's reading of Adorno's artistic sublime as a rejection of humanism in favour of art that articulates its own 'Inhumanität'. [Adorno 1970 293, cited in Welsch 1990 134-5] If we accept that there is or can be a qualitatively different kind of communion with nature, presumably the issue is how it can be different, and how can we, from within our subjective view of the world and nature, tell that it is different and be sure that it is the right kind of relationship to nature.

Of course, Adorno's better known discussion of reconciliation is his critique of Georg Lukács' ideas on realism in art, 'Erpresste Versöhnung' [Adorno 1974 251-80], and as noted above, it is the artwork that Adorno looks to as a locus of the sublime resistance to subjective domination. As far as Kant's mutual exclusion of man-made art and the sublime is concernd, Adorno sees this as timidity on Kant's behalf ('befangen' [Adorno 1970 31]), but elsewhere recognises that Kant's position is entirely appropriate, due to the unreadiness of art-forms for the presentation of the sublime. As Welsch puts it: 'Daher betrachtet Adorno Kants Vorsichtsmaßnahme, das Erhabene allein der Natur zu reservieren und nicht

auch der Kunst zuzuschreiben, als geradezu hellsichtig'. [Welsch 1990 117] Kant

was writing prior to the technical innovations of aesthetic modernism, in which

Adorno, Lyotard, and Welsch see the sublime as activated.

So in what sense can art's formal organisation be seen to precipitate an

experience of sublime as resistance to reconciliation, and what light might these

shed on the kind of relation Adorno prefers between subject and nature? Welsch

does not really clarify the link between sublime effects and formal features, apart

from in the broadest terms of art as challenging its own concept. Of course,

formal reconciliation has traditionally been understood to manifest itself in the

beautiful, which Welsch characterises as a 'Horizont der Versöhnung', achieved

in the ideal of 'ästhetische Einheit'. [Welsch 1990 127] By contrast, and in a fairly

standard reading of Adorno's aesthetics, the sublime artwork is seen to be

generated in the turn 'von Versöhnung zu Unversöhnlichkeit, von der

Schlichtung der Widersprüche zu deren Artikulation'. [Welsch 1990 134] The

modernist artwork is exemplary in this respect, refusing formal unity and

negating meaning, as Adorno's discussions of Kafka and Beckett indicate. [See

Adorno 1974 281-324 and 1977 254-287] The impetus for the ability to throw off

subjective control is given by the experience of the formal qualities of the work of

art. It is questionable whether we can avoid garnering some kind of unified

meaning: Welsch has already suggested that reconciliation is inevitable, and just

as I have noted the essentially anticipatory mode of the sublime above, the

sublime artwork is seen only to postpone reconciliation, to achieve only a 'verweigerte Versöhnung'. [Welsch 1990 129]

Art's capacity for – at least temporarily – releasing its material from the 'Gewalttat der Rationalität' [Adorno 1970 209, cited in Welsch 1990 126] is seen – in rather abstract terms – to guarantee a certain 'Gerechtigkeit'. [Welsch 1990 135] It is in this sense that Welsch reads Adorno's sublime as a rejection of the sublime's traditional association with the dominance of rationality, with what Welsch calls the 'Komplizität des Erhabenen mit Herrschaft'. [Welsch 1990 119] Sublime art in particular is seen to subvert art's usual status as a 'Dokument von Herrschaft' [Welsch 1990 124], as the artwork becomes a locus of difference or heterogeneity. This is expressed by Welsch, in similar terminology to his distinction between vertical transcendence and horizontal immanence above, as a 'Horizont der Gerechtigkeit gegenüber dem Heterogenen'. [Welsch 1990 135] This dialectical relation of art to domination and unification is seen by Welsch, quite reasonably in my view, as the main justification for Adorno's theorisation of modernist art in terms of the sublime:

Dies ist für Adorno einer der wesenlichsten Gründe, warum das Erhabene die Struktur der modernen Kunst generell bezeichnen kann: In ihm sind Herrschaft und deren Brechung paradox und doch konsequent miteinander verbunden. [Welsch 1990 126]

In a perhaps overly subtle argument Welsch asserts that this justice is not a 'blanke Negation von Herrschaft' [Welsch 1990 126], the unificatory logic of which would, according to him, retain a 'herrschaftlicher Zwang'. [Welsch 1990 126]

The notion of heterogeneity seems to posit an irreducible necessity which, contrary to the idea that reconciliation of elements in the mind is unavoidable, insists that complete reconciliation is also impossible: 'Die Idee der Gerechtigkeit ist jene Umformulierung des Ideals der Versöhnung, die in dem Moment unausweichlich wird, in dem man an eine letzte Vereinbarkeit des Heterogenen nicht mehr glauben kann.' [Welsch 1990 130-1] This lends the claim to justice a certain circularity. The question must be, where does this heterogeneity come from. Does it belong to nature, in a Nietzschean sense of the manifold nature of reality which we reduce into singularities for the benefit of our own constrained understanding? This sense of heterogeneity is plausible, and might in fact be hard to refute, in the unasnwerable sense that refuting such multiplicity – like asserting it – merely begs the question as to whether we would be in a position to perceive it. It does indeed seem that 'real' nature enters the argument here, with Welsch suggests that nature's 'elemental' force is somehow essentially resistant to the subject: 'Wichtig ist, daß Natur dabei selbst als "Elementarisches", als Gegenstand voller Macht und Größe auftritt. Solche Gewalt kann nicht

bezwungen, diese Macht nicht beherrscht werden.' [Welsch 1990 120] That said, Adorno here seems to have returned to the terrain of Kant's sublime, which is to say concerned with *size*, rather than heterogeneous particularity that underlies the claims to justice. But the dubious suggestion of reconciliation with nature is all the more problematic in view of the extreme nature of our relationship to nature – due to advances in technology as well as a breakdown in the 'organic' connection to that environment – that modern technology has thrown up. We have seen that Welsch himself identifies key aspects of reality as imperceptible, and the nebulous concept of the sublime is sometimes referred to in this regard, in the sense that Jameson writes of the sublime as characteristic of the postmodern breakdown in the sense of a direct relationship to material reality.

The alternative view is that this heterogeneity in some way belongs to art's formal qualities. This would suggest a kind of *conditional* heterogeneity, measured in terms of (or more specifically by contrast to) formal unity and unobscured meaning. As such, a literary work's narrative strategy might be understood to retain a certain heterogeneity, as in Bakhtin's concept of 'polyvocality' [see Bakhtin 1984], or Adorno's idea of 'bestimmte Negation' of meaning, as in his discussion of Beckett. [See Adorno 1974 320] In such terms in my view a kind of *surrogate* experience of the heterogeneity of nature might be more plausibly generated. This ties in with the idea that the difficulty of evading our irrepressibly recuperating rational faculties means that the sublime, if we are

to experience it without dominating it, must migrate into the qualities of the artwork. But what would this mean? What good is the artwork without the mind? I have already suggested in chapter two that there may be a crucial interplay between form and the recipient, to say nothing of the fact that this idea of fundamental heterogeneity seems to be opposed to a substantial idea of 'form' (as in a mode of 'organisation' of content), and I will say more on this below.

The awareness of 'belonging to nature' is a curious quality or effect to attribute to modernist art, in view of the fact that the latter has become ever more reflexive and abstract, ever more removed from the natural realm. The fact that it is man-made precisely leads Kant to exclude art from the experience of the sublime, and burying the sublime experience in art's form, in art's internal unreconcilability, makes the emphasis on reconciliation with nature and natural justice more surprising. Again the question is what 'nature' we are talking about. Does this 'nature' refer to the 'material' of the artwork that is seen somehow to be given voice, seen to bring 'Tendenzen des Materials zur Artikulation'. [Welsch 1990 126] This sounds akin to Wellsch's emphasis on the sensory nature of the aesthetic experience, but might also be taken to suggest that the object refuses to refer *beyond* itself, motivating Welsch's characterisation later in the essay of Adorno's sublime art as *immanent*: 'Horizontalität und strikte Immanenz bei Adorno stehen Motiven von Vertikalität und Transzendenz bei Lyotard gegenüber.' [Welsch 1990 147] (This comparison with Lyotard is curious coming

from Welsch, whose appraisal of the Lyotardian sublime is otherwise fully aware of the role that the claim to immanence plays in it, as we shall see below.)

Moreover the question arises what difference there is between this appraisal of unreconciled formal elements of the work of art and the reception of those elements in the mind. The focus on the immanent art object might risk reverting to a focus on the *content* of experience, rather than on Kant's *qualities* of the human mind that are highlighted by the experience. Alternatively we may still be firmly on the terrain of the Kantian sublime here, with nature as a cipher for the limits of the mind's ability to organise the experience of the artwork. So whilst the balance of the sublime does seem to shift from Kant's subjective-rational sublime to the idea of art as an object that resist the sovereignty of the subject, this seems to require a more sophisticated account of what is meant by such a reconciliation with nature. Adorno himself criticises Kant, as Welsch reiterates, for just such a 'Verwechslung von Inhalt und Form' [Welsch 1990 117] because of his focus on the capacities of the human mind, and it may be unavoidable in a valorisation of the sublime as resistant to the subject that there will be a tendency for it to become a valorisation of the object as in itself sublime. But equally for Adorno the question arises as to whether the mind can so easily be excluded here, as my remarks above about the irrepressibility of meaning suggested. This returns to my discussion of the rejection of the recipient in chapter two and the recipient is certainly evident in Welsch's description of the

experience of the sublime in art, in a way that comes straight from Kant, as precipitating a 'Wechselspiel of Lust und Unlust'. [Welsch 1990 123] This 'Unlust' is opposed to the pure pleasure referred to by Adorno as 'der ästhetische Hedonismus' [Adorno 1970 30, cited in Welsch 1990 114] generated by beauty in art (and in Welsch's terms the beautification of even non-art elements in everyday life). I have already associated this pleasure with an extreme organisation of content. The pleasure that art must aim for derives from a more ascetic 'Negation und Entronnensein' ('having slipped through the fingers'). For Welsch, 'Einzig dies – nicht die hedonistische Lust der Angleichung – ist das Glück, das Kunst heute noch vermitteln kann, und genau diese Position kommt in der Kategorie des Erhabenen zum Ausdruck.' [Welsch 1990 114] This owes much to Adorno's remark on the relationship of the sublime to aesthetic pleasure, some of which Welsch cites:

Dem ästhetischen Hedonismus wäre entgegenzuhalten jene Stelle aus der Kantischen Lehre vom Erhabenen, das er, befangen, von der Kunst eximiert: Glück an den Kunstwerken wäre allenfalls das Gefühl des Standhaltens, das sie vermitteln. [Adorno 1970 30-31, see also Welsch 1990 114]

Welsch's own ideas on art as anaesthetic have strong echoes of this idea of the sublime as a means of resisting effects of aestheticisation, as will be discussed in

the next chapter. But as remarked above, this experience of displeasure and pleasure seems to be a necessarily subjective view of the sublime. The question is whether it is compatible with the idea of the sublime as an articulation of the heterogeneous materiality of the object. By contrast to any such valorisation of heterogeneity, Welsch seems to describe the experience of the sublime as a point of stability and resistance: 'Nur so kann sie [Kunst] einen Ort des Widerstands bilden, vermag sie dem Verblendungszusammenhang Paroli zu bieten.' [Welsch 1990 114] The idea of a 'Verblendungszusammenhang' refers to Welsch's characterisation of postmodernity as pervaded by effects of aestheticisation. But the idea of a specific 'Ort' of resistance seems to be counter to other suggestions of the sublime's essential fluidity, indeed seems to want to reserve a space or centre which remains unaffected by this fluidity. An analogous conception of art as a kind of *Reservatbereich* of wholeness and transcendence arguably recurs in Welsch's conception of art as anaesthetic. Such tensions run through the sublime, which may be conceived as a fragile alternation or paradox or as a means of communion with nature and a royal road to a somehow intrinsic and reliable mode of justice. In addition, I would question whether this 'Gefühl des Standhaltens', which comes from Kant, can only be used as a response to aestheticisation, or whether it might be taken as a broader model for autonomous art. Below I will suggest that this lengthening of experience is essential to the refutation of expectation that is central to a modernist aesthetics of defamiliarisation.

166

Welsch discusses the central role of the sublime in Lyotard's theorisation of postmodernity in two essays, 'Die Geburt der postmodernen Philosophie aus dem Geist der modernen Kunst' and 'Für eine postmoderne Ästhetik des Widerstandes'. In the former, the echo of Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik* is curiously not reflected in the essay, which in fact causes certain problems for his argument for reasons that I will explain below. The focus rather is on Lyotard is one of a number of French post-structuralist philosophers (Foucault, Derrida and Lacan) who are identified as translators of the precepts and practice of modern art into the philosophy of postmodernity. [Welsch 1990 82] But for Welsch Lyotard is '*der* Autor des Postmodernismus in der Philosophie' [Welsch 1990 83] by virtue of his early and particularly precise characterisation of postmodern thinking. The irony of this claim is evident, if not intentional, in view of the fact that Welsch is at pains here and elsewhere to flag up the heterogeneity of and the 'horizontal' relationship between the various discourses of the postmodern. The immediate reason for Lyotard's privileged position in Welsch's formulations is what the latter identifies as Lyotard's 'Kunstnähe' [Welsch 1990 84], his closeness, even in epistemological issues, to questions of aesthetics. The constitutive role of modernist aesthetics for postmodern thinking is the central idea of Welsch's essay. Welsch is not alone in

thinking this – Peter Osborne, for instance, considers Adorno's modernist theory of art to be suitable not just for assessing postmodern art but also for understanding postmodernity more generally [Osborne 1989 25] – but in Welsch's discussion of the trickle-down of the formal innovations of modernist art into a postmodern thinking the pivotal figure is Lyotard, who 'verteidigte [...] das postmoderne Denken gerade unter Berufung auf die Ästhetik der Moderne'. [Welsch 1990 85]   Welsch delineates five aspects to modernist aesthetics, of which its sublime nature takes a central position. He cites, firstly, modern art's formal 'Dekomposition', its dismantling of the 'traditionelles Wesen der Kunst' [Welsch 1990 86] (the similarity to Adorno's notion of art as interrogating its own concept is clear), and secondly, its reflexivity. These two are seen to be largely contributory to the third characteristic of modern art, namely its status as an aesthetics of the sublime: 'Diese Umstellung der Malerei zieht den Wechsel von einer Ästhetik des Schönen bzw. der Beschönigung zu einer Ästhetik des Erhabenen nach sich.' [Welsch 1990 88]   Fourthly, the modernist aesthetic's experimentality, and finally its plurality, are seen to be consequences of its involvement with the sublime: 'Lyotard will das Erhabene nicht erbaulich verstanden wissen, sondern – und damit komme ich zum nächsten Punkt seiner Charakterisierung der modernen Kunst – experimentell.' [Welsch 1990 90]   He continues, 'Ist schon der experimentelle Charakter eine Konsequenz des Erhabenen, so ist es die Pluralität noch einmal.' [Welsch 1990 92]

The ideas of art as experimental and formally reflexive acknowledge the conceptual and self-reflexive mode of art's functioning: 'Als reflektierende ist die Kunst der Moderne ein Unternehmen nicht mehr nur der Sinne, sondern auch des Geistes und Denkens.' [Welsch 1990 88] It is worth noting at this stage the discrepancy between this idea of 'nicht mehr nur der Sinne' and Welsch's previous focus on the sensory basis of aesthetics. (That said, it should be noted that far from having abandoned his concept of *aisthesis*, Welsch in the same essay ultimately reverts to the idea of 'aisthetisches Denken' as the logical conclusion of the postmodern. [Welsch 1990 106]) Here Welsch rejects 'eine Beschränkung aufs bloße Sehen und aufs bloß sinnliche Wahrnemen überhaupt'. [Welsch 1990 88] Welsch cites Lyotard as rejecting such 'Gegebenheiten' which do not take into account of the mental nature of art as *Vorstellung*: 'daß das Bild nicht nur im Auge entsteht, sondern auch im Geist'. [Lyotard 1985 97, cited in Welsch 1990 88] Here Welsch returns explicitly to Kant, for whom the sublime precipitates an awareness of precisely this supersensory capacity in us: 'die Erweckung des Gefühls eines übersinnlichen Vermögens in uns'. [Kant 1963 143, cited in Welsch 1990 89] But as well as this more Kantian vein, Lyotard follows the transition of the sublime from the supersensory human faculties to the artwork as a failure of artistic representation and as an attempt to avoid the recuperation that the rational faculties impose on material. Welsch does not say much more about this interreogation of representation, though he does recognise the central role that

questions of the failure of representation take in Lyotard's theorisation of the sublime ('So ist wohl auch der folgende Herzsatz Lyotards zum Erhabenen zu verstehen: "Die Frage des Undarstellbaren…ist in meinen Augen…die einzige, die im kommenden Jahrhundert den Einsatz von Denken und Leben lohnt."' [Lyotard 1985 100, cited in Welsch 1990 92]) Rather he turns to the question of the pluralism of modern art, which for him is crucial to its experimental nature: 'Ist schon der experimentelle Charakter eine Konsequenz des Erhabenen, so ist es die Pluralität noch einmal.' [Welsch 1990 92] This idea of the sublime as plural is clearly linked to the ideas of 'Gerechtigkeit zum Heterogenen' [Welsch 1990 130] and the sublime as 'Unvereinbarkeit' [Welsch 1990 130] discussed in relation to Adorno above. Of course one might accept that art in toto is characterized by a certain pluralism, in the sense that art, unlike much science, is characterized by an almost limitless array of discourses, which operate in parallel and do not necessarily return to a central credo nor strive for a unified system. But below I will ask whether this plurality has anything to do with the sublime, as well as elaborating what I see as a crucial incompatibility between experiment and this idea of sheerly plural art.

More plausibly related to the sublime is the idea of art as self-reflexive, which is to a certain extent implicit in artistic experimentation. I have already discussed the idea of art's self-reflexivity as a meditation on its own concept, including the possibility and limits of representation, and while these issues are still relevant,

here for Welsch the issue of reflexivity specifically refers to art that rejects any realist reference or orthodox political 'commitment'. This quintessentially Adornian valorization of aesthetic autonomy is presented in Welsch's essay 'Für eine postmoderne Ästhetik des Widerstandes', in which he contrast Lyotard's position to Peter Weiss's conception of engaged art. Welsch identifies Weiss's art as what he calls a typically modern aesthetic of 'Widerstand', as opposed to Lyotard's preference for the allegedly more postmodern 'Widerstreit'. [Welsch 1990 157] So whilst he recognizes that Weiss's politicized aesthetic resists the reduction of art to mere aestheticism, Welsch characterises its conception of the connection between politics and art as an 'Input-Hermeneutik' [Welsch 1990 158], by which he means that Weiss imports the elements which carry the political import of the play into the art's form. The implication is that art is only given value by virtue of what non-art uses it is put to, what perspectives and insights it is employed to illustrate and promote:

In Konsequenz dessen wird die Fruchtbarkeit der Kunst dann allerdings genau nur eine Fruchtbarkeit für diese Perspektive sein. [...] Es geht nicht darum, etwas der Kunst als Kunst zu entnehmen, sondern man muß umgekehrt die Bedeutungen und Bewertungen, auf die es ankommt, an sie heraustragen, ja in sie hineintragen. [Welsch 1990 159]

Such meaning is ultimately to be judged by non-aesthetic or 'kunst-extern' criteria, [Welsch 1990 158] and could do equally well without the receptical of the artwork which becomes merely a vehicle in which to express them. Such art is seen to forfeit the political force of art's formal resources. Such committed interpretations or valorisations of art are also dismissed as essentially 'narzißtisch' [Welsch 1990 159], which seems to mean self-aggrandizing for the author as subject – Adorno's influence is evident again here – and as such they are seen to be open to exploitation: 'Mit einem solchen Verfahren wird man in der Kunst immer das sehen können, was man sehen will.' [Welsch 1990 159] By contrast in Lyotard's formulations Welsch sees a dissociation of art from any external, social measure of value: 'Lyotard legt nicht eine von vornherein bestehende gesellschaftliche Perspektive als Maßtab oder Sonde an die Kunst an, sondern orientiert sich an dem Eigenansprüchen der Kunst – die er wahrnimmt und ernstnimmt.' [Welsch 1990 163] Welsch's preference for this radical separation of art and life seems to go against the grain of his project of dismantling such a hard and fast distinction in his return to the terms of aisthesis as a study of perception.

The terminology that Welsch uses is curious too. He calls this disinterested and autonomous quality of art 'Widerstreit' [Welsch 1990 162], whereby art is seen to offer, curiously, resistance (i.e. 'Widerstand') against various elements of modernity, such as the invasion of language by technological terminology and

modern life's '"kommunikative" Verflachung und Vereinheitlichung'. [Welsch 1990 162-3] But the claim that art's truth and value is not contingent on its relationship to external referent, apart from being in my view hard to sustain, might be better described as the seemingly more absolute 'Widerstand', rather than a more dialectical 'Widerstreit'. (For Kant *Widerstreit* refers to an essentially *dialectical* opposition, that is to say neither 'real' nor 'logical'. It is not logical because it does not arise from a mistake in thinking, but indeed arises from the process of thinking itself. At the same time the opposition is not 'real' because such dialectical oppositions do not result in such objectively grounded knowledge that one could describe by the term 'real'. [See Arndt 2004]) Adorno in my view is better at sustaining this dialectical quality of art's separateness, insofar as he registers that whilst form saves art from mere empiricism, any hard and fast distinction between the two moments is hard to sustain. [See Adorno 1970 15]

There is also the question of how these various notions of extreme separateness, self-reflexivivity, autonomy and immanence relate to the historical and more recent uses of the sublime. Welsch explains the political investment in aesthetic autonomy with reference to Christine Pries' distinction between a 'metaphysical' sublime and a 'critical' sublime [see Pries 1989 28], claiming that, rather than a transcendent metaphysics, the sublime for Lyotard functions as an immanent ontology: 'Lyotard vetritt keine Metaphysik der Transzendenz, sondern eine

Ontologie der unabsehbaren Möglichkeiten, und das Erhabene ist nicht vertikal, sondern horizontal zu deklinieren und gewinnt genau dadurch kritische Funktion.' [Welsch 1990 91] This 'critical' notion of the sublime derives from the vein of sublime theory that focusses on its characteristic as an incomparable instant, i.e. the first, not yet recuperated stage of Kant's sublime. Welsch consequently characterizes the postmodern as a 'horizontal' constellation of knowledge, distinguishing its 'Vielheitsoption' from the vertical legitimation of knowledge which characterises the modern 'Einheitssehnsucht'. [Welsch 1990 93] In this way, any sense of an overarching frame of reference or any universally binding measure of value is allegedly dispensed with, and it seems to be in this dispensation that the political force of the sublime inheres. Emblematic of this is the immanent understanding of the aesthetic event, freed from any subordinate position to that external content which it might represent. The point of this politics of the plural and different is that in such a schema there is no vertical schema that would allow ultimate comparison between different objects or cultural entities. In this way, Welsch takes a seemingly relativist position which posits an infinite horizon of potentiality, without any claims to final validity ('Endgültigkeitsbehauptungen' [Welsch 1990 91-2]). This is reiterated later in his anti-foundationalist salvo: 'Es gibt keinen Generalnenner aller Gestaltungen, keine Generalkriterien, keine Generalästhetik.' [Welsch 1990 163]

But can such a rejection of external points of reference for establishing value avoid self-contradiction? Even if one takes the view that art can refute all external reference, the valorisation of immanence and plurality seem to introduce a certain reference to an external value, precisely in the essentially philosophical notion of plurality or incomparability as *intrinsically* positive. This is conceived as an end in itself, and as such as a legitimating principle for diverse art-forms. Moreover, all external reference and influence on meaning would presumably be hard to eradicate, even in the most austere artworks. Indeed, I have already mentioned John Cage's idea that even silent artwork cannot keep out ambient noise and even precisely highlights the difficulty of excluding such inputs. And whilst I have sympathy with the desire to distract from aesthetics' connection to the transcendental, as thematised in my distinction between the marginal and universal directions aesthetics can take, my feeling is that an aesthetics of the incomparable results in a similar cul-de-sac to that generated by Kant's insistence on disinterest. Moreover, in contrast to the claims of plurality and immanence, in my view comparison and reference are irrepressible mechanisms and mode of generation meaning, which art can and has temporarily disrupted, but on which this disruption is ultimately dependent.

A further aspect of this 'horizontality' is evident in Welsch's characterization of this mode of anti-representational, immanent art in terms of an 'experience' that cannot be represented in conceptual terms:

Dabei geht es wohlgemerkt nicht um die Darstellung einer Entität namens Undarstellbares, sondern um die Erfahrung, daß keine Darstellung hinreichend, endgültig, definitiv ist. Auf das Nicht-Darstellbare kann man nur anspielen und die Unmöglichkeit seiner Präsentation fühlen lassen. [Welsch 1990 90]

This idea of the sublime as only a 'feeling' echoes Lyotard's idea of the sublime as non-conceptual apprehension. It also returns to the crucial role of 'feeling' in Romantic contributions to the philosophical issue of grounding knowledge and language, although Welsch's valorization of the 'horizontal' seems precisely to relinquish the need for such a prior basis. But without any such vertical schema of value and means of comparison, how are we to distinguish between this unrepresentable 'experience' and that aspect of the aestheticised life-world in which events and reality are presented as an 'experience', with consequences which we have already seen Welsch describe as 'politisch und ethisch desaströs'? In my view this points to a problematic fault-line in Welsch's theoretical formulations between the ideas of immanence and claims to a *critical* potential in the sublime – the potential for making us aware of aspects of our experience. Moreover, there are serious questions of compatibility between this immanent experience and what Welsch identifies as the self-reflexivity of modernist art, which might be read in terms of its conceptuality and meditation on the limits of

representation. Welsch's reference to the need to allude to the unrepresentable suggests a residual reference which marks the limits of the immanent. This is even more the case with art, to which both Welsch and Lyotard return and which is by its very nature derivative, secondary and ultimately representative, however much it refutes that gesture.

So in this section ideas of the sublime as a communion with nature, as a mode of *Gerechtigkeit* forged out of heterogeneity of aesthetic form have been joined by ideas of sublime art as reflexive, experimental, plural, anti-representational, an incomparable and essentially immanent experience. But I have also suggested that the political investment in the essentially plural and heterogeneous mode of the sublime, which allegedly reconnects the sublime with its relevance for postmodernity, is in tension with how modernist aesthetics seems to work, with possibly key implications for its critical claims. In what follows I will look at Adorno and Lyotard's own writings on the sublime, with a view to developing this picture of the potential role of the sublime in contemporary thinking about art and aesthetics, but in the hope of sketching out a more convincing understanding of modernist art's critical potential and its continued relevance for the aesthetic as a meditation on issues of perception.

Adorno on the sublime: dialectical autonomy

References to the sublime in Adorno's own texts are relatively sparse, and, apart from Welsch's contributions, and a notable essay by Albrecht Wellmer which I will refer to below [Wellmer 1993], secondary literature on the Adorno's sublime is limited. However, parallels between Adorno's aesthetics and the historical discourse of the sublime are apparent, and in view of the currency of the sublime as a mode of the aesthetic, Welsch's remarks are a timely contribution. Adorno's references to the sublime in *Ästhetische Theorie* in particular do seem to engage with the core of his thinking on aesthetics, centring on the notion of aesthetic autonomy, for which the sublime, after Kant, is said to be constitutive: 'Das Erhabene, das Kant der Natur vorbehielt, wurde nach ihm zum geschichtlichen Konstituens von Kunst selber. Das Erhabene zieht die Demarkationslinie zu dem, was später Kunstgewerbe hieß.' [Adorno 1970 293] Much of the common ground between Kant's sublime and Adorno's aesthetics has been covered in the preceding discussions; the self-reflexivity, purposelessness and essential indeterminacy which motivate the above claim to autonomy, the fact that both are largely meditations on the relationship between and relative determination of the subject and object; the concerns about 'Subreption' and the formal nature of the sublime. But as discussed above, Welsch's opening thesis is that Adorno does not remain faithful to the *credo* of the Kantian sublime, and that his conception of the sublime amounts to the concept's 'Rehabilitierung'. This involves a dual shift in the terms of the sublime, firstly from a natural sublime to an artistic sublime, and secondly from an experience of rational superiority

178

(much as the aesthetic is seen a means of developing reason) to an aesthetics of the sublime which is characterised by a turn against the limiting version of rationality which Adorno refers to elsewhere as identity-thinking.

I have traced this former shift from a natural to an artistic sublime back to Schiller's essay 'Über das Erhabene', but in respect of the latter issue of rationality Adorno's artistic sublime is something of a reversal of Schiller's position. We have seen that for Schiller the aesthetic realm, and indeed culture in general, allows a signal freedom from external constraint. For Adorno, on the other hand, whilst such appearance might elude the determinate mode of conceptual thought that he refers to as identity-thinking, such a positive assessment of art's particularity is undermined by Adorno's diagnosis of the manipulation of consciousness and the uniformity of culture which characterises and distorts contemporary understanding. [See Horkheimer & Adorno 1969 128ff.] Artworks are seen to approach a kind of truth only in as much as they refuse to paper over the unfreedoms of society with some kind of premature reconciliation, a facility traditionally associated with beauty but associated by Adorno with Lukács' critical realism. [See Adorno 1974 280] A positively conceived mimetic realism at best results in naivety and sterile empiricism and at worst precipitates a kind of mechanistic approach to literary creation that throttles any kind of spontaneity. [See Adorno 1974 273-7] I have already referred to Adorno's preference for art which turns against its own mode of

mimetic representation, refusing meaning and understanding. This is more than simply a strategy for art to defend its own autonomy, having its roots in Romantic theory's sense that the grounds that make knowledge possible at all are only ever knowable as a secondary moment. I will return to this thoroughgoing negativity in Adorno, which I see as itself ideologically not unproblematic, in relation to Welsch's anaesthetic in chapter four.

Dissonance

This introduces perhaps the most obvious 'sublime' element in Adorno's formulations, the preference for the unreconciled 'dissonance' of the sublime artwork over the coherence, unity and harmony of beauty. As he writes in *Ästhetische Theorie*, 'zart verstanden, war, nach dem Sturz formaler Schönheit, die Moderne hindurch von den traditionallen ästhetischen Ideen seine [das Moment des Erhabenen] allein übrig'. [Adorno 1970 293-4] Art must aid the non-identical [see Adorno 1970 14], refusing to replicate the unity and uniformity of the administered world: 'nicht, durch seine Besonderung die herrschende Allgemeinheit der verwalteten Welt zu vertuschen'. [Adorno 1970 130] As Albrecht Welmer puts it, 'Nicht durch Versöhnung der Widersprüche, sondern dadurch, daß sie diese zur Sprache bringen'. [Wellmer 1993 187] Adorno's investment in the sublime, like Kant's, is motivated by the issue of freedom, but whereas for Kant, freedom is ultimately only possible in the human mind,

Adorno sees the human mind as irredeemably manipulated. The dissonant artwork becomes the refuge of Kant's project to find the indeterminate: 'ihr Lösendes hat einzig noch im Widerspruchsvollen und Dissonanten seine Stätte'. [Adorno 1970 130] This already brings us onto the other main aspect of Adorno's *Rehabilitierung* of Kant's sublime, namely the shift from Kant's subjective and rational sublime to Adorno's sublime art as a valorisation of the non-human and non-rational. The reconciliation with nature that Welsch emphasises is the hoped-for conclusion of this sublime experience.

Nature: the self and the world

The source of Welsch's idea of sublime art as forging a seemingly unmediated relationship to nature is Adorno's own writing on art: 'Weniger wird der Geist, wie es Kant möchte, vor der Natur seiner eigenen Superiorität gewahr als seiner eigenen Naturhaftigkeit.' [Adorno 1970 410] Similarly Adorno writes earlier in the *Ästhetische Theorie*: 'Enthüllt sich jedoch die Erfahrung des Erhabenen als Selbstbewußtsein des Menschen von seiner Naturhaftigkeit, so verändert sich die Zusammensetzung der Kategorie erhaben.' [Adorno 1970 295] As such, Welsch is right to focus on nature as central to Adorno's concept of sublime art, and he does register that the interplay between subject and object is perhaps the key battleground for aesthetics, which seems to be both the subject's undoing and its redemption. But the paradox contained in the idea of a 'Selbstbewußtsein des

Menschen von seiner Naturhaftigkeit' – the self-consciousness that precisely separates us from mere nature – suggests a certain cognitive complication, which is already a key aspect of Kant's 'Copernican turn', which precisely problematises our relationship with nature. As Andrew Bowie points out, the end of divine guarantee of the coherence and order of the natural world means that the human mind and its capacities become the focal point of coherence, such that 'the relation of the human and the natural becomes a major problem'. [Bowie 1990 3] This schism between man and nature is hypostatised even further by the Romantics, for instance in Schelling's sense of man as always a fragment and someone to whom nature's wholeness is no longer accessible. [See Bowie 1997 82] In any case I have referred in the previous chapter to Welsch's valorization of the Stoic as the 'perfekter Anästhet' [Welsch 1990 26], which seems to be predicated on a certain sense of man's separateness from the external world.

In particular, the awareness of 'belonging to nature' is a curious quality or effect to attribute to modernist art, in view of the fact that the latter has become ever more reflexive and abstract, ever more removed from the natural realm. This raises the question exactly what nature signifies in Welsch and Adorno's formulations. It is presumably not the heterogeneous nature which pre-exists our understanding of it, more likely a metaphor signifying what might be called the 'other' of reason [see Habermas 1985 354], a force demarcating the limits of the power of subjectivity, or as a force questioning the logic of identity. But

Welsch's unguarded references to a seemingly unproblematised and *present* nature, the erstwhile trigger for and non-essential 'content' of Kant's sublime, makes him susceptible to the error of taking the object of the sublime for the experience or relationship which it precipitates. This returns to Kant's 'Subreption', which Welsch himself refers to in Adorno's terms as the 'Verwechslung von Inhalt und Form'. [Welsch 1990 117] This tendency towards slipping into a reference to the object seems to follow from what I have identified above as the inherent fragility of the concept of the sublime: the difficulty of answering the question of exactly what the sublime 'belongs' to allows Kant to draw the opposite conclusions in favour of the subject, but Adorno's aesthetics are predisposed in favour of the object, and Welsch convincingly emphasizes Adorno's valorization of that element of the art-object which somehow resists subjective processing. (In this respect, Adorno's sublime aesthetics remains true to the spirit of the first part of Kant's sublime, namely the prohibition of the man-made sublime object.) But his protectiveness towards the object in the face of Kant's sovereign subject is in part a recognition of and rearguard defence against the unavoidable practicalities of mediation, in particular the mediation of the art-object by its formal nature and by subjectivity. Kant of course saw the two as inextricably associated, seeing art's formal organising principles as essentially human, but my point in chapter two was to suggest that even the defamiliarising formal innovations of modernist art operates on principles which, whilst not in

some way intrinsically human, depend upon subjective reception for their effectiveness.

Adorno himself is arguably more circumspect in his treatment of nature: his reference to 'Selbstbewußtsein' above recognises the mediation by the subjective faculties. For Adorno, the eighteenth-century preoccupation with raw nature is already a story of the subject: 'Die Entfesselung des Elementarischen war eins mit der Emanzipation des Subjekts und damit dem Selbstbewußtsein des Geistes. [...] Ihr Geist ist Selbstbesinnung auf sein eigenes Naturhaftes.' [Adorno 1970 292] In Adorno's view this interpretation of nature as anti-subjective is already anticipated in Kant: 'Sie [Natur] war selbst in ihrer Kantischen Version von der Nichtigkeit des Menschen tingiert'. [Adorno 1970 295] Adorno describes this concept of nature as a critique of the (Platonic) absolutist world of forms ('Kritik an der absolutistischen [...] Formenwelt' [Adorno 1970 292]), and in an important passage in *Ästhetische Theorie* Adorno reads the eighteenth-century concept of nature as essential to the transposition of the sublime into art: 'Zur Invasion des Erhabenen in die Kunst trug einst der Naturbegriff der Aufklärung bei.' [Adorno 1970 292] Though Habermas doesn't mention the sublime specifically, his reference to 'limit experiences' is quite clearly on the same terrain: 'Seit der Frühromantik werden für die exaltierende Überschreitung des Subjekts immer wieder mystische und ästhetische Grenzerfahrungen in Anspruch genommen.' [Habermas 1985 361]

As such, nature might more loosely refer to the notion of 'our place within the world' which Martha Nussbaum identifies as a neglected aspect of rationality [see Nussbaum 2001], a prior intelligibility or understanding which might be associated with Heidegger's 'ontological difference'. [See Bowie 1997 160] Alternatively, the reference to the realm of nature might not be *reality* per se, but precisely a metaphor for this *lost* reality. Of course, presumably Welsch knows that nature is a metaphor for the objective realm here, but he seems to forget the 'lost' nature of this reality, the fundamental dislocation which marks man's relationship to that which is not man. The philosophical roots of this dislocation might be found in Kant's phenomenological turn, though their contemporary effects are more likely to be sought in the kind of ideological manipulation which precisely makes the subjective consciousness for Adorno an unreliable locus for any freedom, with important ramifications for Adorno's aesthetics as far as the above noted issues of unity, reconciliation and meaning are concerned.

The sublime and the negative

Welsch, however, perhaps not surprisingly, compounds the tendency to think of nature, and therefore the justice it guarantees, as unproblematically 'there' with an overly optimistic appraisal of the function and potential of art in Adorno's theory. On the one hand, Welsch interprets 'Gerechtigkeit' as actual

reconciliation, or at least a tension which can be resolved in art; on the other hand, he valorises the 'unreconciled' as an instance of heterogeneity. It is understandable that Welsch chooses to emphasize the utopian or reconciliatory aspect of Adorno's aesthetics, particularly in view of his parallel veneration of Lyotard as a thinker. But these emphases arguably fail to do justice respectively to the dialectical complexity which inhabits any such relationship to nature, and to the pervasive negativity of Adorno's writings. In Welsch's interpretation, nature, by the resistance it offers to the subjective principal, is the guarantor of freedom. This is plausible as a reading of Adorno, for whom art becomes 'der geschichtlicher Sprecher unterdrückter Natur'. [Adorno 1970 365, cited in Welsch 1990 118] And Welsch might be right in suggesting that, for Adorno, the question of man's bond with the natural or material world has become the chief preoccupation of modern art, but only if this view is tempered by the understanding of art as itself a *symptom* of humanity's separation from and domination of nature: 'ihre [die Kunstwerke] eigene Dynamik, ihre immanente Historizität als Dialektik von Natur und Naturbeherrschung'. [Adorno 1970 15] This may be a separation that art wants to overturn ('Kunst möchte gerade durch ihre fortschreitende Vergeistigung, durch Trennung von Natur, diese Trennung, an der sie leidet und die sie inspiriert, revozieren.' [Adorno 1970 141]), but this merely begs the impossible question of exactly what nature art wants to return to. The thoroughgoing separation that art's creative force witnesses seems to be implicit in Schiller's man-made and cultural 'ideal' realm, which is itself perhaps

a overly optimistic account of a sense of dislocation which has its origins in Romantic thinking, in the infinite reflection through which we are separated from the world around us. Welsch's concern, with the concept of aestheticisation, is to identify more recent and less philosophical reasons for this division, but the reasons why art cannot reunite man and a kind of pre-lapsarian world presumably do not change. Rather for Adorno culminates in a modernist aesthetic which expresses modern man's distance from, rather than closeness to, that world. [See Sheppard 2000 59] Such indications of the impossibility of communion and the irredeemable sense of our dislocation are evidenced for instance in Beckett's austere anti-dramas. At moments Welsch recognises this sense in which harmony for Adorno is only viable 'im Ausdruck ihrer Negativität'. [Welsch 1990 106] He acknowledges the untenability of any positively construed relationship between art and nature in his reference to art's status as by its very nature a 'Dokument von Herrschaft' [Welsch 1990 124], but his suggestion of unmediated communion with or proximity to nature fails to take full account of art's problematic socio-political function and its status as symptom of dislocation.

Indeed, it might be that the pervasive negativity of Adorno's preferred examples of modernist art is itself a sublime feature, beyond the broad terms of the 'Sturz formaler Schönheit' which renders art a locus of disharmony and the unreconciled. More circumspectly than Welsch and Lyotard's valorization of the

unreconciled as heterogeneity as a value in itself, Adorno emphasises the function of non-appearance in Kant's sublime: 'Kants Lehre vom Gefühl des Erhabenen beschreibt erst recht eine Kunst, die in sich erzittert, indem sie sich um des scheinlosen Wahrheitsgehalts willen suspendiert, ohne doch, als Kunst, ihren Scheincharakter abzustreifen.' [Adorno 1970 292] As such, art's retraction from positive statement and simple presence might indicate its debt to the sublime. Indeed, for Adorno, positive presentation of the sublime undermines its very force: 'was als erhaben auftritt, klingt hohl'. [Adorno 1970 294] This prohibition of anything being present *as* a sublime object motivates Adorno's understanding of the sublime as only possible latently: 'Versöhnung ist ihnen nicht das Resultat des Konflikts, einzig noch, daß er Sprache findet. Damit wird aber das Erhabene latent.' [Adorno 1970 294]

This latency is of course highly ambiguous. Is the sublime in art latent only insofar as it refers to this paradoxical mode of art as non-presentation? Is it latent merely because it describes the artwork's formal qualities, rather than any content? Or might it be taken to indicate that the art object is not itself sublime, as in Kant's version, but precipitates an *experience* of the sublime? Below I will suggest that these ideas suggest two (not necessarily mutually exclusive, and of course not definitive or exhaustive) strands of theorizing the sublime; firstly, as a meditation on the limits of representation, and secondly, as a focus on a dynamic and dialectical conception of art's autonomy which takes more account of the

cognitive element of the aesthetic. In spite of Welsch's positivity elsewhere, the former idea of art as non-presentation or refusal suggests key parallels between the sublime and Welsch's idea of art as anaesthetic.

Happy positivism and pluralism

Compared to Adorno's negativity, Welsch's idea of *Gerechtigkeit* seems to adopt an essentially postmodernist position that valorises the plural, horizontal, or heterogeneous as political *per se*, exhibiting the kind of 'positivisme hereux' that Manfred Frank and others have taken issue with. [Frank 1984 16, see also Eagleton 1997 127] The plural is evident in many aspects of modernist aesthetic, from the multiplicity of styles and genres in artistic production to Bahktin's arguments about the 'polyphony' of Dostoyevksy's novels [Bahktin 1984 17], and this is a crucial argument for Welsch, of course, that modernist art is in some way constitutive for postmodern pluralism. But any suggestion that this multiplicity begins with modernist art cannot ignore the role of modernist (as opposed to modern) philosophy in shaping that aesthetic in the first place. [See Giles 1993 177-8] This returns to my comments above about Welsch's curiously unfufilled title, as Nietzsche is the obvious reference point here. This omission is doubly curious, in view of the fact that elsewhere Welsch does refer to Nietzsche as a crucial figure in the pervasive 'ästhetisch-fiktionale Charakter von Erkenntnis und Wirklichkeit' [Welsch 1996 81], and even cites his *Geburt* essay as a key

instance where this understanding of the world as *'aesthetisches Phänomen'* is registered. [Nietzsche 1973 I 47, cited in Welsch 1996 70]. Henri Bergson is also an important figure, and interestingly for Welsch's ideas on perception and epistemology Bergson registers this pluralist approach to philosophy as an inevitable conclusion of phenomenology's focus on perceptual experience. [See Bergson 2002 249-50] Already for Bergson, an implication of this turning around of the priorities of philosophy, beginning from perception, is that there must be as many philosophies 'as there are original thinkers'. [Bergson 2002 250]

Immanence and the dialectic: art's Geist

This valorisation of the plural is closely connected to the argument rehearsed above that art's autonomy is guaranteed by its *immanence*, vouchsafed by elements whose determination is only 'kunst-intern'. [See Welsch 1990 158-159] There is good reason for interpreting Adorno's calls for art's separateness in these terms, as Adorno himself writes:

> Ich meine, mit anderen Worten, die sehr spezifische, auf die Produkte des Geistes zielende Frage, in welcher Weise gesellschaftliche Strukturmomente, Positionen, Ideologien und was immer in den Kunstwerken sich selbst durchsetzen. [Adorno 'Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie' 1978 210-11]

Elsewhere he refers to the 'immanente Logik' of the artwork as the 'Theodizee des Zweckbegriffs in der Kunst'. [Adorno 1970 188-9] But, and this might argue against more austere readings of Adorno's ideas on art's role as one of negation, Welsch fails to take full account of the relationship which is suggested in Adorno's writings between the 'genuin-ästhetisch' and 'kunst-extern'. [Welsch 1990 158] Adorno's formulations elsewhere speak against a conception of purely artistic meaning: even in the 'Engagement' essay his formalism seems to locate autonomous art's effect precisely in the process of *transformation* to which it subjects non-artistic meaning:

Entledigt kein Wort, das in eine Dichtung eingeht, sich ganz der Bedeutungen, die es in der kommunikativen Rede besitzt, so bleibt doch in keiner, selbst im traditionellen Roman nicht, diese Bedeutung unverwandelt die gleiche, welche das Wort draußen hatte. [Adorno 1974 410]

Moreover, this relationship between that which is internal and external to art is characterized by its dialectical nature, a quality which pervades Adorno's understanding of aesthetic autonomy and its inherent fragility. Adorno does reject the idea of a dedicated, committed political 'message' in art [Adorno 1974

191

429], but he also objects to an undialectical or unmediated conception of the relationship between the real and the artistic. Odo Marquard is instructive here, for he refutes the 'Ausschließlichkeit ästhetischer Immanenz' whilst noting the necessity of some concept of self-determination by art: 'Ästhetische Immanenz ist wichtig; doch eben so wichtig ist es zu sehen, daß das, was nicht das Ästhetische ist, für das Ästhetische wichtig ist.' [Marquard 1989 11] The artwork's mode of critique is immanent, in the sense that it turns on the concept of art and the possibility of meaning, but in Adorno's view conceiving of it as somehow 'pure' results in bad art:

> Noch im sublimiertesten Kunstwerk birgt sich ein Es soll anders sein; wo es nur noch sich selbst gliche, wie bei seiner reinen verwissenschaftlichten Durchkonstruktion, wäre es schon wieder im Schlechten, buchstäblich Vorkünstlerischen. [Adorno 1974 429]

The concept of *'Geist'* is precisely emblematic of the dialectical nature of Adorno's view of the relationships between art (and its formal nature), reality and subjectivity. In *Ästhetische Theorie* Adorno identifies art's *Vergeistigung* explicitly with the sublime:

Kants Theorie des Erhabenen antezipiert am Naturschönen jene Vergeistigung, die Kunst erst leistet. Was an der Natur erhaben sei, ist bei ihm nichts anderes als eben die Autonomie des Geistes angesichts der Übermacht des sinnlichen Daseins, und sie setzt erst im vergeistigten Kunstwerk sich durch. [Adorno 1970 143]

Geist is all the more pertinent here because of its underlying ambiguity. On the one hand, as this quote exemplifies, it refers to the mediating *subjective* consciousness. It is also in this sense that Adorno speaks of the sublime, in contrast with Kant, as opposed to the 'Souveränität des Geistes.' [Adorno 1970 294] On the other hand, it can indicate the seemingly Idealist sense of objective reality, of which art is the sensory presentation, as in the (characteristically paradoxical) 'immanente idealistische Moment, die objektive Vermittlung'. [Adorno 1970 141] This seems to privilege the Hegelian objective and mimetic moment of *Geist*:

Der Geist der Kunstwerke ist, ohne alle Rücksicht auf eine Philosophie des Objektiven oder subjektiven Geistes, objektiv, ihr eigener Gehalt, und er entscheidet über sie: Geist der Sache selbst, der durch die Erscheinung erscheint. [Adorno 1970 135]

Adorno also seems to be referring to the objective moment of *Geist* when he writes of art as a go-between between *Geist* and its 'other': 'Die Kunstwerke, mögen sie noch so sehr ein Seiendes scheinen, kristallieren sich zwischen jenem Geist und seinem Anderen.' [Adorno 1970 138] But *Geist*, whether as art or reality, cannot automatically be reduced to objective nature, and is to be opposed to any such positivist materiality: 'Wird jedoch Geist selber auf sein naturhaftes Maß gebracht, so ist in ihm die Vernichtung des Individuums nicht länger positiv aufgehoben.' [Adorno 1970 295] Indeed, the subject cannot simply be suppressed in this overcoming of the subject: 'Im adäquaten Verhalten zur Kunst ist trotzdem das subjektive Moment bewahrt.' [Adorno 1970 396] Indeed, for Adorno it is in its negation that subjectivity is redeemed: 'Der Augenblick dieses Übergangs ist der oberste von Kunst. Er errettet Subjektivität, sogar subjektive Ästhetik durch ihre Negation hindurch.' [Adorno 1970 401] So whilst one might take it that the reference to both objective and subjective moments as *Geist* is just a frustrating inconsistency of terminology, it does seem that the mediating concept of art's *Vergeistigung* suggest a more complex interrelationship between objective reality, the subject, and art. As such, it might be more fruitful to think of *Geist* as a fluid and dialectic-enabling concept, with different and shifting positions, rather than fixed meanings and significations. Where Kant's sublime explores the border between the subject and object, the concept of *Geist* is *expressive* of Adorno's view of the nebulous nature of the two. Even the 'simple' valorisation of nature or the object as a location of non-identity is no longer

194

possible or useful, as Adorno remarks: 'Je mehr Kunst ein Nichtidentisches, unmittlebar dem Geist Entgegengesetztes in sich hineinnimmt, desto mehr muß sie sich vergeistigen.' [Adorno 1970 292] The anti-foundationalist consequence of this spiritualisation of art is that art's meaning is not simply a question of static being, but is expressed by Adorno in terms of a tension of becoming: 'Das Moment des Geistes ist in keinem Kunstwerk ein Seiendes, in jedem ein Werdendes, sich Bildendes.' [Adorno 1970 141] This echoes Adorno's comment above regarding the transformative potential of modernist aesthetics.

A crucial instance of this dialectical nature of the sublime that operates at the subjective level, but does not relinquish its claims to external reality, is what Welsch refers to as its 'paradoxes Wechselspiel von Unlust und Lust'. [Welsch 1990 123] This comes straight from Kant's understanding of the sublime as an experience of oscillation between pleasure and displeasure (the latter he describes as a 'negative Lust' [Kant 1963 135, see also Kant 1963 154]), which both Adorno and Welsch refer to. This experience of displeasure is presumably a consequence of the failure to reconcile disparate elements that is associated with the sublime. For Kant of course, the experience is ultimately one of pleasure in the face of displeasure, a consequence of our capacity for remove and reflection. But both the openness of this gesture of unity and harmony to exploitation and its fallacy in the face of so many problems propel Adorno towards a subversive aesthetics of displeasure and shock, albeit one that is expressed in terms of a

paradoxical pleasure: 'Glück an der Dissonanz'. [Adorno 1974 270] This might suggest a kind of self-reflexive experience of displeasure, much like Kant's sublime, with no necessary interaction with the external world. However, a central argument for my thesis is that this oscillation of pleasure and displeasure might also be central to the defamiliarising experience of the modernist aesthetic as described by Viktor Schklovsky.

The challenge to expectation or artistic or perceptual convention which characterises experimental art is associated in particular with that which is unpleasant to the senses: 'das sensuell nicht Angenehme hat Affinität zum Geist'. [Adorno 1970 292, cited in Wellmer 1993 189] This return to the sensory is significant as far as Welsch's ideas on the parameters of aesthetics are concerned, and ties in with my suggestion that one might ascribe a residual sensory nature to the sublime experience. The idea of unpleasant sensory experience seems appropriate as a riposte to the sickly sweet pleasures of the aestheticised world, and the idea of art as unpleasant to the senses will be a central one for my final chapter, which will discuss the aesthetic and implications of sensory excess, in contrast to Welsch's preferred mode of art as sensory absence.

But my point is that this dialectical nature of the sublime is of wider significance than the oscillation of pleasure and displeasure. In my view the sublime might be emblematic of a more general feature of modernist aesthetic, namely the

dialectical nature of aesthetic autonomy. I started this discussion of Adorno's aesthetics with his suggestion that the sublime is in some way crucial to art's autonomy: 'Das Erhabene, das Kant der Natur vorbehielt, wurde nach ihm zum geschichtlichen Konstituens von Kunst selber. Das Erhabene zieht die Demarkationslinie zu dem, was später Kunstgewerbe hieß.' [Adorno 1970 293] The question is what Adorno means by this. I have already discussed the idea of an aesthetics of dissonance. Alternatively Adorno might be referring to the more usual reading of the sublime as a meditation on representation and representability.

Undoing representation and meaning

When transposed into the modernist artwork, this fragile dialectical interplay is usually read in terms of the limits of representation, which is crucial as we shall see to the transposition of the sublime into Lyotard's aesthetic philosophy. Within the formal entity of the (modernist) artwork the failure of form that Kant reads as an internal failure of the faculties of representation to mind becomes a problematisation of representation. Of course, this interrogation of representation is a plausible reading of Adorno's sublime. I referred above to Adorno's 'negative' aesthetics resorting to non-appearance of the object as a means of defending art's autonomy: one way for art to avoid its reduction to

197

mere utility is by defying its own status as a means of communication or reconciliation by problematising its own formal and significatory unity:

> In der verwalteten Welt ist die adequäte Gestalt, in der Kunstwerke aufgenommen werden, die der Kommunikation des Unkommunizierbaren, die Durchbrechung des verdinglichten Bewußtseins. Werke, in denen die ästhetische Gestalt, unterm Druck des Wahrheitsgehalts, sich transzendiert, besetzen die Stelle, welche einst der Begriff des Erhabenen meinte. In ihnen entfernten Geist und Material sich voneinander im Bemühen, Eines zu werden. [Adorno 1970 292]

But this oft-repeated idea of representing the unrepresentable, or saying the unsayable, seems to be fundamentally ambiguous, insofar as it leaves tantalisingly open *why* that which is unrepresentable precisely is unrepresentable. Presumably several reasons might obtain: Kant's transcendent; the failure of the faculties or the concept; the failure of representative means; excessive complexity of the object to be represented, as in Jameson's sublime. Also the question arises whether we are talking about a failure of means or faculties or a conscious problematisation of them. Whatever is the case, this insistence on art as a meditation on the limits of representation seems to be much less 'affirmative' than the idea of sublime art as an immanent object, celebrated for its inaccessibility by concepts.

But for me the risk of focusing on representation and its suspension is that this might short-circuit the modernist aesthetic process, cutting out its crucial 'cognitive' moment (that which is central to Kant's idea of the sublime as a failure of representation *to mind*). This analysis in terms of representation still suggests an underlying sense that the measure of art is its capacity for correspondence to reality. Conceptualising any defiance of such correspondence as non-representation or non-appearance does not necessarily shake the order of representation.

Perhaps more fertile than the issue of representation is the question of *meaning*. The sublime is seen to undermine the generation of meaning in art, as in Adorno's paradoxical formulation, 'Kommunikation des Unkommunizierbaren' [Adorno 1970 292], which in turn is echoed in Welsch's conception of modern art as a 'Moment des Inkommensurablen und Unkommunizierbaren'. [Welsch 1990 142] For Adorno, art is absolved, by virtue of its spiritualisation, of the imperative to 'mean' or 'intend' something, 'dem Ansatz nach der Sphäre des bloßen Bedeutens, den Intentionen entrissen'. [Adorno 1970 139] Whereas Kant's formal failure ultimately recuperated by the experience of the absolute and transcendental, for Adorno, formal failure is precisely an indication that this transcendental grounding of meaning is absent and unobtainable. As such, there is more at stake here than representation: as Albrecht Wellmer makes clear:

'Anders bei Kant ist für Adorno nicht nur die Darstellbarkeit, sondern auch die Denkbarkeit des Absoluten problematisch geworden. Deshalb bedarf die Philosophie der Kunst ebensosehr, wie die Kunst der Philosophie bedarf.' [Wellmer 1993 179] This essentially early Romantic elision of art and philosophy returns to the idea of the aesthetic aiding or marking the failure of Kant's project of underpinning experience with universal guarantees, but my preference is for an aesthetic which understands itself as dismantling the elements of communication that we use in more everyday settings. In the final section of my thesis I will ask whether a more creative sabotage of culturally grounded habits of thinking, as attempted in Peter Handke and Heiner Müller's dramas, might not be more successful as a way of challenging the manipulated consciousness which exercises Adorno and might be said to underlie Welsch's ideas on aestheticisation.

This more 'everyday' interrogation of meaning follows for me from the understanding that such a complete absence of meaning is as paradoxical as Lyotard's notion of an absence of form in the formally deconstructive artwork. Resistance to interpretation is hard to sustain completely. A more contextual understanding might involve the idea that meaning is dismantled dialectically, as supported by my remarks on the essentially dialectical and dynamic nature of the sublime. Thus one might take Adorno's reference to the constitutive nature of the sublime for autonomous art as a reference to its dialectical nature and its

cognitive implications. In the same passage of *Ästhetische Theorie* Adorno emphasizes the essentially fragile and dialectical nature of the sublime, as always open to its opposite: 'Freilich schlägt am Ende das Erhabene in sein Gegenteil um.' [Adorno 1970 295] Paul de Man similarly notes that the sublime is 'shot through with dialectical complication' [de Man 1996 73, see also Bowie 1990 37], and it is in this sense that Welsch writes of the 'prekäre Dynamik' [Welsch 1990 116] and an essentially Kantian 'nicht zur Ruhe kommender Konflikt' [Welsch 1990 140], which are said to characterise the sublime. This dialectical and dynamic nature is already there in Kant's understanding of the sublime as an experience of *limits*, which underlies Christine Pries' description of the sublime as a 'Grenzerfahrung'. [See Pries 1989] As such, an appreciation of those characteristics of the Kantian sublime that are retained in its transposition into art, of the ways in which the Kantian sublime already anticipates some of the ways autonomous art works, might foster an understanding of the more dialectical and mediated relationship between man and nature through art.

This dialectical nature is as important as art's autonomy, which is not absolute and guaranteed, but to be continually renewed. This point is central to Jurij Tynjanov's concept of aesthetic evolution. I touched on the dynamic nature of the aesthetic above when referring to Adorno's idea of the 'Moment des Geistes' as a 'Werdendes, sich Bildendes'. And the dialectical tension might be what Adorno is referring to in the opening section of *Ästhetische Theorie*: 'Deutbar ist

Kunst nur an ihrem Bewegungsgesetz, nicht durch invarianten. Sie bestimmt sich im Verhältnis zu dem, was sie nicht ist. [...] ihr Bewegungsgesetz ist ihr eigenes Formgesetz.' [Adorno 1970 12]   In this sense Adorno writes in 'Engagement' that it is not a question of preferring committed or autonomous art, but of the 'Konflikt der beiden großen Blöcke [...]. Von ihm hänge die Möglichkeit von Geist selber so sehr ab.' [Adorno 1974 409]   Moreover, the specifically *cognitive* nature of this dialectical fragility is evidenced in Kant's idea of the sublime as an explicit experience of time. [See Kant 1913 8] Precisely this kind of slowing down and lengthening of experience is deployed in what Schklovsky calls the poetic. Similarly, Albrecht Wellmer associates the sublime with the alienating aesthetic experience that overturns aesthetic conventions, operating 'ungeschützt durch ästhetische Konventionen'. [Wellmer 1993 187] This freedom from convention is seen to precipitate a loss of objectively assured systems of meaning ('Verlust objektiv verbürgten Sinns' [Wellmer 1993 187]), though perhaps this is overstated, bearing in mind that even divergence from convention is often a meditation on conventions. Coinciding with my discussion in chapter two of the implicit psychological and cognitive nature of the modernist aesthetic, Wellmer reads this meditation on conventions as a specifically *cognitive*, consciousness-raising facility of art, namely a 'Fortschritt des Bewußtseins, den Adorno immer wieder mit dem Eindringen des Erhabenen in die moderne Kunst verknüpft'. [See Wellmer 1993 187-90] Of course, this focus on the reception of modernist art's divergence from the conventional and

202

habitual leaves unasked the question of production: who is responsible for pushing the boundaries in such a way that cannot be explained simply with reference back to existing rules? [See Bowie 1990 32-3] The answer usually relies on the notion of genius, and is a valid direction from which to approach the question, but my concern is not to pursue this question of origin and possibility, but to ask after the political force of such rule-breaking, its impact on our everyday perceptual habits.

This issue of cognitive impact is not entirely at variance with Adorno's turn against the sovereign subject, in view of the idea I have cited above as saving the subject through its own negation. Referring to the moment of shock, Adorno asserts '[e]r errettet Subjektivität, sogar subjektive Ästhetik durch ihre Negation hindurch.' [Adorno 1970 401] Wellmer also refers to the fragility of Geist – 'die Naturverfallenheit, die Hinfälligkeit des Geistes' [Wellmer 1993 183] – that informs Adorno's critique of the Kantian sublime. For Adorno the feeling of the sublime topples the subject from its sense of superiority, but far from Welsch's dubious 'oneness' with nature and the object, this seems to derive precisely from an unsettling of the conventions and habits that constitute the life-world around us. This idea of subjectivity as the battle ground of the aesthetic will be a thread that runs through the next three chapters. In chapter four I will suggest that Welsch's ideas on art as anaesthetic return to those elements of the Kantian sublime which protect the sovereign subject against the external impositions

which he characterizes as the aestheticised world. In my final two chapters, which will look at recent drama which operates at the limits of perception, I will suggest that, through a paradoxical negating or partial dismantling of subjectivity, Heiner Müller's drama in particular attempts to offer an alternative means of counteracting these aestheticised elements that make up our life-world, precisely by imposition of experience which breaks out of the patterns and norms of aestheticised experience.

I hope that the above discussion will serve both to support Wolfgang Welsch's thesis regarding the location of Adorno's aesthetics in the discourse of the sublime, as well as to indicate the shortcomings of his formulations. These centre on Welsch's tendency to revert to a self-present understanding of the sublime, which derives from a slippage from unreconcilable formal elements within the artwork to reconciliation with nature. Similar is the leap to an excessively positive conclusion of the potential for *Gerechtigkeit* in the sublime artwork. These seem to rely respectively on an undialectical grasp of Adorno's formalism, which valorises an autonomous 'kunst-intern' understanding of artistic meaning, neglecting the seemingly necessary reference to that from which, according to a reading of modernist aesthetics as one essentially of defamiliarisation at least, art must continually distinguish itself, and from a failure to take account of the pervasive negativity in Adorno's ideas on the relationship between art and reality (notwithstanding his remarks that Beckett's comedy enacts a 'negation of

this negativity', which can barely said to offer consolation [See Adorno 1974 297]). Analogous to this is problem of 'Subreption', whereby art's dialectical interaction with non-art is neglected in favour of a valorisation of the 'sublime' object, from whose formal qualities is inferred an immanent political significance, marking Welsch's position as an essentially postmodernist one. By contrast I have suggested that it might be more fruitful to conceptualise the sublime as an oscillation between poles (for example, between kunst-intern and kunst-extern, between expectation and experience), bringing out the dialectical subtlety that is already crucial to Kant's sublime.

Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern sublimes

The previous section has been concerned with the understanding of the sublime as a possible template for the quasi-autonomous modernist artwork. For Welsch, however, the significance of the sublime is not limited to its identification with the modernist artwork, but rather it also inheres in its specific relevance to the postmodern situation, both for postmodern thinking. This is due to such features as the artwork's alleged 'immanence', its plurality or heterogeneity, which Welsch also refers to as its horizontal nature, and its anti-foundationalism ('keine Generalnenner' [Welsch 1990 163]), the sublime aspect of its formal decomposition, and the experimental (and presumably open-ended) nature of both modernist art and postmodernist philosophy, which seems to return to the

idea of the knowledge it proposes as horizontal. By its 'horizontal' and 'immanent' nature art is seen to be governed only by its own 'Eigenansprüchen' [Welsch 1990 163], which is to say that it resists any insertion of content and criteria from outside the artwork, and 'gewinnt genau dadurch kritische Funktion'. [Welsch 1990 91] Alongside the preference for a 'Vielheitsoption' over 'Einheitssehnsucht' [Welsch 1990 93], Welsch refers to the immanence of the aesthetic as a kind of 'Nicht-Darstellung' [Welsch 1990 90], which seems to offer the most obvious connection to the traditional terms of the sublime. Some of the above ideas are evident in Lyotard's formulations, and their connection to the sublime will be clarified in the discussion of his terms that follows. This will not proceed by using Lyotard to criticize Welsch, as in the above discussion of Adorno, but rather by using Lyotard as an exemplary theorist, by virtue of his prolific output on the subject, of the postmodern sublime and a good way of assessing its claims and critical potential. From this discussion I will draw implications for Welsch's ideas on the sublime, as well as indicating relevant issues for his related ideas on the category of the anaesthetic.

Lyotard has written over half a dozen texts on the postmodern sublime, identifying the sublime variously as a 'negative presentation' of the 'unpresentable' [see Lyotard 1984 73-81], as a temporal sublime as caesura or the experience of anxiety it causes [see Lyotard 1985 1-18], which Lyotard also conceptualizes as a denial of the dialectic [see Lyotard 1990 303], as a immanent

'matter' [Lyotard 1991 110] or an instance of the inhuman [see Lyotard 1991 108-142], which commentators have identified as a turning against the subjective will [see Beidler 1995 179], and finally as an idea of the infinite. In what follows I will discuss the main aspects of Lyotard's many treatments of the sublime, which range through positive and negative, infinite and immanent, experimental and plural. I will point out the tensions between his various positions, central to which is its characterisation as immanent and plural versus its designation as a means of theorising the quintessentially modernist experimental and innovatory aesthetic.

Lyotard's Kantian sublime

In spite of Welsch's claims as to Lyotard's archetypal status as a postmodern thinker, there is much in his writings on the sublime that locates him close to Kant's quintessentially modern and subject-centred interrogation of the rational, as well as his penchant for the transcendental. Just as I have identified significant continuities with Kant's terms in Adorno's 'Rehabilitation' of the Kantian sublime, in 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime' Lyotard locates the sublime in an overtly Kantian framework: 'That which is not demonstrable is that which stems from Ideas and for which one cannot cite (represent) any example, case in point, or even symbol.' [Lyotard 1982 68] This echoes Kant's crucial notion of the 'aesthetic' or 'indeterminate' idea, with his underlying thesis

that the failure of imagination is exposed and ultimately recuperated by the conceptual faculties which generate these 'Ideas'. [Lyotard 1991 136]   The Kantian sublime as an experience, albeit inferred, of the absolute is seen to provide just the transcendence needed as a grounding for Kant's whole critical project. [See de Man 1996 120-1] For Lyotard too the turn to a sublime aesthetics marks the shift away from the narrowly 'aesthetic' question of taste and beauty, to the question of the possibility of a transcendental grounding of knowledge and ethics: 'This heralds the end of an aesthetics, that of the beautiful, in the name of the final destination of the mind, freedom.' [Lyotard 1991 137]   It is in this sense that Lyotard also refers to the sublime as the 'concretization of an objective infinity' or the 'universal Idea'. [Lyotard 1982 66, 68]

At this point Lyotard refers to – and sounds very much like – Kant in his discussion of abstract concepts, like 'humanity' or the 'good', which he describes as the unrepresentable subject-matter or *content* of the sublime:

> That which is not demonstrable is that which stems from Ideas and for which one cannot cite (represent) any example, case in point, or even symbol. The universe is not demonstrable; neither is humanity, the end of history, the moment, the species, the good, the just, etc. – or, according to Kant, absolutes in general – because to represent is to make relative, to place within the conditions of representation. [Lyotard 1982 68]

But it is questionable whether there is anything particularly transcendental or absolute about these categories; *abstract* concepts after all are not necessarily *absolute* concepts. Lyotard further elides the two categories with the suggestion that for Kant the abstract, whilst not a representation, is a *demonstration* 'that the absolute exists', and moreover one that is achieved 'through "negative representation"'. [Lyotard 1982 68] Even this idea of a demonstration is perhaps too strong, bearing in mind the considerable inference that goes on in Kant's establishing of the transcendental. That said, this idea of negativity, though hardly the way we usually think about 'abstract' concepts of goodness et cetera, does point to a crucial strand of modern European philosophy's attempt to establish grounds for judgment and knowledge at all.

This negativity is more reminiscent of Adorno's sublime aesthetics, and significantly for Lyotard's own formulations seems to be at odds with Lyotard's own position elsewhere on the sublime, where he compares Adorno's nostalgic and backward-looking sublime with a joyous postmodern dismantling of rules and categories. [See Lyotard 1984 81] This identifies Lyotard as a proponent of what Manfred Frank calls postmodernism's 'positivisme heureux'. [Frank 1984 16] Frank is sceptical that any such a notion of sheer heterogeneity can sustain a philosophical grounding.

In this way, Lyotard parts company with the transcendental conclusions Kant draws from indeterminacy, with the more typically postmodern investment in the sublime as gaining its force through *immanence*. [See Lyotard 1991 110] He suggests that unmediated perception of the matter of the sublime is possible, if only for an instant, as an 'incomparable quality.' [Lyotard 1991 141] Our relation to this matter, which he describes in paradoxical terms as 'immaterial matter' [Lyotard 1991 141], is non-purposive and non-teleological, clearly replicating the self-reflexivity of purpose that is crucial to Kant's aesthetics. Indeed, it cannot have anything to do with such teleological relations, as it is seen to 'withdraw' from every relationship: 'It is presence as unpresentable to the mind, always withdrawn from its grasp. It does not offer itself to dialogue or dialectic.' [Lyotard 1991 142] Here, Lyotard is exploiting a crucial ambiguity at the heart of Kant's sublime – namely that transcendence is only *inferred* from the failure and recuperation of the mental faculties. Does the inference of the transcendental follow necessarily from the indeterminacy of the sublime experience, or could it lead one to conclude the immanence of such an experience, which is to say the fact that it teaches us about nothing but itself? Can we reasonably stop to draw our conclusions at the point of the failure of form and mind? Or does Lyotard's logic only work if we prematurely halt the process of the mental faculties, Lyotard's so-called freezing of the dialectic?

This notion of the sublime experience as one of immanence not only replicates Kant's exclusion of intention, but as we have seen above also aims to exclude all that is 'non-artistic' from the interpretation of the artwork's import. In *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* Lyotard defends art's autonomy, drawing a distinction between two 'orders of activity that it is necessary to keep apart from each other.' [Lyotard 1991 135] These are classified as 'cultural' and 'artistic' activities. The former is described as a response to 'the demand coming from society' [Lyotard 1991 136], which in spite of its undertones of Adorno's culture industry actually refers to a Schillerian idea of cultural education centring on the principles of taste and beauty. (In 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime' Lyotard describes the avant-garde as absolving itself of the 'cultural responsibility' for unifying taste. [Lyotard 1982 67]) 'Artistic' activity, on the other hand, is privileged for its separateness from an aesthetics of taste unified around the ideal of beauty, and is said to respond only to the question: 'what is art?' This seems to be saying essentially the same thing as Walter Benjamin in the *Kunstkritik* essay, namely that the discussion of whether an artwork is 'good' or not is actually a response to the question of whether it actually 'counts' as art or not. [See Benjamin 1972 79] There might be a paradox at the heart of this claim to immanence: on the one hand, such ideas of aesthetic immanence preclude any external means of judging art, whether in terms of its political or ideological content, or according to questions of 'taste'; on the other hand, this 'immanent'

art is placed above that which is seen to be affected by any external criteria, that is to say, presumably on an overarching schema of value. Paradoxically, for Lyotard this absence of overarching (aesthetic) criteria is a consequence precisely of the transcendental nature of the sublime or indeterminate. This may not contradict Kant's ideas on the transcendental nature of beauty and the sublime, in as much as they are seen to bypass questions of personal taste.

The rejection of external input underlies Lyotard's valorisation of minimalism as a sublime form of art which absolves the art-object of anything but its artfulness, which Welsch celebrates as 'genuin-ästhetisch' because it does not rely on elements that are 'kunst-extern' for its political force. [Welsch 1990 167, 159] But this claim to immanence also posits a fairly undialectical model of art's autonomy that seems, as noted above, to sacrifice any interaction between art and that from which it distinguishes itself. So whilst Lyotard asks whether Kant's transcendental conclusions lead aesthetics into a cul-de-sac – '[o]ne can legitimately wonder whether this shift from imagination to pure reason leaves any room for an aesthetics' [Lyotard 1990 298] – one might also wonder whether Lyotard's immanence leaves any room for art. What would the purely aesthetic look like when it has been divested of this 'external' content? Would such a meaning-informing context have to have such hegemonic status? If such art is seen to guarantee the validity of the plural and heterogeneous, must some plural aspects not appear as a kind of content? Does this render such an idea of

autonomy nothing but a highly philosophical position? I have already remarked on Adorno's somewhat more nuanced position on this question, with reference to his idea of the need for art to transform what is external to it.

Moreover, the plea for art-immanence as an absence of external reference seems to preclude Gadamer's relatively uncontentious notion of an unconscious horizon of cultural conditioning as a precondition of perception at all. Perhaps the problem here turns on whether we are talking about individual and more or less conscious subjective determination of the political import of an artwork (by its author, for example), or a shared and more or less unconscious horizon of expectation, as Gadamer has put forward. Whilst the former might relegate the aesthetic qualities of the avant-garde artwork, the latter seems to be a prerequisite for its effectiveness at all. Benjamin for instance might reject the idea of any external criteria of judgment for art, but he does refers to the function of critique as one which takes place in the consciousness of the recipient: 'durch und durch Positiven der Erhöhung des Bewußtseins im Reflektierenden'. [Benjamin 1972 67] This sense of the recipient's role in 'completing' the artwork returns to my sense of the irrepressible role of the recipient in philosophical aesthetics, and moreover suggests that their specifically consciousness-raising function might be crucial to how we assess artworks.

In the same way it is questionable whether the critical potential of art really depends on this separateness from individual investment: the demand of immanence might deny the possibility of a specific stand-point from which criticism may be actioned. The conceptualisation of such a stand-point might be possible within a more flexible understanding of modernist art's autonomy as periodically re-established in dialectical relation with various contexts. This would include other artworks whose mode it subverts, as well as various aspects of external reality.

Form and matter

For Lyotard art's immanence is not only a matter of the inadmissibility of external or generally valid aesthetic criteria, but is also seen to derive from a failure of art's formal quality, giving rise to a somehow 'immediate' experience of the artwork. Lyotard refers to Kant's idea of 'formlessness, the absence of form' [Lyotard 1984 78] as an instance where formal organisation of material is somehow lacking in the work of art. The idea of harmony between form and matter, which is central to the aesthetics of the beautiful, has been superceded by an aesthetics of the sublime in which form falls away – 'the paradox of an aesthetics without sensible or imaginative forms' [Lyotard 1991 136] – and sheer matter is approached. As Lyotard puts it, 'the aim for arts [...] can only be that of approaching matter'. [Lyotard 1991 139] This entails 'approaching presence

without recourse to the means of presentation'. [Lyotard 1991 139] The example that Lyotard cites is the minimalist avant-garde, whose turning away from signification and presentation is noted by Paul Beidler: 'the fact that the sublime cannot be presented becomes irrelevant when art loses interest in presentation, as is the case with minimalism'. [Beidler 1995 179] This is combined with a de-emphasis of technical ability. (It is worth noting that the simplicity exhibited in minimalism is already identified with the sublime in Kant's pre-critical writings. [Kant 1913 48]) But is minimalism really characterised by a loss of interest in presentation, or by an *intense* interest in the fate of presentation? As such, this 'rejection' of form is self-contradictory, insofar as it, like Kant's treatment of the sublime, arguably says more about the mode (or perhaps *form*) of our perception of art than the object itself. As such, and in line with investments in the sublime by Kant, Adorno and others, Lyotard's critique of form is as much a comment on the relationship between the subject and object as a reference to the qualities of the object itself. It is questionable whether this idea of art as sheer matter absolved of the ordering and presenting moment of form plausible anyway. It certainly goes against the broader insights of Kant's critical writings, in particular his insistence on the necessary categories which precede any perception, not to mention the less transcendental, more contextualised hermeneutical imperative of 'Hinterfragen'. [See Frank 1984 10] It also seems to resurrect that idea, which Adorno has already dismissed with Kant's concept of 'Naturmaterial', that matter can exist and be perceived in and of itself. That said

Adorno himself is ambivalent on this, asserting at one point in relation to the sublime that in some art the material of the work 'wird kahl, nackt sichtbar' [Adorno 1970 292], and there is a sense in which Lyotard's essentially Nietzschean skepticism towards the organizing conceptual realm echoes Adorno's critique of identity thinking: for Lyotard, the sublime perception is one that we have not first 'controlled, programmed, grasped by a concept [Begriff]'. [Lyotard 1991 110]

But Lyotard rejects the kind of modernism that Adorno values, which I have characterized above in terms of its negativism. (Though it is worth pointing out that the identification of modernism as nostalgic ignores what Richard Sheppard has called the 'modernolatory' element in some modernism, exemplified in Italian Futurism, which is marked by an 'unreserved commitment' to the progressive and innovative aspects of modernity. [Sheppard 2000 82]) Adorno famously refuses to claim anything as positive for art as jubilation at the new or immanent, speaking rather in paradoxical epithets which express the possibilities of art which are snatched from the jaws of its impossibility: 'Archaisch sind die Kunstwerke im Zeitalter ihres Verstummens. Aber wenn sie nicht mehr sprechen, spricht ihr Verstummen selbst.' [Adorno 1970 426] References to silence and the unsayable as the most effective mode of art – 'Nur die intensive Richtung der Worte in den Kern des innersten Verstummens hinein gelangt zur Wirkung.' [Adorno 1970 304-5] – anticipate Welsch's own ideas on the

anaesthetic as the only refuge for art in the face of the sensory excess and veneer that characterises postmodernity. Lyotard refers to such instances of the unsayable as a 'nostalgic sublime', which is characterized by its futile search for a lost absolute or a lost formal unity. He prefers a postmodern sublime that is characterized by its tendency towards infinite experimentation. Lyotard claims that such aesthetic innovation is 'fundamentally not nostalgic and tended toward the infinity of plastic experiment rather than toward the representation of any lost absolute.' [Lyotard 1982 68] Welsch follows this gesture, claiming to want to exploit the oppositional force available in modernism, whilst absolving it of its reactionary and cynical aspect [Welsch 1990 157], and what he describes at one point as a preference for the postmodern 'Vielheitsoption' over the modern 'Einheitssehnsucht' [Welsch 1990 93] seems to coincide with Lyotard's distinction between a progressive and nostalgic sublime. But Lyotard himself is also at his most openly contradictory here, approvingly citing Adorno's terms [see Lyotard 1991 110 and 116] and reiterating his idea of art as a '"negative" presentation'. [Lyotard 1984 78] We have seen Welsch refer similarly to the sublime in art in terms of 'künstlerische "Darstellung" (die eigentlich eine Nicht-Darstellung ist)'. [Welsch 1990 89] Lyotard had already asserted that witnessing the failure of representation has been the main concern of most twentieth century art: 'The momentum of abstract painting since 1910 stems from the rigors of indirect, virtually ungraspable allusions to the invisible within the visual.' [Lyotard 1982 68] This in my view underlines the untenability of his ideas on a refusal of form

and an accessing of sheer matter, confirming the mediated nature of art by its own formal organisation and conceptuality.

And significantly for Welsch's ideas on aestheticisation and the 'exploitation' of the aesthetic, Lyotard sees the vacuum left in the absence of aesthetic standards as being filled by money: the value of artworks is assessed according to the profit they yield. [See Lyotard 1984 76] Money (or the power it bestows) is thus seen to assume the status of the transcendental Idea, evidence by Lyotard's reference in 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' to capital as 'an economy regulated by an Idea – infinite wealth or power.' [Lyotard 1985 16] Paul Crowther notes this parallel in Lyotard's formulations, focussing on the 'infinite analysability and transformation' of the market [Crowther 1992 194], and this connection between the market and the sublime underlies Paul Beidler's distinction that, whereas in modernist art the sublime is seen as a mode of resistance, postmodernity as an epoch is seen *itself* to be characterised by the sublime: 'The difference, then, is that if modernism alludes to the sublime, postmodernism is itself sublime.' [Beidler 1995 177] This echoes Jameson's notion of the sublime as the 'cultural dominant' of the postmodern. [Jameson 1991 6] In the broadest sense, the sublime is taken to characterise our experience of the capitalist system around us, which eludes our cognitive or conceptual faculties, what Jameson calls 'the impossible totality of the contemporary world system'. [Jameson 1991 37] For Jameson, similarly, this sublime nature of reality marks the rift between our

everyday (sensory) experience and abstract knowledge of society. [Jameson 1991 38] This idea of a failure of representation contrasts markedly with the conception of the sublime as *particularly suitable* for representing the characteristic features of the postmodern, which Welsch suggests in one of his versions of the anaesthetic. But is this anything more than a smokescreen which gets in the way of real-world analysis of markets and their effects? Surely the challenge is to present more than surface. Brecht had already pointed out that social reality 'ist längst nicht mehr im Totalen erlebbar'. [Brecht 1967 172, see also Giles 1997 141] His point here is of coure that art which attempts the 'einfache "Wiedergabe der Realität"' [Brecht 1967 171], that is to say art that is merely mimetically representative of surface phenomena, fails to indicate the increasingly complicated and no longer self-evident interconnections within the capitalist system. At the same time, it makes little sense to me to describe 'reality' as characterized by indeterminacy, when our faculties seem to strive for sense and order. Can indeterminacy endure in anything but a specifically counter-cultural deployment? In particular it seems doubly ironic that some of the sublime elements of reality, such as what Susan Bordo calls the 'non-humanness' of technology [Bordo 1992 175], are seen as a bad thing, whereas when art possesses this non-human quality it is seen to contain oppositional force, and similarly when characterised as 'unconsumable', the sublime is understood to resist the process of commodification in a positive way.

It is also questionable whether Lyotard's infinite and plural experimentation is even plausible as a means of describing art and its critical potential. For Lyotard and Welsch's terms, there seems to be a crucial tension between the idea of art as plural and 'infinitely forward-looking' and art as experimental. Emphasizing the plurality of experimental art seems to abstract the particularity of the specific art-object, that element (or those elements) which set it apart as experimental, from the very context which generates its experimental force. Art is not sheerly plural, but rather an interaction of precisely such moments as art's formal decomposition and reflexivity, as is implicit in Tynjanov's theory of aesthetic evolution. As such, art's reflexivity and formal dismantling works at cross-purposes to an 'anything-goes' pluralism. Indeed, experimental art seems to rely on a preference of one (most recent) moment of art over other (previous) moments.

That said, Lyotard does refer more plausibly to the essentially dialectical process of innovation which characterises modernist art, in which a certain immanent 'occurrence' [Lyotard 1985 2], which he identifies with the sublime, plays a crucial role: 'this agitation [here Lyotard is referring to innovation] [...] is only possible if something remains to be determined'. [Lyotard 1985 2] The sublime is in this respect identified with a kind of 'freespace' that precisely makes the

dialectical movement possible. Again this remainder is the equivalent of Adorno's 'das Mehr', albeit that Adorno is readier to acknowledge the always dialectical relation of this element of the process: 'das Mehr ist nicht einfach der Zusammenhang sondern ein Anderes, durch ihn Vermitteltes und trotzdem von ihm Gesondertes.' [Adorno 1970 122] Perhaps this is simply a question of emphasis, but more generally, in my view Adorno's understanding of this process of innovation is more sophisticated than Lyotard and Welsch's, firstly because it allows a moment of conceptual mediation (Adorno reads art both in terms of its own conceptuality and in terms of its effect on consciousness and cognitive process, as allowing a 'Durchbrechung des verdinglichten Bewußtseins.' [Adorno 1970 292]), and secondly because he accommodates an understanding of the formal conventionality of art, which Lyotard and Welsch's allegedly wholesale dismissal of form cannot do. As far as the idea of postmodern or sublime art as formless is concerned, it seems likely that, throughout the dialectical process of disruption and realignment of expectations, of suspension and reassertion of norms, art only temporarily escapes its formal cohesion as art. In this way, Adorno's retention of the category of form might be seen as a more realistic understanding of the nature of avant-garde art which is caught in a continual renegotiation with its own status as art.

Conceptuality, conventionality and the cognitive nature of the modernist aesthetic

Lyotard and Welsch are not unaware of the conceptuality of modernist art. Welsch, for example, defines the reflexivity of modern art as not only something for the senses, but for thought: 'Als reflektierende ist die Kunst der Moderne ein Unternehmen nicht mehr nur der Sinne, sondern auch des Geistes und Denkens.' [Welsch 1990 88] This tallies with Christopher Butler's understanding of art's conceptuality is a key ingredient of the dialectic of innovation which characterises early twentieth century modernist art (and arguably all art). Innovation is said to take place 'within a broadly philosophical matrix of ideas', a conceptual sphere 'which is fundamental to the enabling of the innovatory impulse'. [Butler 1994 249] Recognising modernist art's increasingly conceptual or cognitive nature presumably detracts from Welsch's wish to reconfigure the aesthetic as essentially sensory. Moreover, echoes of the Kantian sublime are apparent in this concept of art as something for the mind, a return of the conceptual or cognitive moment that is repressed in Welsch and Lyotard's ideas of sublime art as an experience of immanence and sheer matter. Is there not also a world of difference between these claims and Lyotard's essentially Kantian idea of sublime art as an 'evasion' of our conceptual faculties, as something that we have not 'controlled, programmed, grasped by a concept [Begriff]'? [Lyotard 1991 110] Whether called the non-identical, the indeterminate or the remainder, a failure of the conceptual in the face of innovation is in some respects still conceptual, even as it marks the limit of our determinate capacity for concepts.

For Albrecht Wellmer, innovation's indeterminate spark occurs where the non-identical offers a space of freedom from conventions of representation, perception and cognition. [Wellmer 1993 187-90]   This returns to my understanding of the sublime as useful for describing the modernist aesthetic's fragile dialectic of innovation and convention.   I have suggested above that Lyotard's various investments in the sublime as on the one hand immanent and 'unobtainable' [Lyotard 1984 81] and on the other as pure and transcendent are two sides of the same coin, but neither are very convincing as models of aesthetic autonomy.   Lyotard himself expresses the idea of his unhesitatingly positive, open and characteristically postmodern sublime in terms of a 'jubilation which result[s] from the invention of new rules of the game'. [Lyotard 1984 80]   But I have already asserted the logical flaw in any characterisation of innovation as immanent: the reference to the 'new rules of the game' indicates a conventionality (and its corollary, an institutionality) of which art cannot ever fully overcome.   Lyotard himself, when discussing the modernist break with mimetic representation, indicates the implicit conventionality of art: '"Modern painters" discovered that they had to represent the *existence of that* which was not demonstrable if the perspectival laws of *construizione legittima* were followed.' [Lyotard 1982 67]   This is to say, with Schoenberg, that 'no new technique in the arts is created that has not had its roots in the past'. [Cited in Butler 1994 47] Schoenberg conceives his own innovations as evolutionary, rather than somehow radically new: atonality is an extension of and addition to tonality, or as Franz

Marc says of Schoenberg's suspension of tonality: 'A so called dissonance is only a more remote consonance.' [Cited in Butler 1994 47] Moreover, art can only break the rules of the game temporarily, suspending their operation until new rules and new expectations coalesce around the innovation. In this way, autonomous art's relationship to the new must always be conceived dialectically: whilst its imperative is innovation, this innovation is only a temporary (and always recuperated) disruption of our expectation.

Of course, the conventionality of art is broader than the coordinates of the sublime. The question even arises whether such a focus on innovation and conventionality loses touch with the specificity of the sublime. Paul Crowther, for instance, questions whether the broad formulation of innovation has anything to do with the specifics of the sublime, and suggests that Kant's theory of genius might stand as a better model for the innovatory process of avant-garde art. [Crowther 1989 73] But Crowther's focus on genius is at odds with the idea that the sublime marks a turn away from authorial intention, which Paul Beidler describes as a 'turning against the will' [Beidler 1995 179], and which underlies Welsch's reading of Adorno's sublime, as well as Lyotard's notion of the sublime as the 'inhuman'. [Lyotard 1991 1] Moreover, this general understanding of the sublime as what Weiskel calls a necessary complement to a psychology which stresses its own limits [see Weiskel 1976 17], central to the Kantian sublime, points to what I think is a potentially fruitful way of conceiving

of the operation of the sublime in art, namely in terms of art's cognitive, and specifically defamiliarising, effect. The cognitive nature of the sublime is already implicit in Wellmer's idea of the non-identical as an experience at the limits of psychology that is unprotected by aesthetic convention. [See Wellmer 1993 187-190] The cognitive aspect of art had already been explicitly thematised in the writings of the Expressionist playwright Georg Kaiser, who at the end of the 1917 essay 'Das Drama Platons' describes our experience of drama as a 'Denkspiel', which draws us 'aus karger Schau-Lust zu glückvoller Denk-Lust'. [Kaiser 1971 IV 545] This turn against 'Schau-Lust' suggests the refusal of beauty, whether in its classical Kantian or postmodern aestheticised variants, opposed as they are by a more modernist 'Denk-Lust'. Once again, this 'Denk-Lust' returns to the Kantian sublime, which belongs to the mind rather than the senses. However, the Kantian conclusion of the superiority of the rational intellect is not the only conclusion that can be drawn here: the opposite might also be instructive. Moreover, the sublime interaction might not just teach us about ourselves, but about the way we interact with the external world.

It might be plausible to distinguish between two ways of conceiving of this cognitive function of art: firstly, as a kind of *reconstruction* of aspects of our cognitive processes, or secondly, as a *dismantling* or *disruption*. Whereas the former suggests a mode of art that remains closer to mimetic representation, the latter marks a more distinct departure from those terms. Jameson's ideas on

representation in the postmodern era follow on from Brecht's notion of the failure of mimetic representation. As Christopher Butler reminds us, conceptual art is not to be thought of in simple terms of a direct correspondence to reality:

> Such signs may reveal the way in which we conceive of the external world, which means that art of this kind does not (really) represent, but rather shows us how the mind might use signs to remind itself of aspects of the external world. [Butler 1994 72]

This reference to 'how the mind might use signs' reiterates the idea of a specifically *cognitive* function of art, which Butler referring to art as thematising 'the ways in which we conceive of the external world'. [Butler 1994 72] It seems to be along these lines that David Frisby calls for 'radically new cognitive and experimental maps' [Frisby 1985 4], and Fredric Jameson conceives of art as a kind of 'cognitive mapping'. [Jameson 1991 51] This idea for a 'new radical cultural politics' is seen to be not mimetic, but rather to allow representation 'on a higher and much more complex level'. [Jameson 1991 50 and 51] This cognitive nature of art (in the sense of focussing on patterns of thinking) is not a smaller aspect of art's conceptuality (in the sense of being self-reflexive about the concept of art). Indeed, it precisely seems to go beyond this conceptuality in as much as it can go beyond the limits of such self-reflexivity, able to thematise the types of cognition that we expect from non-art reality, as well as art. As Steve Giles

points out, Jameson's cognitive mapping is anticipated by Brecht [see Giles 1997 186], for whom the issue of the representability of an increasingly complex reality is a central issue. Giles suggests reading Alexander Kluge's prose collages in these terms.

In contrast to this idea of reconstruction, the 'Denk-Spiel' that takes place in Schklovsky's defamiliarisation aims to dismantle our habits and norms of perception and disrupt and slow down the usual course of our cognitive processes. Both Schklovsky and Mukarovsky reject any kind of impressionism, that is to say the idea of art as 'thinking in images' [Schklovsky 1965 3] or 'Denken in Bildern'. [Tynjanov 1969 393] This seems to turn on the cliché that 'a picture is worth a thousand words', and that evocation of such imagery in poetic language can aspire to a similar economy of words and thinking. For Schklovsky, art or the aesthetic is seen to oppose the clarity and 'economy of mental effort' [Schklovsky 1965 5] that this suggests, rather deploying rather an unsettling experience that Tynjanov describes as a 'Verstoß gegen das System'. [Tynjanov 1969 395] Schklovsky describes this kind of problematised perception in almost Kantian terms as an end in itself:

The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the

process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. [Schklovsky 1965 12]

Schklovsky defines the poetic as the project of problematising this automatisation. For Christopher Butler, Dada offers an example of this idea of art as an 'investigation of subconscious and automatic processes'. [Butler 1994 45] Rather than Brecht's concern to reproduce reality 'im Totalen' [Brecht 1967 172], and Jameson's still essentially 'representative' strategy of 'cognitive mapping', this disruption of our cognitive processes suggests more marginal and arguably more modest aims, such as exposing or challenging of the automatisation of human existence or creating a cognitive free space. This (relatively) indeterminate cognitive moment is arguably implicit in Schklovsky's formulations, and as such might share the sense of indeterminacy as ideas of art as 'remainder', as non-identical, and as anti-conceptual discussed above. But crucially different implications seem to be drawn from this experience, and ones that suggest a reconnection with the life-world, as opposed to the immanence and transcendence discussed above.

The above sentences from Schklovsky sound like Kant's sublime, in which the object is only the trigger for the more interesting mental response: *'Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.'* [Schklovsky 1965 12, original emphasis] Kant's insistence that the force of the sublime cannot be

ascribed to any fixed object apart from the mind also finds an important echo in the idea that we cannot ascribe this aesthetic, defamiliarising force, as espoused in Jan Mukarovsky's theory of aesthetic function and developed in Jurij Tynjanov's theory of aesthetic evolution. [see Mukarovsky 1977 and 1979, and Tynjanov 1969 66-78, see Giles 1995 and Sheppard 1989 16-24] So Tynjanov writes 'wird das, was heute ein literarisches Faktum ist, morgen zu einem einfachen Faktum des Lebens und verschwindet aus der Literatur.' [Tynjanov 1969 399] But what ramifications does this relegation of the object have for representation? Does the *dismantling* of our habits of perception, of 'standard' reality, relinquish or refuse the power to represent in any positive way? Does it capitulate to the idea that representation can only be true if it is somehow 'negative'? As such, does such a break of habits claim to reconnect us with a certain kind of 'real'? And what status does that 'real' have if it is not our habitual real? If it discloses *something*, is that something somehow truer? Does this lead us inevitably back to Adorno's 'negation'?

In my view it is pivotal to the dialectical nature of this kind of formalist-cognitive reading of the aesthetic that it does not relinquish all connection with the external referent. For Schklovsky, 'art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*'. [Schklovsky 1965 12] This sensory experience in art should not distract us from the essentially cognitive nature of what Schklovsky is talking about; in one key

respect it is precisely the opposite of Lyotard's notion of art as an experience of 'sheer matter', somehow subverting its mediation by form. For Schklovsky, defamiliarisation and form are practically synonymous: 'I personally feel that defamiliarisation is found almost everywhere form is found.' [Schklovsky 1965 18] But the important point is that this formalism is not at the expense of our awareness of the referent. Schklovsky conceptualizes this in terms of the difference between what we 'perceive' and what we (think we) 'know': 'The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known.' [Schklovsky 1965 12] This distinction returns to the discussion of the competing reality-claims of *Erlebnis, Erfahrung* and *Erwartung*, noted with reference to Walter Benjamin and Odo Marquard in chapter two. This turns on the tension between the material particularity of lived experience and the accrued and sedimented results of such moments. Is this intensely lived experience the same as Lyotard's immanent occurrence? In other words, what relation does this *Erlebnis/Erfahrung* bear to the contextual *Erwartung* in contrast to which it is generated? Of course, the crucial point is that particular experience that some art specializes in both deviates from and depends and reflects on the context of previous experience. Gadamer reminds us that our knowledge of objects is determined by shared convention in much the same way as modes of artistic representation. Gadamer levels this awareness of perception's dependence on context against what he calls Kant's 'Lehre von der reinen Wahrnehmung'. [Gadamer 1990 96] I will return to this question of the aesthetic

as intervening in located but latent shared expectations as opposed Kant's transcendental aesthetic below.

Welsch is on similar terrain in one of his readings of the anaesthetic, namely as the unthematised cultural and cognitive preconditions to perception mentioned in chapter one. In the next chapter I will return to this aspect of Welsch's formulations, which will be contrasted to his idea of aesthetics as a study of sense perception which seems to flatten out the terrain of the aesthetic as a question of perception switched on and off, bereft of any more sophisticated mechanism that might take account of such habits and preconditions of perception. Indeed, the idea that art can switch perception off seems to be least accommodating of external reference, and its opposite, sensory excess, seems to suggest a return to immanence or anti-conceptuality. But even extremes cannot be said to be internally and immanently constructed of perception and can tell us about habits of perception. I have already mentioned John Cage's (in)famous silent pieces, and Cage himself writes of the experience of silence as bringing to the fore that which is not normally thematised. [See Cage 1961 22-3] I will also discuss this idea of exposing the latent and unthematised elements of perception in relation to Peter Handke's theatre in chapter five. Moreover, the deployment and thematisation of the cognitive and perceptual in art is not just an issue of the mind and ideological investment, it marks an important return to the *bodily*, and

its interrelation with the ideological. I will discuss this in chapter six with reference to Heiner Müller's theatre.

As well as conventions of representation, this idea of dismantling habits of perception might reflect on the status of the 'real'. Does the identification of habits of perception suggest that the real is in some way 'derealised', in the sense that what we take to be true is only justified circularly, as a fulfillment of what we expect to be true. The idea of imperceptible art as an 'anti-fiction' seems to suggest that this is a problem that art might redress. But how would this relate to the idea of the sublime as somehow characteristic of a de-realised world in the light of techno-scientific advances? The tension is certainly apparent between the idea of the sublime as giving an impression of the imperceptible aspects of the world and the essentially modernist understanding of the sublime as describing a mode of cognitive intervention that is somehow resistant to these habits. In terms of its 'reality status' Gadamer's conventional context is in some ways opposite to the view of the sublime taken by Kant, for whom it is not that the determinate (and conventional) is the context that allows the indeterminate to exist, but rather the opposite: from indeterminacy one can infer the super-sensory basis on which the determinate must depend. Charles Taylor makes the same point in his conception of the expressive spark which offers a foothold for meaning in designative language. [See Taylor 1985 221] Does conceptualizing the sublime as a defamiliarising deviation from convention rob it of these

transcendental conclusions? This question returns to my distinction between two conceptions of what aesthetics can offer: universal grounds or marginal intervention. But if I have suggested that Lyotard's arrest of the dialectic, like Kant's, is arbitrary and incomplete – in spite of any claim that the horizontal and heterogeneous is absolved of the requirement of grounding – does a similar problem arise here? Can we stop at the idea of indeterminacy as a marginal intervention? Conversely, do we lose anything by leaping to Kant's transcendental conclusions? Does the conceptualization of the transcendental as indeterminate mean that we have reached an end of what we can talk about, as in Wittgenstein's assessment of the limits of philosophy: 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen'? [Wittgenstein 1922 188] Would empirical cognitive analysis offer a means of asking how this indeterminacy works, what determinate preconceptions it unpicks, or would it be a case of the Emperor's new clothes, the goose that lays the golden eggs?

On the one hand, art's cognitive effect seems essentially to belong to a *Wirkungsästhetik,* and as such to an *empirical* aesthetics whose effect presumably depends to some extent on the context of its reception. This insistence on context (and expectation) for art's effect might rather suggest a conception of the aesthetic as local intervention, getting away from Kantian attempts to theorise in transcendental terms where the value of art comes from. This might be the sense behind Hal Foster's idea of an 'anti-aesthetic' which entails 'interference' in the

'vernacular' rather than any universal models for the value of art. [Foster 1985 xiii] But in Schklovsky's terms such art is not itself vernacular, but precisely interrupts the vernacular. Hal Foster's point is that we should abandon the illusion of the aesthetic as a privileged and autonomous realm, but this does not take into account the alternative view of the way aesthetic autonomy can work. The need to abandon the concept of autonomy disappears if one has a more dialectical, flexible account of art's distinction from everyday life.

For me such flexibility is offered by a cognitively informed and culturally located conception of the aesthetic, which I have associated with the fragile, dialectical and essentially cognitive nature of the sublime as a limit experience in my discussion above. That said, the above discussion of the modernist and postmodernist sublimes clearly points *towards a number of difficulties regarding the theoretical usefulness of the Janus-faced concept of the sublime. Does the concept of the sublime suffer from being too vague for useful application to art or reality? Does it indicate an escape from conceptual control which opens up to plurality or indeed closes around an immanent singularity? Is it a kind of infinite and transcendental 'Idea' or a refusal of the conceptual? Can it be theorised in terms of the formal innovation of the modernist artwork, or at least the effect of that limit of meaning on the human mind, or is it an aspect of our everyday experience of postmodern reality? If it describes a way of *responding* to reality, does this operation disclose a different 'real', that we had somehow not

seen before, or a 'real' that is unobtainable or an experience that indicates a transcendental realm? My overriding concern in seeking clarification here is to ask what becomes of the *oppositional* force of the sublime as a theory of art in the face of its theorisation as a cultural dominant. My point has been to suggest that the sublime can be useful as a means of theorising oppositional art in particular in characterising the intersection of form and its cognitive impact to provide a more dialectical sense of art's autonomy. Through a more located and contextualized nature of the aesthetic's indeterminacy one might find a pathway between Kant's transcendental autonomy and sheer empiricism. The question for Welsch in the next chapter will be to what extent his ideas on anaesthetics admit of this dialectical flexibility and this engaging of form, cognition and non-art experience in a way that his broader ideas on aesthetics suggest.

Chapter 4 · The ideology of the anaesthetic

Welsch does not draw attention to or explore the parallels between his notion of anaesthetic and his discussion of sublime theory in relation to Adorno and Lyotard, but the former might well be conceived as a variant of the sublime. This is particularly evident in its conceptualisation as a means of characterising the allegedly imperceptible nature of reality or in his preference for art which problematises sensory experience, this latter being the aspect that I referred to as the 'sublime anaesthetic' in chapter one. Welsch allocates this type of art a truth-value, at least implicitly, by virtue of its opposition to the fictionality of the aestheticised world, in which respect it echoes Lyotard and others' investment in the sublime as a non-conceptual 'impossible-real' [Žižek 1989 194], or an experience of matter somehow 'beyond formal organisation'. But in contrast to Lyotard's notion of the sublime as an immanent quality that defies conceptual control, the anaesthetic is to be located in the context of Welsch's broader conception of aesthetics, following Baumgarten, as a study of sensation and perception, and moreover as a dialectical 'Kehrseite' or 'Doppel' of or 'Gegenbegriff' to the aesthetic. [Welsch 1990 10-11] It is an aspect of a broader contemporary culture that he characterises in terms of a combination of anaesthetic and aestheticised elements. As such, as we have seen, the anaesthetic embraces various ideas, including an involuntary shutting off in the face of sensory excess, whereby we are able to withstand aspects of the commodified

world; a cognitive precondition of perception, a method of selection without which we cannot perceive anything; a cultural version of this precondition, or a recognition that the criteria of selection are culturally defined; an instance of imperceptibility, which is seen to be somehow representative of a technologically changed reality; and finally a strategic response in art to the various manifestations of aestheticisation.

I have already registered the tension between the return to a focus on art and Welsch's stated project of a broader discipline of aesthetics – 'Ich möchte Ästhetik genereller als *Aisthetik* verstehen: als Thematisierung von Wahrnehmung *aller Art*'. [Welsch 1990 9-10, my emphasis] Perhaps the success of such a project would depend on the extent to which one was able to articulate the interaction between everyday perception and various models of art as particular and distinct, but related, modes of perception. This will be a concern in the discussions that follow. Similarly, there is nothing necessarily wrong with having multiple and varying ideas on how art functions; it would seem to be restrictive and unrealistic to insist that art can only function in one way. For Peter Bürger, the impossibility of privileging one model of artistic functioning over another is an essential characteristic of the contemporary aesthetic:

Für die Gegenwart ist von einem Nebeneinander verschiedener Materialzustände auszugehen. Das Nebeneinander von "realistischer"

und "avantgardistischer" Kunst ist heute eine Tatsache, gegen die es keinen legitimen theoretischen Einspruch mehr gibt. [Bürger 1983 11]

This 'Nebeneinander' is echoed in Welsch's own conviction as to the essential plurality of modern art and the absence of any overarching criteria for judging art, discussed in chapter three. [See Welsch 1990 68] But there I argued that this plurality is at odds with the way the (essentially modernist) aesthetic of experiment and innovation that Welsch is trying to describe works, and here I will suggest that there may be crucial incompatibilities between Welsch own distinct ideas of art and the role that the anaesthetic plays in them. One such incompatibility is evident between the idea that the imperceptible artwork is somehow *resistant* to perception (what I have called the 'sublime' anaesthetic) and the idea that such imperceptible art is specifically *useful* for developing our sensitivity towards those elements of existence which are increasingly shown to be imperceptible (this latter describes what I have labelled the 'pragmatic' anaesthetic).

In my view though this tension between the pragmatic and oppositional understandings of art is less problematic than the contradiction between Welsch's conceptions of art as salvaging some kind of authenticity in the face of a de-realised world (again the 'sublime' anaesthetic) and art as a defamiliarising intervention in our habits of perception (the 'cognitive' anaesthetic). This tension

is apparent insofar as the former offers the anaesthetic as art's *solution* (or at least response) to problems in the everyday world, whilst the latter sees the anaesthetic, in the guise of latent cultural habits and norms, as the *problem* to be addressed in art. Welsch himself defends his fast and loose use of the concept of anaesthetics in terms of its dialectical flexibility [see Welsch 1990 9], but the problem is not the dialectical interplay between aesthetic and anaesthetic, but that these ideas of artistic function rest on two distinct and conflicting conceptions of what the anaesthetic is, prior to its application to art. Firstly, the anaesthetic is understood as a response, either conscious or involuntary, to a specifically postmodern aestheticisation, a switching-off in the face of an excess of sense-perceptual experience. Secondly, the anaesthetic is understood as a kind of unconscious cognitive selection procedure that is the necessary and unconscious precondition of perception at all. This is a process which art is seen to be able to bring to light, in a *de*-anaesthetising 'Bildarbeit' [Welsch 1990 35] that exposes the latent and anaesthetic conditions of knowledge. Aside from the fact that this latter, cognitive, anaesthetic involves a shift from the treatment of the aesthetic in terms of the sensory, surface phenomena and claims of immanence to an awareness of the cognitive complexity of perception, the operation of such latent preconditions to perception presumably raises the question of whether it is plausible to speak of such non-perception *at all*.

In my presentation of the anaesthetic in chapter one I also indicated other slippages from Welsch's central idea of rewriting the aesthetic in terms of the sensory, such as the characterisation of aestheticised world as *fictional*. This suggests that the imperceptible artwork is a kind of receptacle of *truth*. It may be reasonable for art to make these claims, but it should be acknowledged that, far from an ideological 'Pause' or free-space – as Lyotard and others claim with respect to the sublime – they do invest the sublime anaesthetic with crucial philosophical and, I shall argue in what follows here, ideological elements.

Philosophical anaesthetics: negativity and ideology

In view of the fact that it is conceived as a response to everyday experience, Welsch's anaesthetic proposes a very philosophical understanding of art's function. In chapter one I noted the common ground between the anaesthetic and theoretical investments in silence. Famously for Wittgenstein at the end of the *Tractatus*, silence is all that's left to us once philosophy has unraveled its own claims to be able to reach absolute values and truths: 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.' [Wittgenstein 1922 118] The paradoxical status of Welsch's 'unsichtbare Objekte' might be taken, after Wittgenstein, as an indication that the limits of propositional logic have been reached. Certainly this would chime with Welsch's notion that aesthetics has gained in importance because of the failure of philosophy to accommodate the sensory: 'Die

angesprochene Überschreitung kann jedoch, eben als Überschritt ins Aisthetische, schwerlich philosophisch, kann vielmehr selbst nur aisthetisch und somit in prominenter Funktion künstlerisch geleistet werden.' [Welsch 1987 24] (This also for Welsch justifies his own return of art to the centre-stage.) But in spite of his remark about philosophy here, in chapter two I located the 'indeterminate' quality of sensory absence in a fairly philosophical tradition, with reference to Kant and the early Romantics. But quite distinct from Kant's project to vindicate the authority of reason, such a philosophical position might have parallels with various notions of truth in religion, in particular in mystical thought and oriental religion. So Meister Eckhardt, the thirteenth century Christian mystic, writes of a Godhead, whose 'is-ness' ('isticheit') cannot be put into words since 'to say it is already negating it', and that can only be experienced as 'nothing' ('niht'), as a void 'bereft of matter and form, where the soul comes to *naught*'. [Cited in Buning 1990 136] So this post-philosophical paradox has echoes of Taoism, which Lothar Schröder describes as the 'letzte Wirklichkeit der Welt'. [Schröder 1991 218] Tao refuses all significatory exchange, 'hat keine Form, besitzt kein Abbild und ist nicht aussprechbar und nicht übertragbar. Zur existentiellen Form des Tao wird deshalb das Schweigen.' [Schröder 1991 218] George Steiner in 'Language and Silence' also mentions the Taoist idea of 'ever-deepening silence' [Steiner 1969 31] as somehow higher or truer than language, which itself is 'tarnished, flattened to the touch like a coin too long in circulation'. [Steiner 1969 70-71] Silence has therefore been elected by

'the most articulate' [Steiner 1969 68], a renewal that takes the paradoxical form of a 'renunciation' or 'abdication'. [Steiner 1969 69] Buddhism similarly reveres silence, or emptiness, as an end in itself, and an absence which indicates an origin. These positions all exemplify what Michael Hardt calls 'negative metaphysics' [Hardt 1991 244], and echo the idea discussed in the last chapter of the sublime experience as a kind of secularised religion. [See Weiskel 1976 3]

Welsch is not alone in seeing art as particularly suitable as a vehicle for this kind of inexpressible truth. In her 1969 essay, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', Susan Sontag characterises the 'negative' status of this kind of art in post-theological terms: 'As the activity of the mystic must end in a *via negativa*, a theology of God's absence, a craving for the cloud of unknowing beyond knowledge.' [Sontag 1969 5] So it is that the imperceptible and the silent in art become a kind of refuge for such metaphysical claims. For Peter Weiss in *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, for instance, silence is not only thematised as a source of disenfranchisement and powerlessness,[1] as a means of coping in adverse circumstances, but is also characterised as somehow mystical and crucially

---

[1] As Weiss writes in his autobiography: 'Er mußte lernen, sich in dern neuen Sprache anzusiedeln, oder er mußte in der Sprachlosigkeit untergehen.' [Weiss 1968 181] This powerlessness is also evident in Beckett's *Not I*, where we learn of the narratee's inability to articulate: 'so disconnected... never got the message...

'authentic'. Of the silent figure of his mother in the novel the narrator asserts 'was sie in sich trage, sei eine Wahrheit, eine schreckliche, für uns noch unverständliche Wahrheit'. [Weiss 1998 884, see also Langer 1988 45] In his *Notizbücher* he makes clear the paradoxical inaccessibility of this visionary force: 'Sie sieht alles, wir sehen nur ihr Verstummen.' [Weiss 1981 763] Similarly, in the same acceptance speech for the Georg Büchner prize that Welsch cites at the end of 'Ästhetik und Anästhetik', Botho Strauß associates the silence which pervades his dramatic and prose work with revelation: 'Niemand spricht metaphysicher als der, dem Gott sich jäh in der Umkehrung offenbart, in Abgrund, Wunde und Leere.' [Strauß 1999 31] And in his *Fragmente der Undeutlichkeit* the link with the mystical tradition is made explicit: 'Dieses Schweigen wird – wie in der mystischen Tradition – als Gott angesprochen.' [Strauß 1999 53] This idea of revelation coincides with Welsch's analogy between art as anaesthetic and the specifically invisible element of pre-modern theological belief. [See Welsch 1990 25] Marius Buning discusses Samuel Beckett's late plays as inhabited by a similar mysticism, in the sense that ultimate meaning always evades our grasp, and, by virtue of the fact that 'to say it is already to negate it', may only be accessed by silence or emptiness. [See Buning 1990 136] Bjørn Myskja refers to the 'awareness of Nothing', as opposed to any meaning for our age, as the 'main contribution' of Beckett's *Molloy*. [Myskja 2001 48] I will return to this discussion

---

or powerless to respond... like numbed... couldn't make the sound... not any

of such imperceptible art as a 'negative' of presentation, and to Beckett's later dramas in particular, in chapter five.

This turn to art and its relationship with philosophy and mysticism clearly takes us some way from Welsch's interest in the broader 'everyday' significance of the aesthetic as sensory. Indeed, in the light of Welsch's comments about Aristotle's own betrayal of the sensory, it is worth asking whether this marks Welsch's own 'Ästhesiologie'. Certainly it is symptomatic of the tension between Welsch's different uses of the same terms that his concern to 'rehabilitate' the sensory contrasts sharply with his identification of sensory excess and artifice as one of the main problems we face in a newly aestheticised world. His skepticism about the possibility of fruitful contemplation (and presumably therefore of evaluation) in the face of contemporary experience is matched by an ambivalence towards the idea of the sensory as offering resistance to the dominant effects of contemporary aestheticisation. On the one hand he does suggest that sensory experience may be a 'Komplement und Kompensat' [Welsch 1987 22] to the over-determination by an abstract or rationalist view of the world: 'aber der Aristotelische Ansatz enthält doch gewichtige Strukturen, die transformiert durchaus fruchtbar zu machen wären und gerade als Korrektiv moderner Einseitigkeit zukunftsweisend werden könnten'. [Welsch 1987 30] On the other

---

sound'. [Beckett 1986 378]

hand his notion of art seems precisely to return to a contemplative and abstract mode of art.

Moreover, does this elision of the epistemological concerns that have motivated philosophical movements like phenomenology, and the deleterious effects of everyday phenomena (with quite different provenance) work? Would the seconding of the aesthetic to specifically philosophical questions of determination, grounding and the status of the real preclude the aesthetic's usefulness as a means of describing everyday perception? Alternatively, does this same usefulness depend on the aesthetic's mediation by more or less philosophical questions? As far as this everyday nature of the problems Welsch is addressing is concerned (problems such as the excess of sensory experience, the mediation of reality by images, the predominance of veneer over substance, and the thoroughgoing beautification of our environment), an initial difficulty with Welsch's notion of anaesthetic art as a response to everyday phenomena is that it is implausible that one type of minimalist art can address or resist all of them. Moreover, if one allows that these phenomena of aestheticisation include an *ideological* aspect, it is questionable whether Welsch's anaesthetic, reduced to a binary treatment of aesthetics as 'perception: on' or 'perception: off', is equipped to address the ideological complexity of what is really occurring in the disparate phenomena of aestheticisation. Whilst it is plausible that the anaesthetic as sensory might resist mass *consumption*, it is not clear that the anaesthetic avoids

manipulation of consciousness which is apparent in, for example, the commodification or the fetishization associated with Baudrillard's concept of 'sign value'. [See Baudrillard 1998 77] And if aestheticisation is what Mike Featherstone refers to as an 'intensification of image production' [Featherstone 1991 65], as Welsch's idea of a 'mediale Bildwelt' suggests [Welsch 1990 15], surely this image production is not reducible to *mere* image, but must be conceived in more complex terms of *what* is being represented and *how*. The preference for style over substance in all spheres of life from politics to food cannot be criticised by disengaging the perceptual in toto, but must presumably be *exposed* in relation to the more concrete facts which it conceals.

This neglect of questions of ideology and habit in favour of more extravagant issues of nothingness or the infinite echoes the problem which, in Daniel Bell's view, sets up an obstacle to realistic social change: 'Our fascination with the apocalypse blinds us to the mundane'. [Bell 1976 8] Bell is referring, from a somewhat different political position, to the cataclysmic prospect of revolution which undermines the more modest aim of social change, and the point I want to discuss below is that Welsch's anaesthetic might precisely distract us from reflecting on norms of perception and behaviour (which some art as imperceptible *does* indeed seem to meditate on). Is it unfair to criticize the anaesthetic in the first place for proposing an aesthetics, a theory of art, that is limited to crude and binary positions of perception on or off, and then condemn

246

it for drifting onto the terrain of other problems than merely sensory excess and beautification, such as ideas of fictionality and representation? Might not such ideas in fact open up a greater complexity beyond Welsch's characterization of the aesthetic and aestheticisation in terms of sense perception, whereby such phenomena might be conceived as ideologically sophisticated instances of rationalization?

One problem returns to the implication, central to investments in the sublime in the last chapter, that the silent or imperceptible artwork offers a space *free* from ideological imposition, a moment which defies consumption and all that that entails. This seems to be the same freedom which we saw Botho Strauß valorise as the 'Unvermittelte'. But the measure of hermeneutical sophistication introduced by Welsch's cognitive anaesthetic, that is to say the awareness of latent preconditions to perception, should indicate that such immanence is implausible. This is doubly the case for certain forms of modernist art, whose conceptuality and conventionality, as argued in chapter three, speak strongly against simple valorization of art as somehow immanent. This claim to immanence is already highly conceptual, as is made clear by its status as a response to the particularly *philosophical* problems of epistemology and grounding. And it is arguably the philosophical nature of Welsch's ideas on minimalism that undermines its claims to ideological free-space: whilst it is not inconceivable that minimalist art allows a moment of respite and a breathing

space, it is also apparent that the slippage from aesthetic questions (those concerning perception) to epistemological questions (those concerning truth and fictionality) is not unproblematic. Even if philosophically this indeterminacy is convincing and has important consequences, as a *politics* of art it brings with it a certain ideological investment.

For a start, the idea of anaesthetic as anti-fiction or respite seems to cast art in the mode of a kind of therapeutic *compensation*. This quasi-classical conception of art as a guarantee of value contrasts with the modernist tradition of art (in contrast to what Lyotard says) that works at removing any such security with its insistence on our inability to reach a positive basis of meaning. (The debt to early Romantic philosophy is clear here, and it is in this sense that Friedrich Schlegel asserts that '[w]hoever has thought the infinite can never again think the finite.' [Cited in Bowie 2003 52])

Art as compensation: Marcuse I

The compensatory mechanism evident in the sublime anaesthetic exposes it to Marcuse's somewhat heavy-handed but in my view valid critique of Idealist aesthetics, as elaborated in the essay 'Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur'. [Marcuse 1965 56-101] The initial target of Marcuse's essay is the traditional, neo-classical aesthetics of beauty, in as much as beauty, in Kant's

transcendental aesthetics. Such a view of art as universal guarantor is seen to foster the idea of culture as an unreal and ideal realm as a consolation for the trials and failures of reality, a 'schlechter Trost' which not only remind us of what could be, but stands as an obstacle to practical improvement of the conditions of the real world: 'Die Kultur bejaht und verdeckt die neuen gesellschaftlichen Lebensbedingungen.' [Marcuse 1965 64][2] Hans Robert Jauß echoes this with the idea that aesthetic pleasure is complicit in the process of 'Sich-Abfinden mit dem Bestehenden'. [Jauß in Weinrich 1975 285] These ideas return to Schiller's notion of culture as an ideal realm in which man is free to overcome nature hypothetically, as discussed in chapter three. And whilst the essentially utopian sense of this view of culture is politically problematic, there is also a sense in which even more marginal understandings of the value of art – in

---

[2] The contrast is notable between Marcuse's critique of art as a metaphysical *Trost* and what Theo Girshausen sees as Nietzsche's affirmation of the same: 'Das Entsetzen wird in der Tragödie zum Erhabenen, der absurde Ekel in der Komödie zum Komischen geläutert. Diese Gefühls-Katharsis rettet den Erkennenden vor der unausweichlichen Konsequenz, die ihn die Kunst aus der ,wesenseinsicht' im dionysischen Zustand gefolgt wäre: der radikalen Weltverneinung, die keine Möglichkeit mehr läßt, den Trost im Jenseits der Transzendenz zu finden. Kunst ist für Nietzsche somit eine Art irdische Transzendenz: sie ist metaphysischer Trost, der das Leiden an Natur und Geschichte gleichsam in der Schwebe hält, es nicht zur Verzweiflung werden läßt.' [Girshausen 1978 100]

terms of new ways of seeing – also see the aesthetic as a realm of freedom in terms which are ultimately quite similar to Schiller's.

Of course, Welsch's aesthetics is not centred on beauty, which as art's 'vordergründigstes Moment' has precisely been exploited and reduced to mere 'Eintönigkeit'. [Welsch 1990 14] His point is that beauty has long since lost its transcendental lustre, and aestheticisation is more likely to be a source of distraction and false consolation: this seems to motivate Welsch's preference for the imperceptible as a strategic response. Marcuse's essay concurs, tracing the process whereby beauty loses its ideal status: 'Von ihrer Verbindung mit dem Ideal getrennt, im Bereich der bloßen Sinnlichkeit, verfällt die Schönheit daher der allgemeinen Entwertung dieser Sphäre.' [Marcuse 1965 83] Bereft of the status it achieves for Kant and Schiller as an intimation of the ideal realm of freedom and unconditioned truth, Marcuse's 'Vorboten möglicher Wahrheit' [Marcuse 1965 85], and reduced to mere 'Schau' [Marcuse 1965 83], beauty is relegated to a means only to enjoyment. But the problem for Welsch's formulations is that inaccessibility of the anaesthetic suggests that, in ideological terms, might be said to *replace* beauty as the guarantor of an 'Ideal' or absolute realm. George Steiner, for instance, whose essay on silence I cited above, makes the link between silence and the ideal: 'In much modern poetry silence represents the claims of the ideal.' [Steiner 1969 70] Similarly, Adorno identifies silence with both aesthetic transcendence and its opposite: 'Ästhetische

Tranzendenz und Entzauberung finden zum Unisono im Verstummen: in Becketts œuvre.' [Adorno 1970 123] The theological overtones of the imperceptible noted above underline its ideological susceptibility: for Marcuse, art's theological aspect evidences its regressive *consolatory* function that claims to provide this kind of 'new mythology' or 'negative' meaning. [See Marcuse 1965 86] John Cage's suggestion, for instance, that music is there to prepare the mind for divine influence [see Revill 1992 168] would be grist to Marcuse's mill. For Peter Weiss the force of silent truth derives both from its characterisation as revelation and its *inaccessibility*. In chapter three I noted Thomas Weiskel's idea of the sublime as a secularised religion – 'transcendence without any controversial theology' [Weiskel 1976 4, 16] – and religious practice in particular has for centuries insisted on *iconostasis*, the inaccessibility and non-presentability of the ultimate object of worship. As well as Judaism's *Bilderverbot* the Russian Orthodox Church insists on the concealing of the altar and Islam prohibits the use of images of God or man in its holy places. The fact that such devices reinforce the hierarchical distinction between the people and God's earthly mediators supports Marcuse's view of the essentially conservative function of culture – though religion's control mechanism is hardly challenged by Protestantism's internalisation of religious obligation.

Elsewhere of course, far from the intimation of a quasi-religious absolute, Welsch himself intends that the anaesthetic should have a *practical* function (which I

have labelled 'pragmatic') of warning us that reality itself is imperceptible. This is a consequence of scientific developments in the last fifty years or so, though it is still arguably empiricist, albeit opening up realms of reality that were both not known about before, but also are still neither perceptible nor perhaps conceivable to the average person. The idea that art should replicate this experience of 'unreality' – a kind of paradoxical neo-impressionism – seems precisely to refute any such consolation-function. But it is questionable whether the kinds of artworks that we have referred to are or could ever be interpreted as such a warning. And as far as the idea that the minimalist artwork refuses any consolatory function is concerned, Adorno's warning is perhaps pertinent that the austerity of artworks which exclude celebration and consolation paradoxically gain these characteristics ever more: 'Selbst Kunstwerke, welche Feier und Trost unbestechlich sich verbieten, wischen den Glanz nicht weg, gewinnen ihn desto mehr, je gelungener sie sind.' [Adorno 1970 123] (Adorno himself exploits this paradox of course in his preference for works of writers like Kafka and Beckett, whose works shimmer with meaninglessness. Adorno makes the link between such meaninglessness and silence explicit: 'Daß die bedeutungsferne Sprache keine sagende ist, stiftet ihre Affinität zum Verstummen.' [Adorno 1970 123] Though, for Adorno, determinate negation of meaning such as that which Beckett generates in his plays precisely refuses consolation.)

But Marcuse's uncompromising stance is itself somewhat puritanical. Andrew Bowie characterizes art's 'negative' response more positively in his distinction between dogmatic theology and a negative theology that 'kills the pain of meaninglessness by making the negativity part of something that can transcend it'. [Bowie 2003 55] This idea of 'pain' serves as a reasonable reminder that interpreting – and dismissing – religious belief or its substitutes as a spurious guarantee of meaning only tells half the story. The need for such certainty or consolation presumably springs from somewhere: for Nietzsche the need for metaphysical security out of which both religion and science derive comes from a fundamental and primary fear. [See Nietzsche 1973 V 2 275-6] That said, whilst one might question whether it is fair to deny such consolation before material conditions have improved, Marcuse's point is that the promises of religion and art *distract* from the project of changing material conditions. But beauty or its replacement – if that is what silence and imperceptibility are – are not the only source of distraction in the modern western world of mass entertainment and the culture industry. And the irony is of course that such difficult modernist art is aimed precisely at refuting the modes in which these phenomena operate. But Marcuse's concern is to point out that the secondment to modern, bourgeois end of individuation renders such a protected realm illusory, any possible autonomy exploited and rationalised:

Die Kultur soll die Sorge für den Glücksanspruch der Individuen übernehmen. Aber die gesellschaftlichen Antagonien, die ihr zugrunde liegen, lassen den Anspruch nur als verinnerlichten und rationalisierten in die Kultur eingehen. [Marcuse 1965 67-8]

Implicit in Marcuse's critique here seems to be the sentiment that if we sort out material problems, culture will follow. This is as devaluing of culture as its banishment into an ideal realm. The challenge of re-engaging allegedly autonomous culture with the everyday is all the harder insofar as the modernist aesthetic of which Welsch's anaesthetic is arguably a variant defines itself by its overturning of conventional ways of representing and seeing the world. Elsewhere, Marcuse himself refers to the need for distance between the 'aesthetic dimension' and the everyday in order to articulate new ways of thinking. [See Marcuse 1978] I will discuss this issue further below in relation to Marcuse's specific critique of 'difficult' art.

Of course, Marcuse is not the first to be suspicious of the consolatory function of culture. Many theorists are equally skeptical about the idea of culture being deployed as an obstacle to social change, such as Gramsci in his concept of hegemony, Horkheimer's own notion of affirmative culture, and Althusser's 'state ideological apparatuses'. [On this see Jay 1984 84] And Nietzsche in *Jenseits*

254

von Gut und Böse had already criticized the hypocrisy at work in the mechanism of leisure (this time as a respite, rather than as guarantor of an absolute), which only reinforces its opposite:

Die arbeitsamen Rassen finden eine grosse Beschwerde darin, den Müssiggang zu ertragen: es war ein Meisterstück des englischen Instinktes, den Sonntag in dem Maasse zu heiligen und zu langweilen, dass der Engländer dabei wieder unvermerkt nach seinem Wochen- und Werktage lüstern wird [Nietzsche 1973 VI 2 112]

Adorno's reference to the idea of art as 'trostspendende Sonntagsveranstaltungen' [Adorno 1970 10] echoes this suspicion of culture. Nietzsche's reference to antiquity's obsession with fasting is once again a reference to Stoic philosophy. The Stoic's asceticism for Nietzsche, like Hegel before him, is nothing more than a subordinating mechanism whereby 'ein Trieb sich ducken und niederwerfen lernt, aber auch sich reinigen und schärfen lernt'. [Nietzsche 1973 VI 2 112, see Hegel 1951 158ff.] But in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* this process of subordination is characterized not as an avoidance of displeasure, but a question of training oneself 'Steine und Gewürm, Glassplitter und Skorpionen zu verschlucken und ohne Ekel zu sein'. [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 224] Nietzsche characteristically graphic terms describe a process whereby the Stoic 'soll endlich glecihgültig gegen Alles werden, was der Zufall des Daseins in ihn

255

schüttet'. [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 224] Nietzsche continues that Stoicism may well be advisable for those who live in violent times, '[f]ür Menschen, mit denen das Schicksal improvisiert'. [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 224] So is Welsch's valorization of the Stoic, noted in chapter two, saying with Nietzsche that ours is a time in which we are at the mercy of the fates? Certainly Welsch seems to be proposing the return to the self as a coping mechanism in the face of forces that we can no longer control. As such my ideologically motivated complaint might be unreasonably harsh criticism of Welsch's essentially plausible suggestion that minimalism might be able to offer respite from a hectic and ideologically laden contemporary world.

One difficulty with this notion, though, is its apparent contradiction with Welsch's ideas on Adorno's aesthetics as an aesthetics of the sublime, which seems to suggest art as an ethical model that *de-emphasises* the self. The self is clearly both central to and the major obstacle to any ethics and I will say more about the status of self in art below. But even if we choose to condemn the return to the self as a coping mechanism, does it make sense to conceive of this mechanism as operating in the artwork? Of course, for Nietzsche, art's essential quality should be a refusal of this essentially conservative and ultimately submissive gesture of the Stoic. 'Eine Künstler-Dienstbarkeit im Dienste des asketischen Ideals ist deshalb die eigentlichste Künstler-C o r r u p t i o n, die es geben kann'. [Nietzsche 1973 VI 2 421] (For Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal is based

on the same abstraction as the veneration of scientific truth ('Überschätzung der Wahrheit' [Nietzsche 1973 VI 2 420]). Can we speak of art in the same terms as a return to the self? But art's self-reflexivity, as in the notion of art as only 'kunst-intern', does suggest a similar kind of protection or conservation of what is proper to art. I will say more about this in the context of the anaesthetic as a particular turn against representation below.

Whither the sensory? Marcuse II

Aside from any ideological concerns, in Welsch's own terms the anaesthetic seems to indicate a thoroughgoing ambivalence towards the concept of the sensory. I have already registered his suggestion that sensory experience may be a 'Komplement und Kompensat' [Welsch 1987 22] to the over-determination by an abstract or rationalist view of the world, but the valorisation of the anaesthetic as in some way 'authentic' might be taken to perpetuate what Marcuse calls idealist philosophy's 'Abwertung der Sinnlichkeit' [Marcuse 1965 58], and this in the context of a proposal for returning to aesthesis as a discussion of the sensory nature of our experience. The ideas of art's inaccessibility and anti-fictionality seem to work against Welsch's central claims regarding the *dialectic* of the aesthetic and anaesthetic, insofar as the anaesthetic's claim to truth seems to me to offer itself as an absolute model of artistic autonomy, underlined by Welsch's comments on the purely 'kunst-intern' nature of the authentic artwork. By

257

contrast Marcuse follows the eighteenth century materialist philosopher Julien Lamettrie in valorising the sensory as in some way pivotal to human nature. (Nietzsche's remarks on the Stoic do suggests that sensory experience is instrumental for the Stoic, but only as a means of its own overcoming, a means of protecting the non-sensory self: 'Auf das Erhabene ausgerichtet, erheben sie sich über alle Geschehnisse und glauben sich nur so weit wahrhaft Mensch, als sie aufhören zu sein.' [Marcuse 1965 69]) Marcuse cites Lamettrie's anti-Idealist essay 'Discours sur le Bonheur', in which the bodily is experienced in and for itself:

> Und wie werden wir Anti-Stoiker sein! Diese Philosophen sind streng, traurig, hart; wir werden zart, froh und gefällig sein. Ganz Seele, abstrahieren sie von ihrem Körper; ganz Körper, werden wir von unserer Seele abstrahieren. Sie zeigen sich unzugänglich der Lust und dem Schmerz; wir werden stolz sein, das eine wie das andere zu fühlen. [Lamettrie, cited in Marcuse 1965 69]

Lamettrie and Marcuse in this respect belong to the tradition that I referred to in chapter two which reasserts the material or sensory element of experience as a pivotal source of knowledge or as somehow more authentic than its rational elaboration. Disparate contributors to this tradition included Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger, to say nothing of Baumgarten. In the same vein as this critique

of abstraction Marcuse's concerns about affirmative culture echoes Nietzsche's assertion, in *Der Antichrist*, of the disadvantage of seeking truth in an abstract and absent realm: 'Wenn man das Schwergewicht des Lebens nicht in's Leben, sondern in's 'Jenseits' verlegt – in's Nichts – , so hat man dem Leben überhaupt das Schwergewicht genommen.' [Nietzsche 1973 VI 3 215] This idea of the sensory as a corrective to idealist excesses is also central to Marx's writings, who in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* criticises Hegel's category of mental labour as alienated,

> To say that man is a corporeal, living, real, sensuous, objective being with natural powers means that he has real, sensuous objects as the object of his being and of his vital expression, or that he can only express his life in real, sensuous objects. [Marx 1992 390]

These ideas of the sensory as somehow pivotal to human experience might seem to be reiterated in Welsch's intentions for the discipline of aesthetics as a study of the sensory. The question is how the quintessentially *particular* aesthetic-sensory aspect of our being may be said to constitute experience in advance of the necessarily *general* mental capacities that allow that experience to be organised and understood. In this respect the notion of the incomparable particular as somehow determinate for or constitutive of experience seems to be as 'headless'

as Welsch's subsequent postmodernist valorisation of the plural. But these reminders of the specifically sensory nature of experience are not without value, particularly in aesthetics, as a corrective to what Hans Georg Gadamer has referred to as the 'Abstraktion des ästhetischen Bewußtseins'. [Gadamer 1986 94] The sensory particular has been crucial to ideas of the specific nature of what distinguishes art in the twentieth century, and in particular in radical theatre, a tradition I will trace in chapter six. There I will ask how this reassertion of the material relates to the ideological concerns I have raised. Is this materialist imperative only useful as a corrective to the excesses of speculative philosophy or does it allow for an analysis of the way art's sensory nature might interact with our ideological lifeworld? Do these assertions of the body or material as somehow politically charged prior to its inscription by any cultural or ideological factors merely replicate the sublime as idelogical free-space, or does it even turn back the philosophical clock to a more simplistic, essentially empirical understanding of our relationship to the real?

Contemplation, the 'difficult' and the contested subject: Marcuse III

The references to Stoic philosophy and the turn inwards to a discrete self above indicate the crucial issue of subjectivity and individuation in any question of art's political or ethical status. The issues of subjectivity and individuation have been

central to aesthetics since Kant: it is the interaction between the spontaneous individual and the necessary structures of consciousness that takes Kant's philosophy beyond the essentially receptive model of experience of previous empirical philosophy. The subject has also been pivotal in my discussions: in chapter two I suggested that the subject – and its cognitive workings in particular – is a crucial moment for any idea of art's resistance to perceptual norms and ideological pre-investments. Is this saying anything more than the truism that art is made for human minds by other human minds? In view of the scepticism towards the recipient discussed in chapter two, I think it is. Of course, in view of what I have said above regarding the Stoic's turn inwards to the self, it is evident that the role of individual consciousness can also be in some way complicit with the ideology of art as promise or distraction. It is in this sense that Marcuse and others characterise bourgeois individuation as an internalisation ('Verinnerlichung') of freedom in the individual. As such, affirmative culture is seen to function as a 'Disziplinierung [des Individuum] zum Sich-Fügen in eine schlechte Ordnung'. [Marcuse 1965 100] For Marcuse this 'Disziplinierung' is not enacted only by the formal order that is associated with beauty, but even more so by what he calls Idealist philosophy's 'Würdigung alles Schweren und Erhabenen'. [Marcuse 1965 71] The idea of art as a meditation on such conceptually challenging issues or objects might be the stick to the carrot of art's consolatory function. In chapter two I indicated the specific interests that are discernible in Kant's disinterest, and Marcuse's critique similarly implies that

complete resistance to utility is implausible: the irony is that such 'Würdigung des Schweren und Erhabenen' might support a quietism that ultimately best serves politically conservatism.

There is a certain irony, of course, in criticising this preference for the 'difficult' on ideological grounds, in that difficult art itself tends to be mobilised against the ideology and specific utility that operates behind beautification and the formal organisation of the artwork. [See Nietzsche for instance 1973 V 2 115-8] Difficult art is an ambivalent meditation on consciousness, both celebrating (or at least necessitating) the conceptual – the point I made in chapter three regarding the sublime – and causing problems for the supremacy of the subject. But the implicit point of Marcuse's critique is that this kind of autonomy takes us out of the frying pan of beauty's perfection into the fire of the sublime's inaccessibility. A crucial issue in this regard might be whether such inaccessibility indicates art is complete or whether its incomplete nature, underlined by its inconclusiveness or paradoxical nature, acts as a spur to the audience. So for instance the imperceptible nature of Pistoletto's 'Cube' and de Maria's 'Vertical Earth Kilometre' suggests objects that are complete and whole, if inaccessible: their wholeness is in some way guaranteed by their closedness from us. By contrast, I will suggest with reference to some of Peter Handke's early work in the next chapter that inaccessibility can act as a spur to thought.

This idea of art as a challenge to thinking relates to an equally pressing question for my argument, namely the question of how Marcuse's belief that difficult art is somehow complicit in bourgeois individuation compares with my understanding that the individual recipient is a necessary component of this kind of conceptual art, central to much of modernist art's effectiveness. Marcuse here, after all, seems to share the suspicion of the individuated subject as recipient of art that I have referred to in Heidegger, Adorno and others. Of course, the radical suspicion of the historical category of the individual precisely motivates the valorisation of the 'difficult' in art and philosophy. The difficult status of the individual is captured in Horkheimer and Adorno's remark at the end of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*:

[d]ie radikale individuellen, unaufgelösten Züge an einem Menschen sind stets beides in eins, das vom je herrschenden System nicht ganz Erfaßte, glücklich Überlebende und die Male der Verstümmelung, welche das System seinen Anhörigen antut. [Horkheimer & Adorno 1988 257]

But is it not questionable whether the ideological impurities of the culture industry can stain the individual recipient but not the artwork, as Adorno claims in the essay 'Vermittlung'?

Nicht ist zu fürchten, die Reinheit des Kunstwerks werde befleckt von den Spuren des Seienden in ihm selber, über das es nur soweit sich erhebt, wie es am Seienden sich mißt. Wohl aber ist zu fürchten, daß jene Spuren in der Sache verfließen und den Erkennenden verleiten, sie durch Konstruktion zu erschleichen. [Adorno 1978 165]

Adorno's rejection of the recipient is motivated at least in part by the difficulties that are raised by locating the force of the artwork in the potentially limitless instances of its reception. The difficulty with reception seems to be that it is incompatible with desiring a specific outcome from art. This concern seems to motivate Novalis' classic formulation: 'The true reader must be the extended author.' [Cited in Bowie 1997 71] How can one be certain that the artwork's meaning is not misconstrued under these conditions? This problem is even more pertinent in the case of art's non-cognitive *effect*. The difficulty with Welsch's intentions for anaesthetic art, in this regard, is that one seems forced to presume a certain analogy between the formal qualities of a work of art (for example its minimalism), and our experience of it (for example a restful and recuperative calm). Such an analogy cannot necessarily follow: in the case of the imperceptible, this kind of art might well make us think all the more, akin to Lyotard's idea of the sublime as generating an anxiety, 'the possibility of nothing happening, of words, colours, forms or sounds not coming; of this sentence being the last'. [Lyotard 1985 3] Adorno saves himself the trouble of such

indeterminacy by rejecting the sociological study of art's reception, and in particular of music, as a 'bloßes Epiphänomen'. [Adorno 1978 167] For Adorno, defiance of reception and negation of meaning famously become the artwork's deeper meaning.

But this rejection of the individual for me is a crucial aspect of Adorno's failure to advance a positive social or political alternative in a pessimistic view of a totalised world. [See Best and Kellner 1991 284 and Osborne 1989 27] In my view the very awareness of the constitution of the individual subject within 'discourses' or 'ideologies' of power and social convention which might undermine any humanist faith in subjective self-determination [see Foucault 1984 99-120, in particular 110] also demands that we look to the individual as the means of unpicking any such ideology. But aside from the question of who is supposed to enact the change in society which art might precipitate or anticipate, it seems that a moment of contemplation is essential to the privation or overcoming of thought which Lyotard valorises [see Lyotard 1985 1], and constitutive for the kind of difficult art that Adorno prefers. Indeed, in the same essay, Adorno recognizes that aesthetic and sociological issues are not so easily separable: 'Nichts an Musik taugt ästhetisch, was nicht, sei's es auch als Negation des Unwahren, gesellschaftlich wahr ware.' [Adorno 1978 166-7] Of course, this merely begs the question of what such an analogy between art's formal qualities and its sociological qualities might mean. Does this latter social truth of art have

anything to do with our *individual* experience of the work? And certainly, the latter's references to shock and the essentially defamiliarising cognitive force of art suggest that the rejection of the subject is in part at least a rhetorical device. It is in this sense that Martin Jay refers to Adorno's increasing focus on the cognitive power of art. [See Jay 1984 91] I have already referred to Manfred Frank insistence that we retain the individual agent at the centre of any aesthetics or politics. For Frank this issue of subjectivity points to a crucial point of tension between French structuralist or post-structuralist models of reality and German hermeneutics, in their conceptions of freedom. The problem is how to combine an awareness of the social and linguistic structure which govern our perceptions and actions with an idea of human freedom and spontaneity, and the awareness of the 'theory-constitutive role of subjectivity' in meaning and alteration of meaning. For Frank, neither model has given enough credit to the other's concerns: 'Mein Eindruck war und ist, daß weder die Hermeneutik die Tiefe des strukturalistischen Arguments gegen die Zentralität des Subjekts ermessen noch der Strukturalismus/Neostrukturalismus bis an die Wurzeln einer tragfähigen Theorie des Subjekts gefragt hat.' [Frank 1984 12] This crucial tension between hermeneutic and structuralist positions shares the ambivalence at the heart of the reception of 'difficult' art, namely that the sovereignty of the recipient's faculties of perception and understanding are challenged, but that the individual recipient cannot be done without in the functioning of this art. On the one hand, the constitutive subject is not to be trusted, as is implicit in John Cage valorization of

the ambient noises which are uncovered in silent music for their spontaneous and *unintentioned* nature: 'The essential meaning of silence is the giving up of intention.' [Kostelanetz 1988 189] On the other hand, the subject is the locus of the artwork's effect, even where (and perhaps particularly where) that effect is one of holding back any conclusive or determinate meaning.

A similar tension is apparent in Welsch's formulations. On the one hand he shares the mistrust of the individual's capacity for reflection, bemoaning the end of contemplation, whose anachronism is a consequence of contemporary reality's bad excess of the sensory or commodity exchange: 'Im postmodern-konsumatorischen Ambiente hingegen haben die Anregungen einen anderen Sinn. Sie erzeugen leerlaufende Euphorie und einen Zustand trancehafter Unbetreffbarkeit.' [Welsch 1990 14] The deleterious drug-like anesthetising effects of sensory excess are seen to have drastic political consequences – 'für die Politik aber desaströs'. [Welsch 1993 8] On the other hand the receiving subject seems to be an essential moment in any 'imperceptible' art's effect. Firstly, of course, it is precisely the individual that is supposed to be protected from the anaestheticisng effect of too much 'ästhetische Animation' by the 'Kleinereignisse oder Nichtereignisse' of anaesthetic art. [Welsch 1990 14] Secondly, the sublime anaesthetic's arrest of the sensory seems to depend on the grace of a moment of internal reflection, much like Kant's sublime. Certainly artworks that are said to be anaesthetic do seem to presuppose a moment of reflection and contemplation

in our reception of them, at least insofar as they raise more general philosophical questions about such issues as identity, infinity and paradox. I have already suggested above, for example, that the force of Michelangelo Pistoletto's 'Cube', which comprises six mirrors facing each other, comes only when we try to imagine what exists and is visible within the confines of the cube which is also paradoxically empty and infinite. Similarly, the theatre of Robert Wilson, whose slowed-down and virtually wordless *Deafman Glance* might be conceived as an instance of the sublime anaesthetic, is designed to give the audience therapeutic 'time for interior reflection'. [Innes 1993 202][3]

As the references to Manfred Frank and Andrew Bowie's ideas suggest, this issue of constitutive subjectivity is crucial to philosophical questions of grounding, since Kant and Fichte. In particular since Kant and the Romantics the absence of external stimuli is seen to precipitate reflection on the nature of self. Robert Adams writes with reference to Novalis: 'As the world of sense falls away, serving no further function than to limit the expansion of the ego by reflecting it back on itself, the inner world recedes into infinite dimensions and perspective.' [Adams 1966 28] Again Adams relates this reflexivity specifically to the absence

---

[3] One might see Wilson's dramatic pieces as the theatrical equivalent of John Cage's music. A 268 hour long performance Wilson's 'KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia Terrace', for instance, was staged over seven days at the 1972 Shiraz festival. [See Innes 1993 202]

of external stimuli: 'the experience of (physical) Nothing is the only path to the delights of an (imaginative) Everything'. [Adams 1966 132] Lyotard's postmodern variant registers the fear of nothing happening at all [see Lyotard 1985 1-18], and it is in this sense that Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear interpret the experience of absence as one of pure existence: '[t]he time comes when no reflection appears at all. One comes to notice nothing, feel nothing, hear nothing, see nothing. [...] But it is not a vacant emptiness. Rather it is the purest condition of our existence.' [Gallagher & Shear 1999 413] As far as Welsch's formulations are concerned, it is curious that this reflection on our rational faculties and our 'pure existence' seems to be precisely the kind of capacity that is discounted by his comments on the levelling and hi-jacking of contemplation. As such it is paradoxical that, like Adorno, the preference for the difficult and imperceptible is a measure of his scepticism about the power of the rational mind.

The turn against representation

I have already characterised the transposition of philosophical aesthetics' focus on the self-reflexive mind onto art as a turn against representation. Epistemologically this takes place as a crucial turn against a correspondence view of truth, or at least the recognition that correspondence needs a further

explanation or foothold. [See Taylor 1985] In art, which is by its very nature a 'presentation', this appears as a questioning and undercutting of its ability to represent, and thereby a paradoxical assertion of art's status as more than mere fiction and construct. As if in a long-lasting hangover after the apotheosis of mimetic realism in the nineteenth century, much modernist art has sought to shrug off the obligation of representation. For Steve Giles, the turn against representation occurs decisively in Cubism, with the focus on surface 'as a material entity *in its own right*' [Giles 2003 228, my italics], though it is fair to say that artists have expressed the desire to escape this obligation of reference to an external and real content intermittently for the last one hundred and fifty years. And as well as a focus on the materiality of art's material, the apparent *evacuation* of content has been an important mode of this tradition, overlapping with the idea of art as imperceptible. Flaubert, for instance, in a letter written whilst writing *Madame Bovary* expresses the desire to write, 'a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external [...] a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible, if such a thing is possible.' [Steegmuller 1954 131] I have suggested John Cage's compositions as a possible musical version of the anaesthetic, and this idea of an evacuation of content is echoed in John Cage's witty comment: 'I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry.' [Kostelanetz 1971 1]

As far as Welsch ideas about the oppositional nature of the anaesthetic are concerned, these examples come across less as a device intended to defy the widespread excess of perception, but rather as a *by-product* of the artist's frustration at the obligation of more or less realist representation. But this anti-representative strategy, this refusal of reference, is also evident in Welsch's description of the only example that he gives of anaesthetic art, Walter de Maria's 'Vertical Earth Kilometre', which he calls an 'exemplarisches Werk des Entzugs' [Welsch 1990 40], which coincides with my description above of the strategy of imperceptibility as a kind of *reduction*. The conception of the imperceptible in art as the apotheosis of non-presentation is supported perhaps most strongly by references in Welsch's formulations to the art-anaesthetic as a turn against art's traditional claim to be able to present everything. [See Welsch 1990 40] Welsch characterises the in my view essentially modernist idea of art as problematising art's function of presentation as a retort to what he alleges to be the specifically 'modern' idea of art as able to present anything. [See Welsch 1990 40] This reference to the 'modern' underlines the parallel between this specifically artistic issue of representation and the essentially modern faith in scientific reason. Art is merely the test-case of this failure of scientific, propositional language, as has been rehearsed by post-structuralist theorists since. [See for instance Deleuze & Guattari 1986] But rather than post-structuralism's essentially Nietzschean critique of truth, one aim of the

anaesthetic seem to be to shake off the stigma of fictionality, what Proust refers

to as the 'Lüge der Darstellung'. [Cited in Jauß 1975 298]

Imperceptible as anti-fiction

Of course there is a paradox in the suggestion that art might refute such

fictionality, insofar as art by its very constitution comes from and belongs to the

realm of the 'created' or hypothetical. But non-perception might be said to claim

a paradoxical kind of 'reality', if only by virtue of its 'reduction', of what might

be thought of as a *convergence* of truth and fiction at the point of silence or

inactivity. At the same time, the attempt to relinquish the responsibility of

representation gets caught in a 'Catch-22' situation, insofar as it appears as a

meditation on conventions of representation, a shadow of the order of

representation which abstract art cannot shake off. As T. J. Clark remarks,

paintings like Malevich's suprematist pieces do not signify 'absolute blankness

or emptiness [...] they really are paintings!' [Clark 2000 268] And the point for

Welsch's formulations is that artworks which deploy the imperceptible tend to

be engaged in more complex issues than a mere negation of sensory perception,

for instance meditating on art's 'obligation' of representation.

But in view of his idea of a dialectical interaction between art and the everyday,

the anaesthetic's seemingly very conceptual mode of resistance, characteristic of

art's increasing conceptuality (that is to say, its increasing self-understanding as a meditation on the concept of art) and self-referentiality, might be seen to result in an increasing *Verharmlosung* of art. This may be an instance of what Simon Jarvis, writing about Adorno's highly esoteric aesthetics, calls the deployment of 'fetish against commodity fetishism' [Jarvis 1998 118], that is to say that which 'does not criticize commodity fetishism by being *less* fetishized and accordingly less illusory than the fetishized commodity, but by being *more* fetishized'. [Jarvis 1998 118] Is this the neutralising of art's critical potential which for Adorno is the inevitable price of its autonomy? 'Neutralisierung ist der gesellschaftliche Preis der ästhetischen Autonomie.' [Adorno 1970 339] But this fetishization and high philosophical debate is problematic in Welsch's terms, as the inoculation of aestheticisation is precisely what the anaesthetic is supposed to avoid, and the anaesthetic seems to stand or fall by virtue of its dialectical interaction with the opposite, namely the everyday aesthetic experience. It is questionable whether Welsch's sublime anaesthetic even occurs in the same arena as aestheticisation, that is, the everyday, or whether it is only to be experienced in the security of the art gallery or the modernist text. Is this extreme modernist aesthetic not anachronistic as a response to a problem that Welsch characterises as specifically *postmodern*? Then again, Welsch's main proposition is that it is precisely the everyday characteristics of postmodernity that are responsible for necessitating the refusal of such 'Werke des Entzugs'. [Welsch 1990 40] As such, this apotheosis of modernism might be precisely necessary.

That said, as well as undermining Welsch's idea of a dialectic between the anaesthetic and aestheticisation, this might also indicate certain limits to Marcuse's critique of Idealist aesthetics: can beautiful or difficult art be said to distract from the inequalities of everyday life if it is not seen by those who experience those inequalities. The aestheticised world is arguably the more likely distraction, and the more likely source of ideological distortion. Moreover it is worth pointing out that whilst Marcuse objects to autonomy *per se* in his essay on 'affirmative culture', to the 'Reich der eigentümlichen Werte und Selbst-Zwecke' [Marcuse 1965 63], he himself ultimately resorts to a similar idea of art's function in what he calls the 'aesthetic dimension', in which he defends art's distance from actuality and invokes Stendhal's definition of beauty as both the 'promise' and 'memory of the happiness that once was', rather than its immediate possession. [See Marcuse 1978 68] The question is how this promise avoids the fallacy, which exercised both Marcuse and Adorno, of overcoming in thought or art what is still split in reality. [See Jay 1984 87] As Habermas puts it, rationalised everyday life 'could hardly be saved from cultural impoverishment through breaking open a single cultural sphere – art – and so providing access to just one of the specialized knowledge complexes'. [Habermas 1985b 11]

But this is not to say that art's autonomy must be abandoned wholesale. My concern here is whether a conceptualisation of aesthetic autonomy is conceivable

that does not slip into a mere defence of autonomy that is more than a 'Kehrseite' of its own exploitation. This might also offer a means of critique, examining the *particular* ideological purposes which it is being exploited for, rather than the idea of purpose in itself. This need not lose sight of the indeterminacy which has been crucial to the special nature of the aesthetic since Baumgarten nor of Welsch's characterisation of the aesthetic in terms of perception and the cognitive. But at the same time it need not entirely relinquish the separation between art and the everyday which Mike Featherstone refers to as the 'hierarchies of signification'. [Featherstone 1991 65] Peter Bürger, whilst warning against relinquishing art's autonomous status, refers to the idea of art's 'Alternativen zum Bestehenden' in terms of a 'Freiheitsspielraum'. [Bürger 1974 73] This echoes Marcuse's idea of art as a dimension of 'counter-consciousness', that is to say 'a realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible'. [Marcuse 1978 9, 6] This suggests a realm for cognitive exploration, without resorting to the idea of art as a reserved realm which promises meaning by virtue of its unobtainable nature. Whilst in Bürger's view this freedom is safeguarded by the 'Distanz der Kunst zur Lebenspraxis' [Bürger 1974 73], I will ask whether or not it is possible to conceive of art as Marcuse's 'aesthetic dimension' in more marginal terms. As opposed to the idea of 'Freiheitsspielraum' as an alleged ideological vacuum afforded by the minimalist anaesthetic artwork, or the ideology-free zone of Lyotard's postmodern sublime, in what follows and in the next chapters I will try to sketch out ways in which art

275

which operates at the limits of perception might be conceived as just such a 'subversion of experience', and moreover in ways that might be conceived as critical and related to aestheticisation.

Anaesthetic as deviation from perceptual and cognitive norms

The idea of aesthetics as an intervention in cognition as a means of conceiving of art's relation to the everyday, rather than the seemingly narrower and more surface-oriented category of sense perception, returns to Welsch's own alternative use of the term anaesthetic as denoting the *latent* and *unthematised* preconditions to perception. The awareness of the more or less sophisticated processes of cognition that accompany even 'non-perception' inserts a complexity into Welsch's sensory model of the aesthetic. This latent experience causes problems for the idea of the sublime anaesthetic as somehow *sheerly* imperceptible, and – insofar as it identifies these latent preconditions as the object to be thematised – what I have labelled the 'cognitive' anaesthetic conceives of an opposite function of art to its sublime variant. Whereas the sublime anaesthetic suggests a *mystifying* function for art, by which I mean the function of obstructing the cognitive processes of perception, the cognitive anaesthetic suggests a *demystifying* function, whereby art exposes and thematises the usually non-thematised elements of perception.

It is in this sense that Welsch refers to art as a 'Machtinszenierung' and to 'feminist' art as an intervention in our 'psychosozialen Bilderhaushalt' [Welsch 1990 36], indicating that the target of this kind of art is the unconscious underlying assumptions – art conceived as a kind of 'cognitive behaviour therapy'. This might allow for a more plausible reconnection with the everyday effects of aestheticisation by encouraging an analysis of the ideological tendencies that underlie such phenomena. Welsch does characterize this idea of art operating on latent material in sense perceptual terms: '[Moderne Ästhetik] zielt eher auf das Unsinnliche als auf das Sinnliche. Mindestens arbeitet sie daran, ständig die Grenzen des Wahrnehmens zu thematisieren und zu verschieben.' [Welsch 1990 65] But of course, such unthematised cultural or ideological assumptions and norms which might be exposed by art are not 'unsinnlich' in the same way that Welsch intends for the sublime anaesthetic. This emphasises Welsch's failure to make a clear distinction between different ideas of how art functions, and the limitations of his understanding of aesthetics as an essentially *sensory* mode of experience.

That said the opposition between the cognitive and sublime anaesthetic might not be insuperable. Like Marcuse, Hans Robert Jauß is sceptical about so-called 'negative' art, but his remarks stem from different concerns. In his essay 'Negativität und Identifikation: Versuch zur Theorie der ästhetischen Erfahrung' [Jauß 1975 263-340], aside from taking issue with the idea that critique is only

possible through 'negative' art [see Jauß 1975 265], as you would expect from the reception theorist par excellence, Jauß reminds us that the 'negative' is only half the story. Jauß insists on a more sophisticated understanding of the moment of reception:

So fruchtbar danach die Kategorien einer Ästhetik der Negativität erscheinen mögen, kann man doch zweifeln, ob Leistung, Horizontwandel und gesellschaftliche Funktion der ästhetischen Erfahrung mit alledem schon zureichend beschrieben sind. [Jauß 1975 264]

For Jauß this negativity cannot be valorized *in itself* – because positive and negative are not fixed points, as a consequence of the context-dependent locus of reception: 'weil sie im Prozeß der Rezeption einem aller ästhetischen Erfahrung eigentümlichen Horizontwandel unterliegen.' [Jauß 1975 266] That which is 'negative' changes over time, such that even so-called 'negative' artworks can become 'klassisch'. [Jauß 1975 266] This is because the 'konstitutive Negativität des Kunstwerks' must be mediated by the 'Identifikation als ihr rezeptionsästhetischer Gegenbegriff' [Jauß 1975 267], a hermeneutical insistence which might be implicit in Welsch's references to a dialectic of aesthetic and anaesthetic.

Jauß's idea of a dialectic of identification and negation reiterates the idea that the two main ideas of art contained in Welsch's formulations on the anaesthetic, namely art which deploys non-perception and defamiliarisation, are not as mutually exclusive as Welsch's formulations suggest, rather that what I have called the sublime anaesthetic also necessarily includes a cognitive aspect. Seemingly 'negative'or problematised perception could conceivably serve as a *means* for exposing the latent and unseen. This is certainly how John Cage intends his silent pieces to function, as noted above, with silence bringing to the fore the normally unheard but ever-present sounds that accompany life. [See Cage 1961 22-3] That it to say that an absolute halt of the senses or of cognition is implausible, as suggested by Welsch's idea that latent cognitive activity underlies any and all perception. It is in this sense that Susan Sontag refers to the *obstruction* or *deviation* of perception as a 'limited, vicarious participation in the ideal of silence'. [Sontag 1969 7] Indeed, for Sontag, art can only ever be silent in a 'non-literal sense' [Sontag 1969 10]: '[m]ore typically, he continues speaking, but in a manner that his audience can't hear. Most valuable art in our time has been experienced by audiences as a move into silence (or unintelligibility or invisibility or inaudibility).' [Sontag 1969 7] Examples of this kind of art might include the frustration of the audience's perception in Botho Strauß's *Die Hypochonder* or Peter Handke's *Quodlibet* – the latter playwright will be a key focus for the next chapter.

This 'unintelligibility or invisibility or inaudibility' might tell us nothing about the referent, a seemingly 'contentless' reflection only of our own capacities, as in Kant's sublime. But to be anything other than the autonomous, indeterminate or self-reflexive *Kehrseite* of everyday experience presumably it must involve at least a *trace* of an experience of some referent. For me the partial nature of this silence offers a way of breaking out of what Fredric Jameson calls the 'prison-house' of formalism and reconnecting with the material reality, and in such a way that precisely meditates on the cultural habits and expectations that underlie and inform perception. This seems to me to be particular important if art is to be conceived as operating in dialectical relationship with the everyday, at least in any sense other than the broadest one that they are both forms of perception.

But what might be lost in annexing anaesthetics to an aesthetics of defamiliarisation that indicates the unthematised preconditions or cultural habits that underlie perception? Does theorising art at the limits of perception as a consciousness-raising break from and reflection on cultural norms and habits of perception lose the sense of Welsch's anaesthetics as the experience of the imperceptible – an imperceptibility which does seem to be apparent and intentional in artworks like Pistoletto's 'Cube' or de Maria's 'Vertical Earth Kilometre'? Reading the imperceptible as a defamiliarising strategy certainly seems to be in danger of losing sight of Welsch's terms of art as a means of addressing (by opposing) the widespread phenomena of aestheticisation. Of

course Welsch himself does not conceive of the *cognitive* anaesthetic specifically with the problem of aestheticisation as sensory excess or veneer in mind. But I have argued that the *sublime* anaesthetic, inasmuch as it is a meditation on issues of truth and representation, and a valorization of indeterminacy for whatever reason, does not convincingly address aestheticisation either. Moreover, the reconnection that Welsch wants to make with everyday experience seems more plausible in these more cognitively sophisticated terms. The point for me is that Welsch's focus on the *limits* of perception as a means of destabilising the cultural norms of perception is valid, because art at the extremes of perception seems eminently able to unsettle and reflect on our perceptual and cognitive habits. Welsch does refer to art as an 'Experimentierfeld sinnlichen Sinns, ein Laboratorium sinnlicher Denkkraft'. [Welsch 1987 24] This seemingly paradoxical reference to 'sinnliche Denkkraft'echoes Baumgarten's concept of 'sinnliche Erkenntnis' [Baumgarten 1983 vii] already blurs the distinction between the sensory and the cognitive and opens up a more sophisticated understanding of the interaction of art and cognition. I have already suggested, with reference to Christopher Butler's arguments, that this cognitive nature of the modernist aesthetic might in fact be taken as a reasonable description of a key feature of much groundbreaking art in the twentieth century, for instance disrupting expectation and connecting usually unconnected features. But Welsch does not really articulate how this 'Denkkraft' might coincide or contrast with his own sensory focus, and indeed how this 'experimental' art might

interact with his understanding of contemporary reality as being characterised by the sensory. This returns to my sense of his failure to articulate more closely how the sensory can be critical. But in my view a cognitive understanding of Bürger's 'Freiheitsspielraum' might be a more plausible variant of Welsch's ideas for aesthetics as sensory, and a more plausible model of the dialectic that Welsch envisages between the aesthetic and anaesthetic. The capacities of the *cognitive* anaesthetic, that is heightening perception, might contribute to a more ideologically capable exposition of latent assumptions and connections. It may be that one could conceptualise aestheticisation more generally as an instance of precisely the 'economy of mental effort' [Shklovsky 1965 5] and automatisation of perception, and conformity to cultural norms, that Shklovsky opposes in 'Art as Technique'. Beyond the valorisation of a momentary withdrawal and respite from aestheticisation, playing with the limits of cognition and perception might be understood as a means towards a more critical and durable *engagement* with the processes and implications of the ideological and rationalized underside of aestheticisation.

Aesthetics of excess as an alternative to the imperceptible

The Dadaists, mentioned by Bürger in relation to the idea of art as generating a 'Freiheitsspielraum', are also pertinent for my broader concerns insofar as their shock tactics offer an alternative and in certain respect *opposite* understanding of

the cognitive significance of art as a predominantly sensory experience. This contrast is significant for the terms of my thesis not just in respect of this 'sensory' dimension but also in terms of the interaction it seems to offer with latent cultural or perceptual habits and norms. Of course, the parallels between an aesthetics of the imperceptible and an aesthetics of shock are numerous: as well as the fact that they both may be said to emphasise the moment of perception, both seem to operate at the limits of experience and representation: both seem to deploy a certain 'indeterminacy', a freedom and openness, as in John Cage's wish to 'mak[e] something that didn't tell people what to do' [Kostelanetz 1988 74], and Peter Bürger's characterisation of the avant-garde artwork as posing problems for the recipient: 'Die Problematik des Schocks als intendierte Reaktion des Rezipienten besteht darin, daß er im allgemeinen unspezifisch ist.' [Bürger 1974 108]

But this reference to 'indeterminacy' also raises the question of how an aesthetics of excess and shock measures up against Marcuse's reservations about difficult art. Does Dada's ludic shock absolve this indeterminacy of any residues of the seriousness and the idealist sense of promise which Marcuse finds so ideologically suspect? Indeed, avoiding art's traditional seriousness was precisely central to Dada's critique of the institution of art, gaining them the reputation as the first postmodernists. Dada's aesthetic invasion of life was not based in, and indeed militated against, a concept of the aesthetic as a value in-

itself – Welsch's 'moderne Utopie einer total-asthetischen Kultur'. [Welsch 1990 38] This recurs in Shklovsky's idea of the process of perception as an 'aesthetic end in itself' [Shklovsky 1965 12], but the idea of art as a value-in-itself is the main object of Hans Richter's criticism of neo-Dada: 'Neo-Dadaism is an attempt to establish such a shock as a value in itself.' [Richter 1965 197]

This contrast might be illustrated with reference to the opposite relationship each takes to time and temporality. The imperceptible has often been associated with the experience of a disturbance, a caesura, in the space-time continuum. [See Adams 1966 3] I have already cited Kant's idea of the sublime as an explicit experience of temporality ('Eine lange Dauer ist erhaben.' [see Kant 1913 8]), and this might be likened to Lyotard's claim of a general failure of space and time. [See Lyotard 1991 113] But with a paradoxical gesture towards the eternal and unchanging, which is brought out in Botho Strauß's notion of the role of the artist as responsible for the 'Pause'. Dada's shock, by contrast, works by speeding up and conflating experiences. And quite the opposite of the seemingly infinite spiritual experience of contemplation of the imperceptible, Dada's shock tactics are characterized by their short-lived nature, as Peter Bürger writes, 'Nichts verliert seine Wirkung schneller als der Schock, weil er seinem Wesen nach eine einmalige Erfahrung ist'. [Bürger 1974 108]

So is it fair to say that, if the minimalist aesthetic of which the anaesthetic is a variant is essentially conservative, the aesthetics of shock is more radically anti-conservative? Might shock or excess be conceived as Welsch's 'Kehrseite' or Sontag's 'antidote', or does it refuse this kind of consolation? Does shock's alleged indeterminacy fall into the same problematic cliché of sheer immanence as Lyotard's distinction between a nostalgic modern sublime and an open and joyous postmodern sublime? If shock, like the anaesthetic, operates at the limit of experience and representation, can such extremes of art can contain thematic content and harbour anything but the most basic political intentions? If the rapid experience of shock is an 'einmalige Erfahrung' [Bürger 1974 108], as Bürger suggests (in line with Docherty's 'moment as it is lived in its intensity' [Docherty 2003 24]), can it be said to have cognitive value or any kind of critical function? Can it be said to show us things in a new light? Can it be said to undo some of the effects of the aestheticised world? At one point Peter Bürger describes this short-lived nature of shock in terms of being 'konsumiert' [Bürger 1974 108], which would seem to discount it as a possible antidote to aestheticisation. Moreover, shock might be seen to precipitate precisely the kind of 'leerlaufende Euphorie und [...] Zustand trancehafter Unbetreffbarkeit' [Welsch 1990 14] that Welsch bemoans in contemporary aestheticised experience. But perhaps the antidote of shock is precisely what aestheticisation demands, depending of course on exactly how aestheticisation is being characterized: shock might well

be suitable for breaking through the veneer and surface-effects of the aestheticised world.

Section 3 · Art at the Limits of Perception

Chapter 5 · Applied Anaesthetics:
the Art of the Imperceptible

The only example Welsch gives in the essay on anaesthetics is Walter de Maria's 'Vertical Earth Kilometre', a steel rod, buried in the ground and concealed from view, but he does pinpoint an interesting variant of minimalism that seems to amount to a tradition, elements of which I referred to in the preceding chapters. Most of the examples of the anaesthetic I have suggested have been visual, as in James Turrell's 'space division constructions', or aural, such as John Cage's music, and in this respect I have followed Welsch himself. But at the end of the essay on the anaesthetic, Welsch cites the author and playwright Botho Strauß, for whom it is specifically the *Dichter* who is responsible for 'das Unvermittelte, den Einschlag, den unterbrochenen Kontakt, die Dunkelphase, die Pause.' [Welsch 1990 40] Consistent with this I will turn in what follows to more verbal forms of art, in order to discuss whether the concept of the anaesthetic might plausibly describe or theorise actual instances of art. Of course, if such 'Dichtung' were truly silent it would leave little room for any kind of art at all, let alone the kind of interaction with the everyday which Welsch asserts. But in the last chapter I referred to Susan Sontag's idea of 'non-literal silence' [Sontag 1969 10], which I suggested moreover might to some extent overcome the apparent incompatibilities between Welsch's disparate investments in the anaesthetic. My particular focus in both the chapters that follow will be drama, and below I will

examine how non-perception and non-presentation have operated on the stage in some recent drama, assessing to what extent these examples might plausibly be theorised in terms of the anaesthetic. Moreover whilst it might seem paradoxical to suggest that such 'difficult' and 'formal' art as Samuel Beckett's, Peter Handke's and Heiner Müller's might in some way deliver the promise of dialectical interaction between art and the everyday that Welsch's terms make, particularly in light of my comments with reference to Marcuse in the last chapter, I will endeavour to make this claim. Pivotal to this will be my emphasis on the role of the recipient in their work and the transformations of perception and consciousness through techniques that may be characterized in broadly sensory terms.

Dismantled drama: a radical tradition

Peter Handke and Botho Strauß are of course not without precursors in this respect: the tradition of modern drama that I will draw on here are those plays in the last century that have engaged in the specific dismantling of the various elements of traditional drama such as action, character psychology, causation, dialogue, and meaning. In contrast to the pivotal position of action in classical drama – for Aristotle '[t]ragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life' [Aristotle 1996 11] – the futility of action has been a dominant theme in modern European drama since Shakespeare. Theo Girshausen refers to the

'Hamlet-problem' in relation to Heiner Müller [see Girshausen 1978 98-9], and

Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod* explicitly thematises the futility of individual

action in the face of the tide of history. But it is worth distinguishing between

these precursors and dramatists for whom this paralysis becomes the crucial

theme and formal device. This might be said to start with what Steve Giles has

called the 'acutely anomic situation' in Chekhov's dramas [Giles 1981 211], the

purposeless and repetitive *'Beschäftigung'* which Giles calls the 'analgesic

injections of habit, game and ritual'. [Giles 1981 235] (The reference to 'analgesic'

here shares the metaphorical terrain of Welsch's anaesthetic. In this case habit

and ritual are seen as having anaesthetic effects – in much the same way as

Welsch's idea of anaesthetic as the effect of the process of unconscious selection –

but what pain do they protect against? The threat of nothingness, or what Steve

Giles calls the 'problem of identity' or the 'obliteration of time'? [Giles 1981 235])

But already in the early dramas of Maurice Maeterlinck, written in the 1890s,

over half a century before Beckett's *Godot*, waiting – a central retarding device of

classical drama – had been deployed 'not [as] a tool of drama, but its focus'.

[McGuinness 2000 214] Most famously, the blind characters who give the play

The Sightless (*Les Aveugles*, 1890) its title are reduced to a passive waiting-game,

caught in an absurd discussion about why the priest, their erstwhile guide who is

sitting dead beside them, has left them. With this replacement of 'action with

inaction, events with eventlessness, and dialogue with a semiotics of silence'

[McGuinness 2000 214], Maeterlinck's *théâtre statique* takes the first radical step

towards inactivity which will culminate in recent performance art's experimentation with such extremes as complete absence of activity from the stage,[1] and even non-presence.[2]

Of course dramatic action is more than mere 'activity' for Aristotle, and presupposes certain features, such as causality and agency: Steve Giles distinguishes 'generative action' from mere on-stage activity. [Giles 1981 5] The breakdown in causality and agency is a crucial point in the dismantling of action in some modern drama. Robert Brustein notes, for instance, that this dismantling does not just amount to 'vacancy', that is to say Maeterlinck's absence of activity, but also 'accident'. [Brustein 1964 4] Likewise, Beckett's pieces are not characterised by sheer inactivity or even disjointed and repetitive activity, but rather are inhabited by fragmentary narrative, broken causal connections and, in the case of the later plays like *Not I* and *Footfalls*, evacuation of the very psychological interiority of character. In what follows I will suggest this evacuated interiority, and the attendant and central problematisation of

---

[1] For example, Teching Tsieh's year-long pieces living in a cage or Marina Abramovic and Ulay's motionless sitting seven hours at a time. Both referred to in Graver 1995 62.

[2] For example, Chris Burden's hiding himself from the (potential) audience by hiding in a locker or by leaving town. Also referred to in Graver 1995 44. Colin Counsell likens Samuel Beckett's *Breath* to installation art, rather than theatre, in view of the absence of any actors. [See Counsell 1996 4]

meaning, might at its most extreme be taken as an instance of Welsch's anaesthetic art.

Of course a simple equation between Welsch's 'arrested perception' and the formal dismantling of action, dialogue, meaning and other aspects of drama would not be convincing. Such dramatic techniques do not operate purely at the level of perception, rather at a more sophisticated level of reference and meaning, and theatrical or psychological norms and expectations. But a central point of my discussion in the last chapter was that Welsch's theorisation of the anaesthetic went beyond his own stated focus on issues of perception, for example in the ideas of the anaesthetic as defying artistic representation and as somehow invested with truth-value – albeit what I have characterised as a 'negative' truth, inasmuch as it is claimed only by virtue of art's 'anti-fictionality' and by virtue of a process of 'reduction'. Similar concerns and techniques are also evident to varying degrees in Beckett and Handke's drama, supporting the view that there are significant parallels between Welsch's theory and recent dramatic practice. And whilst this detracts from Welsch's specific focus on perception, it may be that conceiving of the anaesthetic in terms of a formal dismantling of dramatic norms saves it from what the dubious notion of art as sheer and immanent non-perception. That said it will be apparent that both Handke and Beckett also specifically thematise or deploy obstructed perception, overlapping with Welsch's narrower formulations. The plays in which they do

this practically overlap chronologically, with Handke's early plays *Das Mündel will Vormund sein* and *Quodlibet*, from the late sixties, preceding Beckett's late plays from the early 1970s, *Not I*, *That Time* and *Footfalls*. It is in these pieces, which might be viewed as the apotheosis of this dismantling of dramatic presentation, that the failure of action becomes a problem specifically for *reception* and *perception*.

Samuel Beckett's **Not I***: evacuated interiority and narrative incoherence*

Genre crisis

Not I is a play without beginning or end. The audience is placed in the position of interloper, glimpsing a mere section of an exchange between two figures on the stage, the 'Auditor' and the 'Mouth'. The words that pour out of the Mouth are unintelligible at beginning and return to the same unintelligibility at the end: *'As house lights down mouth's voice unintelligible behind curtain.'* [Beckett 1986 376] *'Voice continues behind curtain, unintelligible, 10 seconds, ceases as house lights up.'* [Beckett 1986 383] Four brief movements are the only discernible on-stage 'activity' in *Not I*, in which action is supplanted by narration. Since Aristotle, narration has traditionally been seen as the opposite of dramatic action, with all the attendant complexities of telling rather than showing. [See Aristotle 1996 5-6] The 'negative' to action's 'positive', Wolfgang Iser describes narrative as 'ein

Nicht-Gegebenes bzw. ein Abwesendes'. [Iser 1975 531] Similarly, Jauß sees it as inhabited by the 'irrealer Gegenstand' which 'für die ästhetische Wahrnehmung das Wirkliche – eine vorgegebene Realität verneinen muß'. [Jauß 1975 263] Narrative tends to refer back to the past, but the idea that instances of modern drama have been 'dominated by the past' and 'permeated by memory' [Giles 1981 269] (these quotes refer to the dramas of Ibsen and Chekhov respectively) cannot simply be ascribed to the thematics of historical change and nostalgic reflection, but also to a renunciation of present action. In this sense the renunciation of action in Beckett's pieces is emblematic of what Jovan Hristic identifies as a wider genre crisis. [See Hristic 1972]

But as I have indicated the constituent parts of dramatic action are more than just on-stage activity, and the qualities of coherent causal logic and psychological depth can be retold as well as enacted. That is to say that coherent and generative action does not always require activity on stage, but can be conveyed by narration, like a play within a play, as a means to incorporate or indicate previous action. But in Beckett's pieces narrative is no pragmatic device, but rather is integral to the displacement of action and meaning in Beckett's theatre. This is underlined by the fragmentary nature of the play's narrative, fraught as it is by incompleteness, incoherence, questions of the identity of its subject and of its authorship and reliability.

The point at which the audience picks up the flow of words that issue forth from the Mouth is an orthodox starting point for a narrative, the birth of the 'tiny little girl' who is its fleetingly glimpsed and problematic subject. But we soon learn that her story is barely worth telling: 'nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when...'. [Beckett 1986 376] What we do hear is incomplete; gaps and hesitations punctuate fragments of sentences, which relate fragments of episodes:

> practically speechless... how she survived! .. that time in court... what had she to say for herself... guilty or not guilty... stand up woman... speak up woman... stood there staring into space... mouth half open as usual... waiting to be led away... glad of the hand on her arm [Beckett 1986 381]

Here, for example, we learn nothing of the alleged crime, the woman's plea, or the verdict. We are offered an incongruous intimacy with her emotions, albeit that the motivation and impetus for these emotional responses remain a mystery. And the fact that we do not know *why* she is crying is overshadowed by the fact that we do not even know *if* she is crying: 'sitting staring at her hand... there in her lap... palm upward... suddenly saw it wet... the palm... tears presumably... hers presumably... no one else for miles... no sound... just the tears'. [Beckett 1986 380-1]

Moreover, the fact that we do not know *if* she is crying is further overshadowed by the fact that we cannot be sure *who* the she being referred to actually is. The relationship between narrator and narratee is never clarified, such that John Knowlson refers to the 'partial, though incomplete, concurrence' between these positions. [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 201] He and others have registered the 'Not I' of the play's title as referring to a failure in the process of individuation [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 201, see also Acheson 1993 7-8], though in the later play, *Footfalls*, this is echoed in the suggestion of May as never having been born, and having no self-consciousness (the proper name already contains an idea of hypothesis). [See Knowlson & Pilling 1979 282] In his essay on *Endgame*, 'Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen', Theodor Adorno describes Beckett's characters as 'verschleppt aus Innerlichkeit'. [Adorno 1961 203] This is understood both in terms of psychological motivation and effective agency, and is seen as part of a wider removal of specific characteristics from Beckett's art, a 'Verlust aller Qualität'. [Adorno 1961 195] Adorno reads this dismantling of the dramatic individual as agent as a critique of the bourgeois ideology of the individual, which marks Beckett's decisive move beyond the cult of the individual which flawed both Existentialism and Expressionism. [See Adorno 1961 199] The retention of the individual is paradoxical, for Adorno a case of the 'Verwendung von Formen im Zeitalter ihrer Unmöglichkeit'. [Adorno 1961 214] I will say more in the next chapter about the eradication of the individual, which is famously dismantled in Heiner Müller's work.

But I have already suggested in preceding discussions that the evacuation of the individual is not as self-evidently positive and redemptory as some post-structuralists suggest. For one thing, it is apparent that the sense of imposition and resistance which characterises the narration might be taken to hint at an infringement on autonomy, as John Knowlson puts it, 'the experience of being recounted is virtually synonymous with the experience of being observed'. [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 201] Alternatively, the seemingly involuntary torrent of speech in *Not I* has been associated by some commentators with a mystical experience, such as James Acheson's idea of an 'ineffable experience like the mystic's of union with God'. [Acheson 1993 9] This is interesting in the light of my comments regarding the role of silence in mysticism. It also chimes with the reading of the possibly religious reference in the title, which Acheson relates to Saint Paul's idea in the Epistles that it is 'not I' that writes but Christ. [See Acheson 1993 6] But such a conclusive and redemptive reading as this suggests does not seem to be in keeping with Beckett's other work. Indeed, Knowlson refers to the passage in *The Unnamable* where the narrator states that such a voice 'issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me [...] but can only be mine'. [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 199]

Equally disconcerting as not knowing enough about the subject of the narrative and the motivation of the retelling is that we cannot be sure who *does* know. The above repetition of 'presumably' is one of several rifts in the veneer of narrative reliability. Initially we assume that the Mouth, which after all can only be there to tell the story, is its authoritative source. This assumption is undermined when the Mouth is corrected, much to its own surprise: 'nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when...what?... seventy?...good God!' [Beckett 1986 376] In contrast to the Mouth's assertions of narrative authority – 'no! . . she!' – the narrative seems to be strewn with factual errors: '... what? . . not that?. . nothing to do with that? . .' [Beckett 1986 382] It is as if, not just guilty of not learning its lines, the 'facts' of the story are as new to the Mouth as they are to us. The impression is of a possible story that we are not hearing, which suggests the arbitrariness of the story we do in fact hear. At these points of interruption, of which there are four in the piece, the Mouth's hesitant monologue is disturbed by a suggestion of dialogue, a shift from the third person narrative to direct speech, like a Brecht character directly addressing the audience. But we neither see nor hear the source of the external prompt, if such a prompt is even given. The only possible interlocutor seems to be the 'Auditor', who is 'facing' and 'intent on' Mouth. [Beckett 1986 376] But its seemingly connected 'four brief movements', which are said to be 'gesture of helpless compassion' [Beckett 1986 375], hardly suggest

an authoritative intervention. The stage directions indicate that they should 'lessen[] with each occurrence till scarcely perceptible at the third' [Beckett 1986 375], both reflecting and exacerbating the audience's own lack of comprehension.

Of course, narrative reliability is frequently at issue in the modern novel, due to such obstacles as limited knowledge, personal involvement or a problematic value-system. [See Rimmon-Kenan 1983 100] In his essay 'Standort des Erzählers im zeitgenössischen Roman' Adorno considers this undermining of narration, in its assumptions both of continuity and identity in the character's experience, and of authority and control in the narrator's handling of the material, to be a consequence of the increasing alienation between people and even towards ourselves in the new reality of modern society. [See Adorno 1974 42-3] He characterizes this as a 'Verdinglichung' of relations and their facilitation by 'Schmieröl' – seemingly subjectivity's version of the façade of aestheticisation.

Dismantled meaning

For Adorno, Beckett's dismantling of psychological interiority is also centrally a meditation on meaning and representation: 'das Zeichen eines Inneren, aber das Innere dessen Zeichen er wäre, ist nicht mehr, und nichts anderes meinen die Zeichen'. [Adorno 1961 202] Clov scoffs at Hamm's idea that they might be carriers of meaning: 'Mean something! You and I, mean something! [*Brief laugh.*]

Ah that's a good one!' [Beckett 1986 108] It is ironic that this comment comes as one of the play's clearest references, but the point for Adorno, implicit in the title of his essay, is that Beckett's nonsensical words, actions and relations conjure up a 'Rätselwesen' [Adorno 1961 192] that defies recuperation in an external and coherent meaning: 'Die Interpretation des Endspiels kann darum nicht der Schimäre nachjagen, seinen Sinn philosophisch vermittelt auszusprechen.' [Adorno 1961 190]

This scepticism about the possibility of meaning motivates Adorno's idea of Beckett's theatre as enacting a 'Subtraktion' – which is to say a kind of abstraction but bereft of the positive content. It is worth remembering in this respect that the Romantics associated negation with the finitude of the particular and the determinate [see Bowie 1997 68], and whilst Adorno calls this refusal of referential meaning a disruption of the 'Einheit von Erscheinendem und Gemeintem' [Adorno 1961 189], one might also say that the immanent meaning generated in Beckett is precisely a case of this unity being taken to an extreme. The chain of reference has been short-circuited. I have noted Adorno's idea of the removal specific characteristics in his representations – the 'Verlust aller Qualität' [Adorno 1961 195], but in Romantic terms, this short-circuiting of reference might mark the paralysis of the referential mechanism, of the meaning-function of drama, which fails to escape the particularity of any words or action.

Of course, complete absence of meaning is a paradox, in as much as meaning can always be retrieved, even if it is limited to the idea of there being no meaning. (This echoes the gesture of Kant's sublime, to draw sense from nonsense, rational control from chaos.) So even though Colin Counsell writes that 'there is no meaning' [Counsell 1996 116], and Adorno that Beckett's work is an 'Ausdruck seiner Absenz' [Adorno 1961 189], elsewhere the latter is characteristically resistant to the idea that meaning is simply absent, or 'einfach negativ'. [Adorno 1961 189] There is no such sheer absence in Beckett, rather a playing with the possibility of meaning. Adorno himself recoups 'positive' meaning from Beckett's work in the form of its critique of subjective interiority. Similarly one might identify the hopelessness of the 'situation', the futility of a gratuitously repeated activity as its essential message. Emblematic of this refusal to relinquish meaning is that in *Breath* the rising and falling light never goes out completely, arguably making it in this respect a more subtle piece than Martin Creed's 2001 Turner Prize-winning 'Lights Going On and Off'. The activity on stage never dissolves into sheer nonsense, but is fraught by an intentional *non-elucidation* of meaning.

Foregrounding technical apparatus

In this sense one might interpret Beckett's *Endgame* as refocusing attention on the presence of activity on stage, and denying its suitability for representing any

coherent story. One device that contributes to this is the fore-grounding of technical apparatus, such as Beckett's use of lighting in *Breathe*, in which the rising and falling light never goes out completely: 'Not bright. If 0 = dark and 10 = bright, light should move from about 3 to 6 and back.' [Beckett 1986 371] Whereas normally a means to signify something else, here lighting refuses to signify anything beyond itself and becomes an enigmatic end in itself. In this respect *Breathe* anticipates Beckett's later work, of which Knowlson writes that 'Beckett was anxious as a director to make the lighting and sound levels as much a part of the formal patterning as was the verbal text.' [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 225] A spotlight picks out the human head in *That Time*, as it had followed the protagonists – or rather determined their action – in the earlier short piece *Play*. In both *Not I* and *That Time* most of the stage is in darkness, in the former pierced only by the suggestion of physical being, in the disembodied 'Mouth', and the hint of physical action, in the 'Auditor'. [Beckett 1986 375] As Marius Buning has it, '[w]hat characterises the late plays, above all, is the pervasive and compulsive presence of almost total darkness, only to be mitigated by subdued portions of light.' [Buning 1990 137] In his book on the holy and its relationship to rationality, written in 1917, Rudolph Otto refers to the intrinsically mystical effect of darkness: 'The darkness must be such as is enhanced and made all the more perceptible by contrast with some last vestige of brightness, which is, as it were, on the point of extinguishing: hence the 'mystical' effect begins with semi-darkness.' [Otto 1959 83] Alternatively, this use of lighting might be used to

focus the audience's attention on the minimal events on stage, but it is also one aspect of Beckett's theatre in which he returns to the rudiments of perception. Beckett had become 'preoccupied with the effects that could be obtained by varying the intensity and the speed of both speech and lighting'. [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 112] This minima of visual stimuli fosters an increased sensitivity to language and to the rhythm of the words. As Enoch Brater puts it, '[t]he stark interplay of space, sound, and light therefore makes us sensitive to language and its repetition, which controls the flow of this work.' [Brater 1987 44]

But the sound that is accentuated by the darkness is not itself a means to a representative end, a particularly effective rendering of Beckett's thematic message. Rather, the sound is a kind of an end-in-itself, as Beckett puts it in an instruction to one of his actresses, Billie Whitelaw: 'What matters is the rhythm of the piece – the words are merely what pharmacists call the excipient.' [Quoted in Brater 1987 38] Beckett's production notebooks indicate how important musical parallels are to him as a director, for instance in the musical pitch differentiating voices in *Play*, the pacing of the delivery in *Krapp's Last Tape* and of May's step in *Footfalls*. The stage notes for the latter refer to 'clearly audible rhythmic tread' [Beckett 1986 399] of which is said later, in the dialogue V reports between mother and child, May: 'I mean, Mother, that I must hear the feet, however faint they fall. The mother: The motion alone is not enough? May: No, Mother, the motion alone is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall.' [Beckett

1986 401] This leads James Knowlson to read Beckett's work as less 'psychological' and 'realistic', and more 'musical'. [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 283-4, see also Buning 1990 138]

This modulated pacing is largely absent from *Not I*, whose 'sound stage' is characterised by an alternative but related strategy that is common to Beckett's later work, namely the inexorable and almost impenetrable flow of words. I have already referred to ideas of the religious or mystical nature of this involuntary flow, but it was clearly central to Beckett's intention for the piece. The playwright pushed the actress Billie Whitelaw, when playing Mouth, to speak faster and faster [see Fischer-Seidel 1994 74], saying: 'I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect.' [Brater 1974 198] Similarly, the playwright wanted *That Time* to be impossible to understand the first time round, and in order to maintain the momentum of the play he allowed no laughter pauses in the Royal Court revival of the play in 1976. [See Knowlson & Pilling 1979 116] The common ground with the focus on the modulation of perception here is the more 'direct' and sheerly 'sensory' nature of the performance. James Knowlson acknowledges that it is 'tempting to see the impact of the play in sensory, even in visceral terms' [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 205], and Enoch Brater refers to the particularly visceral effectiveness of *Not I*, and even its hypnotic force. [See Brater 1974 195, 1987 23] George Devine, Beckett's long-time lighting collaborator refers

in his director's notes to words as 'dramatic ammunition' rather than as carriers of meaning, which he compares to his own idea of light as a dentist drill. [Cited in Knowlson 1971 91]

Of course just as Beckett's work cannot be said to be without meaning or to evade interpretation entirely, the meditations on narrative, meaning and identity above make clear that Beckett's late theatre cannot be said to be merely sensory. But perceptual sphere does play a pivotal role in Beckett's late work. Even the issue of identity that *Not I*'s narrative pokes holes in might be said to turn on the individual's status as a being that is perceived. I have indicated Knowlson's idea that 'the experience of being recounted is virtually synonymous with the experience of being observed'. [Knowlson & Pilling 1979 201] (This returns to the terrain of Beckett's earlier filmed piece, *Film* (1963), in which the protagonist, O, is plagued by E, which ultimately turns out to be O's own self-awareness, expressing what Beckett calls the 'inescapability of self-perception' [Beckett 1986 323] or what Raymond Federman refers to as the 'agony of perceivedness'. [Federman 1971]) But the overlap with Welsch's ideas on aesthetics is evident, both in the focus on minimalism which throws the audience's focus onto simple sensory elements and in the strategy of making perception of events on stage difficult. That is not to say that Beckett's work fulfill Welsch's anaesthetics of respite, with its consolatory undertones: if anything, it precipitates quite the opposite: a disconcerting half-understanding. But the above features of and

comments on Beckett's work also seem to echo the two aspect of claims to authenticity that I discussed above in relation to an/aesthetics as sensory, namely art deployed as anti-fiction by virtue of a process of *reduction*, and as an overwhelming and concrete *presence*. Robbe-Grillet was the first to refer to the privileging of 'sheer presence' in Beckett's pieces, which he identifies with their hermetic nature (and associates with Heidegger's notion of man's thrownness). [See Robbe-Grillet 1963 106, 105, 95] Likewise Brater claims that 'it is not the possible fictivity of the process which ensnares our attention, but its overwhelming and outrageous authenticity'. [Brater 1987 40] In a similar vein Fischer-Seidel distinguishes between 'visible fact and audible fiction' in Beckett's late work [Fischer-Seidel 1994 79], a view which seems to rest on the above idea of authenticity by virtue of reduction. Beckett's visuals are certainly more spare and minimal than his words, but even if we trust our eyes more than our ears this does not seem to amount to a positive statement of authenticity, in view of the fragments of bodies and inconclusive gestures that Beckett's *Not I* offers. Beckett's art clearly offers an experience that is in crucial ways the opposite of aestheticisation's perfect surface and 'tweaked' receptivity, insofar as the pre-digested meaning of aestheticisation is subverted by Beckett's indigestible meaning. In my view Fischer-Seidel is closer to the critical sense of Beckett's late work when she refers to his refusal to leave visuality to the popular media. [Fischer-Seidel 1994 80] For me this refusal turns on what Jonathan Kalb refers

to, citing Robbe-Grillet, as the 'invention of a new type of audience/stage transaction'. [Kalb 1989 47]

Transmission and habit

This kind of transaction is of course precisely thematised throughout Beckett's work, from *Cascando* (1962), in which the 'Opener' and 'Voice' share a fragmentary story, the through the indeterminate relationship between Mouth and Auditor in *Not I*, the three voices of *That Time*, rapidly delivered to the suspended and illuminated face of the 'Listener', to the parallel figures of the 'Reader' and 'Listener' in the later *Ohio Impromtu* (1981). The use of sound and light also reflects on the issue of transaction, or perhaps better transmission: for instance the figures in urns in *Play* (1962) are provoked to speak by the spotlight, and for Hugh Kenner the role of light has also been seen as 'a metaphor for our attention (relentless, all-consuming, whimsical)'. [Kenner 1968 210-11] This suggests that Beckett is not only dismantling the customs of theatre, what Colin Counsell calls Beckett's 'one-man assault against theatrical norms' [Counsell 1996 4], but might be said to reach beyond the stage precisely via these issues of problematised reception.

This underlines the fact that the sensory nature of Beckett's pieces and the gaps in understanding are deployed to destabilise our intellectual faculties and the

means of our interaction with the outside world. Since his early 'Proust' essay, published in 1931, Beckett had been interested in the workings of the human mind, and the relationship between inner and outer worlds. Like Proust, Beckett is preoccupied by the pernicious effects of habit, referring to it as the 'dull inviolability, the lightening-conductor of [man's] existence'. [Beckett 1931 8] Just as lightening is dangerous, Beckett cites Proust's idea that without habit life would be both deadly and delicious. [Beckett 1031 17] Habit is both a 'minister of dullness' and an 'agent of security' [Beckett 1931 10], a protection against the suffering and privation of reality. [See Beckett 1931 13] His plays might be seen as an oscillation between these poles of suffering and boredom.

Beckett's concern about the levelling effect of habit on experience underlies his remarks on involuntary memory, to which he sees Proust's entire book as a monument. [See Beckett 1931 21] Memory and habit are seen always to be 'conditioned by the prejudices of the intelligence which abstracts from any given sensation, as being illogical and insignificant, a discordant and frivolous intruder whatever word of gesture, sound or perfume, cannot be fitted into the puzzle of a concept.' [Beckett 1931 53] And this reference to gesture, sound and smell is indicative of Beckett's understanding that, just as the processes of intellection are responsible for this levelling, the mode of their overturning is described in specifically *sensory* terms. Beckett describes 'the essence of any new experience' [Beckett 1931 53-4] as being resistant to analysis, which underlies what Beckett

describes as a 'total past sensation' which can only be happened upon 'by accident'. [Beckett 1931 54, his emphasis] 'Thus the sound produced by a spoon struck against a plate is subconsciously identified by the narrator with the sound of a hammer struck by a mechanic against the wheel of a train'. [Beckett 1931 54]

This accidental sound retains Kantian aspects, in both its insistence on the purposeless nature of the experience – Beckett refers to it as 'a sound that his will had rejected as extraneous to its immediate activity' and as a 'subconscious and disinterested act of perception' [Beckett 1931 54] – and its nature as a 'pure act of cognition'. [Beckett 1931 55] Beckett associates this purity – an *integral purity [that] has been retained because it has been forgotten*'[Beckett 1931 54, his emphasis] – with a kind of Artaudian 'Idea' or 'essence': 'Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action being precisely to hide the essence – the Idea – of the object in the haze of conception – of preconception.' [Beckett 1931 11] This 'vetoed essence' returns to the kind of intangible, mystical core that refuses positive statement and can only be 'evoked', which I have associated with the aesthetics of silence and negativity. In the same vein, Beckett's darkness, the spareness of action and fragmentary meaning might suggest intimations of this 'Idea' or 'essence'. But equally the speed of delivery in *That Time* and the torrent of words of *Not I* might be read as a means of warding off the operation of habit and the mental facility of intellection, which are fostered by what Beckett refers to as the 'poisonous ingenuity of time'. [Beckett 1931 40]

But of course a key question posed in the last chapter was whether this kind of 'negative' art or non-presentation of the 'Idea' is a cul-de-sac for art, which I discussed both in terms of art's 'completeness' and the possibility of art retaining connection to an external referent. It is with these issues in mind I will turn now to Peter Handke's theatre, whose early works share the same transformation of the relationship between audience and stage as Beckett's later works, albeit expressed as a more explicit challenge to the audience. Similar meditations on the rudiments of sense perception and habitual responses are evident in Handke. Moreover, I asked the question above whether such meditations on the limits of meaning and perception could be reconnected with everyday habits of perception as a kind of critical interrogation, rather than the seemingly more redemptive 'Idea' that evades those habits – the combination of Welsch's imperceptible art with art which reflects on the cultural and cognitive preconditions of perception. For the young Beckett the only interaction with the everyday seems to be an evocation of past experience. He writes of '[t]he identification of immediate with past experience' as 'amount[ing] to a participation between the ideal and the real, imagination and direct apprehension, symbol and substance. Such participation frees the essential reality that is denied to the contemplative as to the active life.' [Beckett 1931 55-6] In what follows I will suggest that Handke's theoretical writings and his

theatrical work might take us a step further towards such a critical articulation of the evocative and the everyday.

Peter Handke's *Das Mündel will Vormund sein*: anti-reference and non-perception

Direct comparisons between Beckett and Handke in the secondary literature are few. Corbett Stewart refers to Handke's inconsistent attitude to Beckett, which ranges from direct quotation (in Handke's 1968 piece *Hörspiel Nr. 2*) and the influence of Beckett's use of action (or rather *inaction*) to Handke's rejection of the older playwright's simplistic symbolism. Stewart also usefully registers other parallels, such as the use of the clown by both dramatists and the master/slave relationship. (Stewart notes their different reasons for this focus: Beckett's 'wide-ranging existential metaphor' is contrasted with Handke's 'attack on society's restrictive codifications' [Stewart 1990 309], in terms which incidentally echo, at least loosely, my distinction between aesthetics' more transcendental and its more marginal concerns.) The point might even be extended to register that whilst Beckett's hermetic work seems to offer an almost 'timeless' depiction of the existential situation (I have referred above to Heidegger's idea of our 'thrownness'), Handke belongs to a generation which sets higher store by a more socially grounded cultural critique. This might indicate thoroughly different motivations for their ostensibly similar strategies, pertinent for my considerations, of narrative fragmentation, the limitation of narrative perspective

and the attack on signification. This distinction of generation and disposition might also be illuminating for Jonathan Kalb's discussion of the two playwrights. Kalb starts out from the understanding of Handke's broad debt to Beckett, in particular in his *Kaspar* figure, which 'becomes entangled in an action more serious and disturbing than anything one would expect in *Kasperltheater* or even *Kabarett*'. [Kalb 1989 47, see also 144] But Kalb takes issue with Handke's remarks in *Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms* (1972) where the latter dismisses the 'Beckett'schen Pantomimen' as 'unreflektiert' and uncritical of theatre's essential claim to present unequivocal meanings. [Kalb 1989 261, Handke 1972 27] Kalb acknowledges that Handke would have only been referring to Beckett's earlier work, but in this respect it is notable that Handke's dismantling of dramatic norms, such as the specific focus on the rudiments of perception, predates Beckett's more radically dismantled late work. (The idea that influence between the two playwrights might be more than one-way traffic may be recognised in Kalb's remarks about the difficulty of periodising Beckett, who 'is Artaud's junior by little more than a decade, Brecht's by only eight years, which means that he can be both precursor and contemporary to Handke and Müller.' [Kalb 1989 145]) Moreover, there is arguably a specifically social dimension to Handke's cultural critique which is less evident in Beckett.

All that said my concern here is not to indicate respective debts between the two playwrights, nor to explore the specific parallels or links between them for their

own sake, but rather to trace their common interest in a specific kind of drama that meditates on and plays with perception. Of particular interest in that regard is Peter Handke's early short mime play *Das Mündel will Vormund sein* (1969) and the spoken piece of the same year, *Quodlibet*. *Das Mündel* is a play of gesture and non-verbal language, whose depiction of a curiously apocalyptic 'Ursituation' [Rühle 1972 143] is clearly similar to that of Beckett's *Endgame*. In this case the mutually dependent but hierarchical relationship of master and servant is based in this case on the relationship between Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest*,[3] but like Beckett's characters' short and guttural names, emphasising the renunciation of individuated personality, Handke's figures are referred to only by generic names, the servant character, the 'Mündel', and the master, the 'Vormund'. Their relationship is acted out in physical gestures, with the Mündel deferring to the Vormund, at the same time as manifesting the sole focal point of his master's authority: the Hegelian subtext is clear. In the first scene, for example, the Mündel is half way through eating his second apple, when the Vormund enters and, by staring at the servant, gradually and at some expense of time and attention, induces him to stop eating the apple. This is followed by exchanges of repetitive reciprocal activity, summarised at one stage as follows: 'Gegenseitiges   Anstarren,   gegenseitiges   Anschauen,   gegenseitiges

---

[3] The title of the play comes from the German rendering of a quote from the *Tempest*, 'My foot, my tutor?', cited by Handke on the frontispiece; 'Was, das Mündel will ein Vormund sein?' [Handke 1992 193, see also Innes 1979 248]

Durcheinanderdurchschauen, gegenseitiges Wegschauen. Man schaut einander aufs Ohr.' [Handke 1992 201] For Günther Rühle, this kind of action thematises the 'Lernprozesse' of conditioning and domestication via norms and otherwise meaningless strings of words which are also central to Handke's earlier and better known *Kaspar*. [Rühle 1972 140] And whilst the outfits of the two characters and their activities, falling from ropes and pulling large hoses across the stage, are reminiscent of farce, Handke states at several points that it is not comic: 'Nichts Komisches ereignet sich.' [Handke 1992 208] And it is this insistence of how we as audience (or reader) relate to the activity on stage (or in the text), rather than the relationship between the two characters on the stage, that interests me here.

The most immediate implication of *Das Mündel's* lack of dialogue is that its text consists largely, and necessarily, of stage directions. Similar to Beckett's *Not I*, this precipitates a slippage – at least for the reader of the play – from dramatic action to narrative telling. But the narrative of this silent piece is not dialogue, but a written text that can equally well be read as performed. Indeed, certain elements of the direction are clearly included with a view to their poetic value, for example when we are told of the Vormund: 'er steht da, er stellt das Dastehen dar, mehr nicht.' [Handke 1992 205] Similarly, some of the words on the page resemble concrete poetry, as in the episode where the Mündel writes on the door:

Er schreibt langsam an der Tür herunter:

K + M + B

K + M + B

K + M + B

K + M + B [Handke 1992 208]

(This action refers a traditional aspect of celebrating Epiphany in Southern Germany and Austria, where boys dressed as the three kings visit houses, marking the front door of each they visit with the letters of Kaspar, Melchior and Balthazar, so that the kings may protect the house for the coming year.) The genre confusion is compounded by the inclusion of elements in the direction which might be lost in the enacting of this silent piece, such as indications of psychological motivation and bald statements of what *might not* happen, like 'die Katze bewegt sich, oder auch nicht.' [Handke 1992 197] These might serve as a guideline for the director or actors, but in many instances it is hard to see how a director could generate these specific effects merely by force of the action or sounds on stage.

More central to my concerns is the fact that many of these directions are not so much an objective description of what happens on stage, but a commentary on the implied audience's subjective impression of these events, as Rolf Günter Renner remarks: 'Vieles von dem, auf das sie hinweist, ist subjektiver Eindruck,

nicht objektivierbare Form der Aufführung.' [Renner 1985 40] This might be understood as an aspect of what is probably the defining feature of Handke's early work, the dismantling of the invisible barrier between stage and audience. For Mereille Taban this is pivotal to Handke's turn against the closedness of what she calls 'absolute' theatre. [Taban 1990 139] Rather than a presentation which we sit back and enjoy, Handke's *Sprechstücke* draw the audience 'ins theatralische Geschehen'. [Nägele & Voris 1978 74] The same central formal device is true of this silent piece, and the continuity with Handke's first work, the earlier and better-known *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (1966), is evident. As Günther Rühle notes: 'Stummspiele sind Herausforderungen an das Publikum. Stummspiele bringen das Publikum zum Spielen und zur Selbstdarstellung.' [Rühle 1972 144] It is in this sense that Peter Iden describes *Das Mündel* as a *Lehrstück* for the audience, albeit 'freilich in einem neuen Sinn.' [Iden 1972 144]

So how might Handke's *Lehrstück* be understood to operate and how might it relate to Welsch's ideas of imperceptibility and latency? Handke himself describes the aim of his theatre in terms of a strategy of alienation: 'irgendwas zu machen, was das Schauen und das Zuhören der Leute irgendwie befremdet.' [Quoted in Litten 1972 157] For Nägele and Voris, this means a 'sharpening' of perception: 'Sprache so zu benutzen, daß sie das Bewußtsein und die Wahrnehmung schärft.' [Nägele & Voris 1978 120] But what exactly is to be made strange in this new light, what is to be perceived anew? Common to all

Handke's early pieces, of course, is their subversion of our expectations of theatrical convention. But the question for me is whether there is any perceptual renewal *outside* of this formal renewal which might support the idea of reading aesthetic perception as somehow significant for everyday perception.

'Pures Theater': anti-reference and anti-theatricality

The thematic content of *Das Mündel* seems to be the patterns of domination, in the same way that *Kaspar* takes as its material the patterns of language acquisition. And Handke's own notion of a parallel between on-stage activity and 'Außenwelt' suggests that theatre might aim to sharpen our perception of both on-stage action and the everyday. [See Handke 1972 91] But of course, any direct link between the stage and reality would be at variance with Handke's own rejection of specific engagement in favour of a greater formalism. [See Nägele & Voris 1978 71-4] In particular, a central motivation for Handke's pieces is the refusal of the idea of art as creating an illusory meaning or 'Bild von der Welt'. [Nägele & Voris 1978 75] Indeed whilst Handke's *Kaspar* is about the (albeit restrictive) acquisition of language which generates meaning from nonsense, a central theme of *Das Mündel* is the problematising of reference and coherent meaning. Akin to what I have said about Beckett's theatre as 'short-circuiting' meaning, Handke in his theoretical writings refers to 'unmittelbares Theater', which defies the need to generate an alternative coherent reality: '[Das

Stück] braucht nicht die Vermittlung einer Geschichte, damit Theater ensteht, es ist unmittelbares Theater [...]: auf der Bühne gibt es nur das Jetzt, das auch das Jetzt des Zuschauers ist.' [Handke 1972 203, 206] Peter Iden refers to this immanence as Handke's 'pures Theater' [Iden 1972 144], of which *Publikumsbeschimpfung* is the clearest and most explicit example. This piece begins with the four 'Sprecher' on stage practising their 'Schimpfwörter', which are barely audible and from which 'sich keine Bedeutung ergeben [soll].' [Handke 1992 13, 14] But from the moment the Sprecher turn to the audience, it is not perception that is denied, but the audience's institutionalised expectations of theatre: 'Sie haben sich etwas erwartet./ [...] Sie haben sich eine andre Welt erwartet.' [Handke 1992 15] (Of course, this rejection of theatricality is somewhat disingenuous, as many elements of theatre inevitably remain in all three pieces. In *Publikumsbeschimpfung* the Sprecher ironically acknowledge their adherence to the unities of time, place and action which the piece observes: 'Dieses Stück ist also klassisch.' [Handke 1992 28]) This essence of theatre, 'was des Theaters ist' [Handke 1992 17], is its conception not simply as 'another world', but also its claim to be a mirror of reality: 'Sie sehen keine Gegenstände, die andere Gegenstände vortäuschen. Sie sehen keine Dunkelheit, die eine andere Dunkelheit vortäuscht.' [Handke 1992 18] The expectation that is being denied is that of illusionist representation. In view of the fact that the Sprecher will talk about 'nichts Erfundenem' [Handke 1992 36], there seems to be an imperative of faithfulness to the external world. This is the paradoxical status of this kind of

art: its anti-fictionality suggests truth is an issue, but not any truth that might be verified externally. It is precisely the subordination of theatre's 'reines Spiel' to meaning and reference to reality that the Sprecher complain about: 'Immer lauerte etwas zwischen Worten, Gesten und Requisiten und wollte immer Ihnen etwas bedeuten.' [Handke 1992 32]

In *Publikumsbeschimpfung* this manifests itself as a rejection of the piece's 'meaning' at all. Even the moments of non-perception, the emptiness of the stage or the silences which punctuate speech, are not intended as dramatic devices, pregnant with meaning, but rather emptied of special significance:

> Die Leere dieser Bühne bedeutet nichts. Diese Bühne ist leer, weil Gegenstände uns im Weg wären. Sie ist leer, weil wir keine Gegenstände brauchen. [...] Unsere Pausen sind nicht beredt wie das Schweigen. Wir sagen nichts durch das Schweigen. Zwischen unseren Worten tut sich kein Abgrund auf. [Handke 1992 18, 22]

This failure of referential language is also central to some of Handke's poems, for example 'Abbrechen mitten im Satz' (1968), which does just that, and 'Vergleiche für nichts Vergleichbares' (1968), which consists of twenty-nine similes without a final term. (This idea of the interchangability of similes and the failure to reach an end term anticipates Stanley Cavell's remarks in 'Aesthetic Problems of

Modern Philosophy' on the relationship of a metaphor – and ultimately all language – to its referent. Rather than being in some way unique and 'resistant to paraphrase, one metaphor may be exchanged for any other equivalents in an unending chain which never actually *touches* what it speaks about. [See Cavell 1976 77-8] And in *Das Mündel*, whilst meaning does not break off, there are moments where representation and meaning 'bound up in' a closed circle. The Mündel, for example, 'steht da, er stellt das Dastehen dar, mehr nicht' [Handke 1992 205] and the cat 'stellt das dar, was sie tut'. [Handke 1992 195] This anti-illusionist theatre seems to make a similar claim to 'realness' as that in Beckett's spare but concrete stage presences, in as much as the simple actions that happen on the stage happen there and nowhere else. For Peter Iden, this absolution from the obligation of meaning also offers an interpretation of the title of the play, whose formal qualities become more important than its meaning; in effect they become its meaning: 'das Instrument nimmt sich selbst zum Thema.' [Iden 1972 146] This rejection of theatre as reference to a – necessarily absent – external reality has its technical correlate in the actions in *Das Mündel*, which are repeatedly said to occur without theatrical effect. The Mündel eats the apple 'als ob niemand zuschauen würde' [Handke 1992 196], and with 'keine besondere Eigenart Äpfel zu essen'. [Handke 1992 197] At the end, the curious activity of pouring sand into water is done 'gemächlich, ohne Gleichmäßigkeit, ohne Feierlichkeit'. [Handke 1992 215] This seems to offer the clear parallel with the minimalism inherent in Welsch's anaesthetic, namely art as dispensing with

excessive artifice. Exaggerated theatricality of traditional drama is rejected in favour of a kind of non-acting. By the same token, this does not mean that actions should be particularly ascetic: the final action is said not only to be without 'Feierlichkeit', but also without the 'Gleichmäßigkeit' of such a self-conscious holding back.

Non-perception as anti-fiction

This refusal of asceticism is notable, in view of my remarks in the previous chapter about the function of austerity as consolation and ultimate reconciliation. In this respect I cited Adorno's warning that artworks which exclude celebration and consolation paradoxically gain these characteristics ever more: 'Selbst Kunstwerke, welche Feier und Trost unbestechlich sich verbieten, wischen den Glanz nicht weg, gewinnen ihn desto mehr, je gelungener sie sind.' [Adorno 1970 123] Welsch is of course not so cautious. But aside from his remarks on fictionality and stoicism, for him art's minimalism is important for the respite it allows our faculties of sensory perception. This focus on sense perception coincides with the remarks of several commentators on Handke, whose refusal of meaning is seen to invite interpretation at the level of simple perception. Iden, for example, writes of a reduction of theatre 'auf das, was daran sinnlich wahrnehmbar ist'. [Iden 1972 146] Hallmuth Karasek refers to the audience's experience as a 'sensualistische Nachprüfung von Minimalvorgängen'. [Karasek

1972 150] Handke himself writes of a turn from representation to the merely sensory: 'Der Weg geht über die Sinnlichkeit, über das sinnlich Erfassbare.' [Handke 1972 29] But beyond this return to simple perception, in what follows I shall argue that it is crucial to the way in which Handke's art might be more than just a cul-de-sac of non-representation, and might in fact be conceived as dialectically related to what wider cultural norms. This has implications, in my view, for the viability of Welsch's ideas on the anaesthetic as being about perception and the cultural norms which underlie that perception.

More than the rudiments of sensory perception, *Das Mündel* involves a thematisation of more sophisticated *cognition*, as much as one can make this distinction. As noted above, the stage directions indicate not only what objectively happens on stage, but also what we (allegedly) subjectively see on or hear from the stage: 'Im Hintergrund der Bühne sehen wir, als Hintergrund der Bühne, die Vorderansicht eines Bauernhauses.' [Handke 1992 195] And, 'Jetzt wird die Musik fast unhörbar, wie das Hauptthema an manchen Stellen eines Films fast verschwindet.' [Handke 1992 204] The text also informs us of the duration and progression of our perception:

Neben dem Hackklotz, auf einem Schemel, haben wir schon auf den ersten Blick jemanden sitzen sehen, eine Figur.

Jetzt, nachdem wir die anderen Einzelheiten ringsherum kurz aufgenommen haben, wenden wir uns wieder dieser Gestalt zu' [Handke 1992 195]

The text also includes curious reminders not to ignore certain things have been happening stage: 'vergessen wir nicht, weiter auf die Musik zu hören, die weder leiser noch lauter wird'. [Handke 1992 200]

Handke also presupposes a specific audience expectation and experience of the actors' activities: 'dann kommt der Vormund mit dem Gummischlauch, den er hinter sich her zieht und schließlich fallen läßt'. [Handke 1992 200] This 'schließlich' seems to suggest that we should feel an element of tension about this moment of physical theatre. And whilst we could happily wait for the arrival of a second character on stage to establish the first figure's identity when watching the play, in the written text we are informed of our 'own' deductions before a comparison is even possible: 'Die Figur auf der Bühne ist jung – also erkennen wir daß diese Figur auf der Bühne wohl das Mündel darstellt.' [Handke 1992 196] Alongside such seemingly superfluous inferences, essential directions are all but neglected: 'Es muß wohl kaum mehr erwähnt werden, daß die Person, die vor dem Bild des Hauses auf einem Schemel hockt, eine Maske trägt.' [Handke 1992 196] At other times, Handke indicates insights into the characters thoughts which would not necessarily be apparent from merely watching the action: 'Das

Mündel sitzt da. Wohin mit den Beinen?' [Handke 1992 201] Similarly, otherwise ambiguous gestures in the Mündel and Vormund's mime are interpreted for us: 'er antwortet, in dem er den Hut abnimmt und vor sich auf den Tisch liegt.' [Handke 1992 201] Handke also tells us how we perceive and understand things, such as that repeated activities lose their sense: 'das wird so oft wiederholt, daß es seine Psychologie verliert' [Handke 1992 201]; or that the slowness with which certain things take place precludes our finding them funny: 'Auch er tut das so langsam, daß es gar nicht zum Lachen ist.' [Handke 1992 207] This repetition or exaggerated slowness inevitably emphasizes the sensual element of the characters' actions, and contributes to Handke's refusal to create a convincing illusion of an alternative reality.

But in what way does this curious invasion of usually objective direction by subjective inference invest Handke's work with anaesthetic effects? Of course, some of this detail actually tells us what we might not otherwise notice, and in some cases could not otherwise know in the absence of any script. But then who is the text intended for, the actors or the audience? Though if the stage directions were read over a public address system simultaneous to the on-stage action it is possible that this would be even more of an obstacle to perception and comprehension. (I will refer below to Werner Gerber's production of Heiner Müller's *Bildbeschreibung*, in which the text was both read out and a recording of it played over a PA.) And certainly some of these interventions do seem to share

common ground with Welsch's anaesthetic in that they not only thematise perception, but also set up obstacles to perception. In particular, this involves a curious emphasis on what we (the audience) cannot see or hear. Sometimes this is because we have become used to certain phenomena: 'An die Musik haben wir uns schon gewöhnt.' [Handke 1992 212] At other times it is too dark for us to be able to see: 'Aber diesen Sachverhalt nehmen wir kaum mehr wahr, denn [...] die Bühne [wird] auch schon langsam wieder Finster. Die Szene ist zuende.' [Handke 1992 198] Sometimes it is because we notice only after the event has occurred: 'Das Mündel steht schon einige Zeit, als wir es stehen sehen.' [Handke 1992 211] Sometimes it is because the action happens too fast for us to perceive: 'so schnell [...], daß wir, wenn wir hätten zählen wollen, kaum viel weiter als bis eins hätten zählen können.' [Handke 1992 206] Sometimes we are distracted by some other activity on the stage: 'Vor lauter Schauen haben wir fast übersehen, daß die Figur den Apfel schon aufgegessen hat.' [Handke 1992 197] Sometimes it is because things simply are not there to be seen: 'Hühner sind nicht zu sehen.' [Handke 1992 197] Sometimes we see but are unable to recognise objects, as at the start:

Ein Gummimantel, schwarz, bedeckt den Gegenstand einerseits ziemlich, andrerseits hat er, obwohl er den Gegenstand bedeckt, sich nicht in allem der Form dieses Gegenstands angepaßt, so daß wir nicht erkennen können, was der Gegenstand auf der Bühne darstellt. [Handke 1992 195]

Similarly, we sometimes hear something, but are unable to identify it:

Im Finstern beginnt jetzt eine neue Szene, wir hören es. Was wir hören, ist ein lautes Atmen, das von einem Tonband über Lautsprecher kommt. Das Atmen fängt, nach einer Stille im Finstern, gleich ziemlich laut an und, indem es fortgeführt wird, wird es weder gleichmäßig lauter noch leiser, sondern es schwankt immerzu in seiner Lautstärke: derart, daß, wenn wir meinen, jetzt würde es gerade immer lauter werden, bis zu dem Lautestmöglichen, es plötzlich wieder ziemlich leise wird, und, wenn wir glauben, es könnte jetzt und jetzt verstummen, es plötzlich wieder möglichst laut wird, und zwar weitaus lauter als ein natürliches Atmen. [Handke 1992 198]

This is reminiscent of Beckett's *Breath*, referred to above, in which not the eponymous breathing, but the light oscillates in a way that is neither dark not light. This scene is echoed towards the end of the piece, when, the stage in darkness, unidentifiable noises arise:

Es wird lauter, das heißt, immer räumlicher – ein Röcheln? ein sehr angestrengtes Luftholen? Oder nur ein großer Blasebalg? Oder ein riesiges Tier?

Es wird recht gleichmäßig lauter.

Allmählich wird es zu räumlich für diesen Raum.

Ist es hier, ist es dort?

Plötzlich ist es still. [Handke 1992 214]

The status of these phenomena is hard to define: they may exist (or not exist) only to defy our perception of them. In my view this text is characteristic of Handke's shift in focus from on-stage action to the audience, which Rolf Günter Renner calls Handke's 'Begründung der Wirklichkeit des Theaters durch den Zuschauer.' [Renner 1985 41] But of course crucial aspect of Handke's work is precisely a refusal to generate any such 'Wirklichkeit': it is apparent that the thematisation of perception in Handke's *Das Mündel* does not so much generate a new reality, but precisely undermines the possibility of any such determinate let alone convincing new reality. As in Beckett's *Not I*, these obstructive ruptures and blind-spots in Handke's description serve a similar strategy of disrupting the audience's ability to generate a coherent 'story'. As such, it is apparent that the force of Handke's theatre cannot be found in its focus on the audience alone, but in the interplay between the audience and the question of the *status* of the phenomena witnessed on stage. On the one hand, the presentation of these phenomena occurs largely through our subjective perception of them. On the other hand, we are also compelled to question and try to reconstruct their

possible 'reality' or otherwise. At the same time it seems that such refutations of representative function cannot fail to make a paradoxical reality-claim, an authenticity derived from an experience beyond the artifice of conventional, theatrical presentation, an 'unmittelbares Theater', limited to acts which are actually and undeniably occurring on the stage.

But this 'incontestable experience' is not the only claim to truth that inhabits Handke's piece. These misperceived or non-perceived phenomena and these immediate and immanent actions cannot entirely escape their status as theatrical elements. And in the sense of Adorno's remark at the start of *Ästhetische Theorie* that nothing in art is self-evident any more [see Adorno 1970 9], a 'deeper' significance seems to derive inevitably from the incorporation of a gesture or a fragmentary phrase in the artwork. As such, actions like the Mündel's pouring sand into water do seem to beg some kind of allegorical interpretation, even at the same time as they refuse direct interpretation. Indeed, as in Beckett it seems that their meaning inheres precisely in their evasion of determinate interpretation. Handke makes this redundancy of language explicit in the 1973 essay 'Die Geborgenheit unter der Schadeldecke', in which he suggests that 'sprachlose einzelne Wörter' are all that is left in the face of an inauthentic and colonised language: 'Alles weitere gehörte dann schon zu der Fiktion von Verständigung'. [Handke 1974 73] This idea of the 'Fiktion von Verständigung' sounds very much like the opposition I have identified between the fictionality of

the aestheticised and the truth of silence or sensory absence. It is a view of art that I have associated with what Michael Hardt calls a 'negative foundation of being', whereby '[b]eing seems to rest precariously on a poetics of silences.' [Hardt 1991 244] The quasi-mystical vein in minimalist art, identified in connection with John Cage, is also evident in drama, as attested to by works and comments by Botho Strauß and even Peter Weiss. Maurice Maeterlinck, noted above as an early proponent of contentless and paralysed drama is also an important precursor in these ideas of the spiritual dimension of art. In his theoretical writings he suggests the function of silence and inactivity in drama as a guarantor of ideal realm, whereby such minimalism is seen to offer 'a kind of new beauty [...] more spiritual, more abstract, than was the old'. [Maeterlinck 1994 xx] This is in spite of his expressed wish to 'sortir du monde der réalités évidentes, sans rentrer dans celui des chimères anciennes' [Maeterlinck 1908 xiii-xiv]; in the last chapter I asked whether such 'ancient chimeras' can be avoided in this new quasi-religious function of art as a compensation for material.

But Handke is arguably not capitulating in his essay, rather making a 'call to arms'; a demand that we speak out our 'Sprachlosigkeit'. [Handke 1974 73] My concern in the last chapter was not only that readings that take art as a response to essentially epistemological and ontological problems might be politically and ideologically problematic, but that they sacrifice the possibility of art relating to everyday reality dialectically, as Welsch's cognitive anaesthetic sketches, and to

the features of everyday aestheticisation in particular. My point here, as suggested above, is that the thematisation of perception and the deployment of incomplete perception in Handke can offer some dialogue with the everyday life-world this side of a more philosophical function of the artwork. This involves a more marginal intervention in the life-world that reintroduces fragmentary elements of 'content' into the artwork, rather than relying on the expurgation of the latter. Crucially for Welsch's formulations it seems to open the door for a treatment of perceptual and cognitive habits.

Quodlibet: misperception and cultural norms

Space for a certain kind of referent seems to open up in the piece that Handke wrote immediately after *Das Mündel*, *Quodlibet*, in which a similarly imperfect perception is deployed as a process of tapping, and frustrating, certain theatrical expectations and perceptual norms. In *Quodlibet*, as in the opening moments of *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, the utterances of the players are only to be half-understood by the audience: 'Die Zuschauer hören zwar zu, verstehen aber nur selten ein paar Wörter oder Satzteile oder einfache, alltägliche Sätze.' [Handke 1992 220] But the key difference from *Publikumsbeschimpfung* is that this half-perception is not a mere warm up, but the main mode of the piece. Again, like *Das Mündel* there is no set text, and the actors are instructed to speak about what they have experienced that day: 'Es steht den Schauspielern frei, was sie reden

330

wollen: über das was sie gerade in der Zeitung gelesen haben, was sie am Tag erlebt haben.' [Handke 1992 219-220] The resulting 'einfache, alltägliche Sätze' are precisely so 'belanglos' and 'nichtssagend' [Handke 1992 220] that the audience eavesdrop in vain for a conversation or even a complete sentence, let alone a story-line.

The fragmentary exchanges of this opening section are peppered with misunderstandings, word-play and cross-talk. So for instance it begins with a reference to something being broken, it is never made conclusively clear whether this is a bottle or someone's neck. Similarly, 'vor Angst geschüttelt' transforms into 'vor Gebrauch schütteln', and 'ertränkte Kinder' becomes 'Er tränkte Rinder, John Wayne, glaube ich, wie hieß nur der Film?' [Handke 1992 222] Snatches of a poem are read out: '...ob auf Astern Tautropfen blieben.../...ob Sorgen im Alter zerstieben...' [Handke 1992 223] Voices from all parts of the stage interchange, which further disorientates the listener from any reconstruction of a coherent statement or story. There follow several different phases of speaking, the first in which crucial words are omitted from sentences: *'jeweils ein Wort überhaupt weglassen und sieht sie dabei einander beziehungsvoll und mitwisserisch anschauen.'* [Handke 1992 224] So for instance: 'Wenn im Radio ... angesagt wird, lasse ich alles liegen und stehen.' [Handke 1992 224] The omission of what is often the decisive word of the sentence leaves the audience frustrated. The second phase is characterised by wrong words slipped into the exchange: *'sie gebrauchen ein*

falsches Wort für das richtige, in der Annahme, daß sie einander schon richtig verstehen'.

[Handke 1992 224] This plays with allusion and clichée, and also opens up the

potential for misunderstanding. The phase ends with a joke, which is only half

heard and clearly misunderstood by many on the stage. Next, sentences

gradually come to the fore that are the stock responses of politicians and

hecklers: '*Sätze aus dem Repertoire, das Politiker für Zwischenrufe aus dem Publikum*

anwendbar ist, aber auch angewendet wird, wenn es keine Zwischenrufe gibt.' [Handke

1992 225] Again the point seems to be a reference to clichée and standardized

and restrictive forms of communication.

This technique of allusion is clearly not the kind of strategy that Welsch's

anaesthetic as *non*-perception describes, but in my view might suggest a strategy

of *mis*perception and moreover one which points at and thematises latent

preconceptions in much the same way as the cognitive variant of Welsch's

anaesthetic suggests. I have already mentioned Susan Sontag in this regard, for

whom misperception allows a 'limited, vicarious participation in the ideal of

silence'. [Sontag 1969 7] Misperception is the compromised version of silence:

'The exemplary modern artist's choice of silence is rarely carried to this point of

final simplification, so that he becomes literally silent. More typically, he

continues speaking, but in a manner that his audience can't hear.' [Sontag 1969 7]

I have already noted John Cage's view on the impossibility of absolute silence,

and Peter Handke concurs: the idea of complete non-perception is dismissed by

his 'Sprecher' in *Publikumsbeschimpfung*: 'Versuchen Sie, nichts mehr zu hören. Versuchen Sie, nichts mehr zu riechen. Versuchen Sie, keinen Speichel mehr zu sammeln. [...] Sie sammeln ja Speichel. Sie hören ja zu. Sie riechen ja.' [Handke 1992 29] And in *Quodlibet* this anticipation and irrepressible hearing is exploited by Handke's use of allusion and half-reference. As Handke puts it, alongside the snatches of banalities, are to be heard 'Wörte und Sätze, die im Theater als Signale wirken: Ausdrücke der Politik; der Sexualität; der Analsphäre; der Gewalt.' [Handke 1992 220] That is to say, these words are not to be heard, but *misheard*: 'statt "vergasen" wird auf der Bühne vom "Vergaser" gesprochen, statt von "betonter Nichteinmischung" wird von der "Betonmischmaschine", statt von "Auschwitz" spricht man vom "Aus-Schwitzen"'. [Handke 1992 220] The point for me is that this misperception in *Quodlibet* is more flexible than the silence in *Das Mündel* in that it allows reference, albeit fragmentary and merely suggested, to culturally loaded words. In Welsch's terms, this allows an articulation between his two ideas of the anaesthetic, namely non-perception and the unthematised normative frameworks which underpin perception and meaning.[4]

---

[4] A similar thematisation of perception and cultural norms is central to some of Beckett's shorter works, for example the *Ghost Trio*, a play for television written in 1975. The female voice begins with a reference to the audibility of her own voice; 'Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly. [*Pause.*] Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly. [*Pause.*]' [Beckett 1986 408] In the ensuing first short act we are directed to look in detail at the

Radically obstructed perception is plausible as a response to aestheticisation insofar as such art is the precise *opposite* of the pre-digested phenomena that characterise the aestheticised world. The same could be said of Adorno's determinate negation of meaning, but does this 'opposition', insofar as it resides in meaninglessness and silence, allow for the kind of cognitive, dialectical *re-engagement* with the everyday that are the promise at the heart of Welsch's ideas for the aesthetic? Non-perception, as a more extreme version of theatre's turn against action and representation, seems to get ever further from a notion of content and a dialectical relation to the everyday. But in my view this more modulated playing with perception in Handke lets referent and cultural norms back into the picture. As such, as well as saving art from the cul-de-sac of extreme self-reflexivity or non-reference, the return to some vestige of content might also be said to make a more plausible link with Welsch's ideas on aestheticisation.

---

stage set, and each small part we examine is said to tell us enough about the rest of it. 'Having seen that specimen of wall, you have seen it all.' [Beckett 1986 408] Beckett is clearly playing with the concept of allegorical representation, ironically reducing our experience of events to a spareness, evacuated of feeling and content much like Expressionist drama. And akin to Handke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, he goes on to parody the expectations and automatic connections we make in experience representative art; 'The kind of window- [...] The kind of door- [...] The kind of wall-'. [Beckett 1986 409]

Compared to the insistence on a seemingly sheer self-determination or autonomy that leads to art's refuge in silence or seemingly contentless art, Handke's modulated idea of misperception does not call for abandoning the idea of art's separateness *in toto*, nor the conception of the aesthetic as a quite separate mode of experience. But does *Quodlibet's* fragmentary referential content – which hardly amounts to explicit, discursive ideological critique help it avoid the ideological pitfalls which attend the idea of art as absolute or does it fall between two stools? But perhaps this fine line might be a good way of addressing the ideological basis behind some of the effects of aestheticisation. This fragmentary cultural reference might be read as forging a middle path between the rarefied meditation on the limits of meaning and the pre-packaged and ready-made meaning which seems to characterise the aestheticised world.

Perception and identification: anaesthetic as *Wirkungsästhetik*

I have already suggested that this meditation on norms and expectations underlines the pivotal role of the culturally located recipient, as distinct from Kant's transcendental capacities or Adorno's banished subject. This returns of course to my discussion in chapter two of philosophical aesthetics' ambivalent relationship to the subject. On the one hand, the aesthetic is bound up with the subjective experience, or indeed the experience of self as subject, as noted with

reference to Christoph Menke in chapter two. On the other hand, aesthetic theory from Kant, through Romanticism, to Heidegger and Adorno, whether in its quest for the absolute or merely a space beyond particular ideological investments, has been characterised by a mistrust of the subjective recipient. More recently Hans Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauß have redressed this imbalance with their focus on the contextualised moment of reception. Ironically, however, a sceptical attitude towards the moment of reception might be encouraged by the rigid conception of the process of reception in Hans Robert Jauß's concept of 'Identifikation', discussed in chapter four. [See Jauß 1975 263ff] Jauß's identification proposes that if we perceive something it must also in some way be said to make sense. Hegel registers this concept of a dialectical interrelationship between meaning and perception in the double sense of the word 'Sinn'. [See for example Hegel 1971 69] This short-circuiting of sense and meaning is also central to Welsch's conception of anaesthetic as cultural *non-perception*: to receive sense-data necessarily involves investing those impulses with culturally-determined meaning and sifting out those perceptions that one cannot attribute meaning to. But this rigid conceptualisation of identification is surely undermined by precisely those examples of art which do seem to elude the search for clear meaning: art like Beckett's and Handke's theatre are instances where one perceives something that does not make sense, indicating precisely that meaning and perception are not co-extensive. One might even say that the truth that these art-forms can offer is *antithetical* to meaning, Adorno's

determinate negation of meaning, and that their truth is redeemed precisely by defying 'identification' by the recipient.

That said, Albrecht Wellmer has also suggested the implicit dependence on this moment of subjective aesthetic experience in Adorno's own understanding of aesthetic value. [See Wellmer 1993 185-93]   And in my view a reception-theoretical approach might steer this kind of interpretation-resistant art between the Scylla of mysticism and the Charybdis of social irrelevance. It's an obvious point to say that the inaccessibility of art's meaning is activated only at the moment of its problematic reception, but in my view this does cause problems for the aforementioned mistrust of the recipient. In Handke's *Quodlibet* it seems that the recipient is more than just the point of cognitive failure. On the one hand, the recipient might be taken as the main purpose of Handke's art, as references to Handke's *Sprechstücke* as a new kind of *Lehrstück* [Iden 1972 144] and as drawing the audience 'ins theatralische Geschehen' [Nägele & Voris 1978 74] indicate. My discussion of *Das Mündel* began with Handke's focus on audience, and alongside the above ideas of theatre's function as immanent and self-present truth or capacity for exposing norms, an underlying aim (or perhaps simply 'method') of Handke's theatre is to develop a certain *receptivity* in the audience. For Nägele and Voris, this Schillerian receptivity ('Schaffung eines ästhetischen Zustandes') opens up a space for thinking differently, 'Wecken eines

Möglichkeitssinnes, der überhaupt erst Alternativen denken kann'. [Nägele &

Voris 1978 73]

This idea of opening up alternative ways of thinking might be a variant of the

idea of the aesthetic as experience of an excess beyond determinate or discursive

meaning, what Menke calls an 'epistemological break' [Menke 2000 40] and

perhaps the characteristic feature of the aesthetic experience since its inception in

the middle of the eighteenth century. In drama theory this allergy towards the

determinate and contingent recurs in Antonin Artaud's preference for ancient

mime for its evocation of less determinate or 'obvious' [Artaud 1993 29-30] ideas,

to its 'modern European' variant, which is seen to function as a simple

replacement for words. Ideas, or, as Artaud puts it,

> attitudes of mind, aspects of nature in a tangible, potent way, that is to say
>
> by always evoking natural things or details, like that Oriental language
>
> portraying night by a tree on which a bird that has already closed one eye,
>
> is beginning to close the other. [Artaud 1993 29]

Language itself is implicated in this contingency, as indicated by the references

to the crisis of language at the turn of the century above. But the idea of verbal

convention as an obstacle to contact with reality, dismissed by Heidegger as 'the

worst of conventions' [Cited by Sheppard 1978 328], begs the question of what is

left if you remove language. By contrast, Handke's theatre does not just conjure circular, autotelic meaning, but plays with conventions of language and perception in a way that might be said to raise consciousness. As Günther Rühle puts it: 'Stummspiele bringen das Publikum zum Spielen und zur Selbstdarstellung.' [Rühle 1972 144]

So rather than a transcendental idea of the aesthetic as accessing a space beyond the determinate, this might point out a more *marginal* free space within culturally specific and located expectations. As such, Handke's pieces might suggest a middle-ground between the sheer autonomy and self-reflexivity of this autotelic use of language, exploiting a critical role that such a specifically aesthetic experience can play within everyday life. The opening up of the receptivity of the audience might activate a less 'absolute' intervention, which in the case of *Quodlibet* is achieved not via a rejection of identification *in toto*, but by working at its limits. This suggests a way of referring to but also partially escaping from the ideological pre-investment of cultural phenomena, Welsch's 'cultural anaesthetic'. In my view this allows a key shift of emphasis, from the aesthetic object as truth-functional in-itself, by virtue of its refutation of coherent referential meaning, to the *effect* of the artwork on the audience and specifically its activation of the aforementioned half-reference to cultural references and expectations.

Returning to the question of aestheticisation, T. J. Clark characterises this aestheticisation as phenomena being 'scrubbed and tweaked into post-modern receptivity'. [Clark 1999 3] But my point is that 'receptivity' cannot be discredited wholesale by this association with the postmodern, and is central to the potentially oppositional function of art in postmodernity. It seems to me that the strength of this focus on problematic perception and a renewal of receptivity in the audience lies in its denying the easy 'consumption' of packaged sensory perception and meaning which is central to the characterisation of postmodernity as aestheticised. For Adorno, this focus on receptivity merely renders phenomena as little more than a mirror of the recipient's manipulated consciousness. But is it not plausible that Handke's toying with perception precisely *re-activates* a recipient that had been rendered passive by the 'tweaked and scrubbed' phenomena of postmodernity?

Of course, this reliance on a moment of reception might suggest an open-endedness, a relinquishing control over what is perceived and understood in the aesthetic experience. Whilst this open-endedness might be of concern to formalists and Marxists alike (I have already drawn the contrast with the protective tenor of Adorno's treatment of modernist texts), for Nietzsche, art's incompleteness and imperfection is precisely the source of its value. As noted in chapter two, art's failure to reach completion imparts a desire in the recipient of art. For Robert Wilson, whose dramatics works I have associated with the

anaesthetic above, the open-ended nature of minimalist art offers the recipient a moment of cognitive freedom. In a way that overlaps with Welsch's understanding of contemporary aestheticisation, Wilson conceptualises this cultural and ideological overload as an infringement on our freedom of thought and mental association, against which people 'sign-off' as a 'means to survival'. [Cited in Innes 1993 202] This motivates his idea for a theatre to which people can react in their own way, a freedom that also extends to artists and actors, who are to explore and develop their own styles. [See Counsell 1996 180-1] This notion of freedom echoes John Cage's motivation for writing 4'33": 'I was intent on making something that didn't tell people what to do.' [Kostelanetz 1988 74] But can we really speak in terms of cognitive or interpretive freedom in the case of Beckett or Handke? The prescriptive tenor of Handke's *Das Mündel* seems to speak against this idea: we are told that we do notice this, and that we do not notice that. Moreover, the challenge to find coherent meaning or to piece together a narrative which is central to *Das Mündel* and *Not I's* fragmentary presentation seems intent on frustrating the audience, rather than allowing it any moment of freedom.

More crucially for my argument here, Handke's works are conscious of the cultural context in which they operate, with the consequence that any such cognitive freedom could presumably only ever be marginal and momentary, pitted against the backdrop of the necessary network of culturally determined

expectations. For Handke as for Welsch, cultural determination is both the necessary medium of and an obstacle to perception. Peter Brook identifies similar constraints on the side of production. Spontaneity and innovation struggle in the face of individual as well as cultural conditioning, which for Brook reduce dramatic enterprise to 'deadly theatre'. [Brook 1968 125] In an echo of Antonin Artaud's idea of art as an assault on the 'obvious ideas' [Artaud 1993 30], Brook writes of 'the hair's-breadth of terror before the blankness, and then the reassuring ready-made idea coming to the rescue.' [Brook 1968 126] For Brook it is the task of theatre to undo this preconditioning, in the actors as well as the recipients, to 'eliminat[e] cultural accretions' [Counsell 1996 169, see also Brook 1968 125-6], but any attempt on the part of the aesthetic experience to evade this 'reassuring ready-made idea' is an 'almost impossible' struggle against the collusion of imagery and memory. [Brook 1968 126] The concept of imagery here returns to Shklovsky's critique of Potebnya's notion of the poetic as 'thinking in images', and the reference to the workings of memory puts me in mind of Marcel Proust's references in *In Search of Lost Time* to habit, the 'skilful but slow-moving arranger'. [Proust 1981 7] Against this Proust posits a notion of 'involuntary memory' that bypasses the habitual connections of consciousness. The constitutive function of our necessarily limited 'Erwartung' – or 'Erwartungshorizont', as Gadamer would have it – is an essential element of reception theory's hermeneutical insight.

This reading of cultural over-determination as a process of inducing people to think and respond in certain 'ready-made' ways fleshes out Welsch's idea of aesthetic accumulation and the cognitive anaesthetic, and is already more sophisticated than his one-dimensional conceptualisation of the problem as sensory excess. The linguistic element of this determination of experience by cultural preconditioning is expressed in the notion that language 'itself' speaks. It is in this respect that Antonin Artaud sees theatre's avoidance of language as crucial to how art can operate counter-culturally. But as we have seen, Handke is more circumspect about this rejection of language as the medium of our experience. For me, the struggle with cultural pre-determination is evident in Handke's works and it is a struggle that takes place at the level of language. In particular Peter Handke's notion of the *Nachbild*, mentioned in the prose piece *Mein Jahr in der Niemandsbucht*, is a possible means of reconnecting this indeterminacy with a kind of reference to cultural habits and norms. Peter Brook had already written in similar terms of art as burning a trace, though his terms suggest a more conscious combination emotion and argument:

> When a performance is over, what remains? Fun can be forgotten, but powerful emotion also disappears and good arguments lose their thread. When emotion and argument are harnessed to a wish from the audience to see more clearly into itself – then something in the mind burns. The

event scorches on to the memory an outline, a taste, a trace, a smell – a picture. [Brook 1968 152]

It seems that everything has to be right for this to work: the audience have to be committed to change and the combination of emotion and argument must be just right. On the other hand, Peter Handke's pieces discussed above, such as *Publikumsbechimpfung* and particularly *Quodlibet*, suggest using the limits of perception as a means to provoking the audience into a reflection on cultural norms and habits. His *Nachbild* idea suggests a way in which this half-perception might bypass our usual habits of perception:

'Wenn du von einem Gegenbild ein Nachbild erwartest', sagte er mir einmal, 'darfst du ihn keinesfalls fixieren, du must, dabei aufmerksam, durch ihn durschschauen, erst damit wird sein Nachbild verlässlich und beständig, und seine Gestalt wird an solchen Nachleuchten oft eher zu Entdeckungen führen als an dem Ding selber!' [Handke 1994 657]

Certainly, Handke's idea of 'durchschauen' seems to propose the same kind of half perception that is imposed on the audience in *Quodlibet*. As such, if the packaged and pre-digested phenomena of aestheticisation may be characterised in these cognitive terms as an enforced *passivity*, T. J. Clark's 'scrubbed and tweaked [...] receptivity', it might be that Handke's combination of partial

perception re-activates and re-engages the recipient's mind. This operates via a disturbance in expectations, a toying with assumptions and pre-determined cognitive connections. This returns to my distinction, in the course of my discussion of Lyotard in chapter three, between art as correspondence to reality (or the idea) and art as provocation to habits of mind, citing Christopher Butler's idea of art as 'reveal[ing] the way in which we conceive of the external world, which means that art of this kind does not (really) represent, but rather shows us how the mind might use signs to remind itself of aspects of the external world'. [Butler 1994 72]

Adorno also refers to art as generating an afterimage, a *Nachbild*, but in his case this is an image of a transcendental, primordial experience of fear, 'Nachbilder des vorweltlichen Schauers im Zeitalter der Vergegenständlichung'. [Adorno 1970 124, see also 428] This sounds like the same kind of experience that is central to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty [see Artaud 1993 33], but for me it is important that Handke's undermining of habitual cognitive patterns does not relinquish its connection to cultural context and content, whilst at the same time refusing to relegate art to mere representation of ideologically pre-determined positions. I have associated art which deploys silence or the imperceptible with a turn against the real, or a shaking off the obligation to represent, but implicit in my discussion of the ideological problems of silent and imperceptible art is the suggestion that such art is in fact still in thrall to the representation paradigm

(insofar as it represents a 'super-sensory idea'). My contention here is that Handke's fragmentary reference is more successful in dismantling or shaking the representative order. If I am right to characterise Handke's experimental drama as finding a middle path between non-reference and reference, can his work be said to remain true to the specificity of the aesthetic experience, at the same time as engaging with our ideologically tainted preconceptions? In my view it would be dismissive to characterise this cognitive intervention as a limited function of ideological statement. Does Handke's method here bridge the gap between what art can do that other things cannot and art understood as ideological critique? Is it really anywhere near critique? Might it suggest that the perceived gap between formalist aesthetic concerns and everyday life does not have to be bridged only via the understanding of the ontological or epistemological implications of the aesthetic realm, but via the kinds of experience it can foster offering vernacular interference in the patterns of habitual thinking? It is not a question of what such aesthetic experience can *tell* us about our assumptions, because it is by its very nature open-ended, but that it has a de-stabilising effect on our assumptions, forcing a kind of renewal.

In conclusion, there are clearly aspects of Handke and Beckett's works considered here that have crucial overlaps with Welsch's theorisation of the anaesthetic; instances where perception is obstructed, where perception or non-perception are thematised and where the fictionality of the aesthetic is

challenged. But there is clearly more going on in these pieces than Welsch's simple arrest of perception, such as the dismantling of dramatic form in the work of both dramatists, the critique of conventions of representation and the meditation on meaning. But this focus on such self-reflexive issues as dramatic convention and the possibility of meaning arguably renders the relationship of these pieces to aestheticised reality as esoteric as Welsch's anaesthetic. The problems I identified with Welsch's formulations, it will be remembered, were not only its incapacity for ideological engagement, but its tendency towards mysticism, and its failure to challenge – and indeed its arguable reinforcing of – art's separateness. As far as this latter is concerned, the conceptually difficult works in which anaesthetic elements dominate, like Handke's *Das Mündel* and Beckett *Not I*, seem to perpetuate a certain institutionality, in that their nature confines them to small, experimental theatres. But several features make Handke's art distinct, namely its explicit challenge to the audience and its incomplete but still partial cultural reference.

I have contrasted the open-endedness and lack of completion of Handke's work with the sense of completion of the silent or imperceptible work. Of course, there are certain instances of this kind of work which do demand input from the audience: the playing with the infinite in Pistoletto's 'Cube', and the provocation of contemplation by a work like Walter de Maria's 'Vertical Earth Kilometre'. But at the same time they carry with them a sense that whatever we do, we

cannot affect the other-worldly intrinsic nature of the work, it is in some way closed off from us. More pointedly, the implication hovers around these works that silence or absence enacts a reduction not just of sensory excess, but a negation of the untrue. I have made this point with reference to Welsch's ideas on fictionality in previous chapters. But whilst some of his remarks about silence suggest this investment, Handke's more openly jesting and provocative work is not so precious. Pertinent in this respect are Nietzsche's remarks on what is valuable about art. I have already referred to the function of the incomplete, but an understanding of the value of art as provocation might also be informed by his notion that we cannot get to truth by reduction, but must rather create anew: 'Nur als Schaffende können wir vernichten!' [See Nietzsche 1973 V 2 98] This sounds like Lyotard's sheer positivity, which I have criticised above as undialectical and unrealistic as a description of the way art works, a point which Handke's retention of fragmentary cultural reference underlines. And of course, we can criticise ideologically suspect phenomena by pointing out the disparity between what is being presented and what is being concealed. But the point for me in Nietzsche's remarks about creativity is that they emphasise the idea, rather than unpicking particular cognitive and cultural conditioning to isolate its falsity, of jolting us out of our present thinking by making new associations and combinations. It is precisely this kind of reinvigoration of the modernist aesthetic that was pioneered by Dada.

But this is no simple Lyotardian preference for joy over nostalgia: Dada shares other modernist movements' or practitioners' concerns about a modern world that was seen as excessively instrumental or utilitarian. But, as Richard Sheppard asserts, the Dadaists were the first movement to try to go forwards without first taking a nostalgic step backwards. [See Sheppard 1978 330] With other modernists the response to the view of language or culture as already corrupted as a means of genuine expression is precisely in the kind of refusal or silence that Welsch seems to opt for, either encapsulated in art, or the real silence of ceasing to produce art, the course taken by Hofmannsthal and Rimbaud. [See Sheppard 1978 330] The 'high' modernism of Pound, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Yeats and others tends to give in to a 'real pessimism' about language (and its failure to do justice to the 'real'), culture and humanity, for instance in the turn inwards of what Sheppard calls the 'peculiarly modern notion of literary language as "autotelic"'. [Sheppard 1978 328] But this seems to be the least fertile conception of modernist art, and might even be little more than an elitist response cloaked in humanist concern. Sheppard contrasts this high modernism with the positions and techniques of the Dadaists, which is not nostalgic for language's now lost capacity for communication, a broken unity between language and reality, but concerned to generate new combinations and associations. This combining seems to be the opposite of the aesthetic purity of Lyotard's Kantian 'aesthetic idea', and seems to survive by virtue of its interaction with expectations and attitudes that are not purely formalist. Culturally informed expectations are

disturbed by Dada's surprise effects, its excessive noise and its incongruous associations. In this way art becomes *counter-cultural*, and crucially for my concerns social rather than purely aesthetic. [See Sheppard 1978 333]

Emblematic of this counter-cultural nature of Dada's art for me is the sense that a high modernist aesthetics of silence is displaced by an aesthetics of sensory excess. In the essay cited above, Richard Sheppard contrasts high modernism's with Dada's 'total sensory stimulation and corporal engagement'. [Sheppard 1978 335] The resonance with Welsch's idea rehabilitating the sensory is evident here, and already in Handke's work this almost physical engagement is stated as a means of dismantling the representative hierarchy between stage and audience, for example in his *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, in which the Sprecher resort to the eponymous strategy of verbal abuse:

> Weil auch das Beschimpfen eine Art ist, mit Ihnen zu reden. Indem wir beschimpfen, können wir unmittelbar werden. [...] Wir können einen Funken überspringen lassen. Wir können den Spielraum zerstören. Wir können eine Wand niederreißen. [Handke 1992 38]

My concern in what follows however is not to return to Dada, but to ask whether more recent performance art (as well as Handke's) might operate with extremes

of perception in a way that might also be said to generate cognitive or ideological force. My focus will be on the dramatic work of Heiner Müller, which I will consider as a mode of art which certain perceptual and cognitive parallels to Welsch's ideas on the imperceptible. Like silence and imperceptibility, an excess of physical experience is seen as somehow slipping under (or perhaps above) the threshold of the representable. Elaine Scarry even goes so far as to assert that physical pain is 'language-destroying'. [Scarry 1985 19] But crucial questions for me will be whether this sensory excess makes a stronger case for intervening in and engaging with the anaestheticising effects of Welsch's aestheticised culture, and whether such art can combine Welsch's focus on perception or cognition with a treatment of ideological factors and cultural norms which seem to underlie his more cognitively sophisticated ideas on perception.

Chapter 6 · Theatre of Excess

'Wir sind nicht die Ärzte, wir sind der Schmerz.' Alexander Herzen[1]

Radical *aesthesis*: a counter-tradition

In the above discussions a recurrent problem of Welsch's formulations has been the fact that his meditation on the real and the fictional or the latent and unconscious habits that underlie perception are at variance with his proposal to read aesthetics in terms of the sensory. But arguably Welsch's focus on the sensory may ultimately be borne out insofar as we accept that the sensory must always be understood as a more complex economy than rudimentary sense data. It is in this sense that I cited in chapter two the sensory aspect of Viktor Shklovsky's ideas on defamiliarisation. Even what I have referred to as a more philosophical meditation by art on the 'status of the real' often turns to the sensory and material as a direct and incontrovertible instance of the real, as in Heidegger's idea of an 'unvermittelte Begegnenlassen der Dinge'. [Heidegger 1950 59] Both contribute to a diverse and more or less philosophical and more or less radically materialist tradition that I have associated with thinkers such as Lamettrie, Marx, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Marcuse. In chapter two I also cited

Susan Buck-Morss, who reads the enigmatic 'Nachwort' to Walter Benjamin's *Kunstwerk* essay in specifically sensory terms [see Buck-Morss 1992], and Benjamin is also an obvious precursor of Welsch in his analysis of the effects of modern technology on perception. His much-cited essay ends with the well-known reference to the aestheticisation of politics, referring of course to fascism, and with his famously enigmatic call to arms for a politicised art: 'Der Kommunismus antwortet ihm mit der Politisierung der Kunst.' [Benjamin 1974 469] Buck-Morss takes this as a reference to sensory or bodily knowledge, a concept of the body that she clarifies in a subsequent interview to be pre-symbolic but not pre-political. [See Kester 1997 40] Steve Giles is also on similar terrain when he interprets Benjamin's final words in the *Kunstwerk* essay in terms of Benjamin's remarks on Dada's 'tactile quality'. [Giles 1997 160] Giles likens this politicisation to the kind of art which Antonin Artaud's drama theory is seen to offer, characterised by 'revolutionary discharge and the collective body'. [Giles 1997 120] Artaud's curiously titled 'Theatre of Cruelty' valorises the sensory elements of performance as offering a way out of the dominance of theatre by words and by petty narratives of human psychology. [See Artaud 1993]

Both Artaud and Dada are important antecedents of a recent resurgence of *radically materialist* view of how art – and theatre in particular – can work, which

---

[1] Cited in Trifonow 1979 192.

Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf refer to as the many recent 'Varianten der Körperkunst'. [Kamper & Wulf 1982 9, see also Sierz 2001] It is in this sense that Stanton Garner for instance refers to the 'almost obsessive interest in the body as a political unit' after Brecht. [Garner 1990 145] Brecht himself is ambivalent about the status of the body in theatre. Analogous to his concerns about the limitations of mimetic representation, noted in chapter three, he registers the limitations of an aesthetic of 'Erlebnis' in an increasingly complex world. [See Brecht 1967 172] For Brecht this traditional notion of art has become outdated: 'Aber der alte Begriff der Kunst, vom Erlebnis her, fällt eben aus.' [Brecht 1967 172] In Brecht's view, paradoxically, and in a gesture that might be traced back to the early Romantics, something more 'Künstliches' or 'Gestelltes' is required for a representative depiction of society. [Brecht 1967 172] (Brecht's terms here refute the ideas of aesthetic immanence that were seen in my discussions of the sublime to give a somehow direct and non-conceptual experience of the real, but of course Brecht is interested in a very different kind of 'real' than that which inhabits Lyotard's 'Unpresentable', Adorno's 'Unkommunizierbare', or indeed that which Slavo Žižek refers to Lacan's 'das Ding, the impossible-real object of desire'. [Žižek 1989 194]) That said Brecht's early 'Lehrstücke' are a seminal moment in this tradition of corporeal theatre, which Rainer Nägele reads as an important and already Artaudian 'mutual interpenetration' of voice and body, indicating that learning is more than a simply cognitive process. [See Nägele 1987 112-20, here 113] As well as Artaud's ideas, a significant reference point in

what follows will be Nägele's idea of Heiner Müller's work (among others) as a

fusion of the corporeal and cognitive. [See Nägele 1987 112]

Moreover for Nägele it is not merely the sensory nature of Brecht's 'Lehrstücke'

but their *violence* and *cruelty* that are allied to the learning process. Not only a

twentieth century phenomenon, this sensory extreme has been repeatedly

valorised since the Romantics, evident in Byron's Romantic summation of

human existence: '[t]he great object of life is Sensation – to feel that we exist –

even though in pain.' [Cited in Marchand 1974 109] In Büchner's *Lenz* the

protagonist's half-hearted suicide attempts are more 'in Augenblicken der

fürchterlichen Angst oder der dumpfen, ans Nichtsein grenzenden Ruhe ein

Versuch, sich zu sich selbst zu bringen durch physischen Schmerz'. [Büchner

1957 33] Nozdrev in Gogol's *Dead Souls* is said to 'quarrel[] in order to feel,

beating on his face, the fists of inescapable, undeniable reality'. [Cited in Adams

1966 54] On the face of it this extreme sensory experience seems to have an

obvious claim to reality: in the 1932 essay 'Über den Schmerz' Ernst Jünger

characterises pain as the universal and unchanging category that is distinctive of

mankind. [See Jünger 1980 145] This is of course a singularly anthropocentric

view, and ironically this reality claim might be particularly persuasive because it

overturns that characteristic which is arguably more distinctive of man, namely

language. Elaine Scarry highlights pain's resistance to any rhetoric or

metaphorical remove, referring to the 'language-destroying' nature of real

physical pain. [Scarry 1985 35] The question for art is whether this anti-metaphorical aspect defuses its representative potential, or whether it might be said to guarantee its status as a kind of irreducible 'hyper-reality'.

In what follows I will relate certain aspects of this tradition to Wolfgang Welsch's concerns both regarding his reconfiguration of aesthetics in terms of sense perception and even his characterisation of contemporary culture as aestheticised. In particular I will look at the theatre and the ideas of Heiner Müller, referring amongst other things to his use of violence and sensory excess, his Artaudian turn against word, and what seems to be a radically materialist concept of history. In chapter two I suggested significant differences between the disparate valorisations of the sensory, including a counterweight to the dominance of ideas, a radical critique of the assumptions of conceptual thinking, and the valorisation of an enigmatic 'real'. Heiner Müller will be seen to share something with a number of these positions. Moreover in spite of the apparent contrast with Handke and Beckett's minimalism there will be key overlaps in terms of the challenge set to perception and cognition, which will be central to my conceptualisation of this kind of art as belonging to the terms of Welsch's reconfiguration of aesthetics. The question for Müller's theatre is whether it can offer a means of engaging with cognitive habits, combating manipulated consciousness and addressing the varied phenomena of aestheticisation, and to

what extent it too is limited to questions of mere sensory perception or turns to more philosophical issues of truth and authenticity.

Heiner Müller: anti-minimalist

Central to my discussion in the previous chapter was the way Handke specifically thematises and problematises audience perception, with obstructive ruptures and blind-spots and fragmentary reference emphasizing the audience's inability to generate a coherent story or convincing 'reality'. Similar strategies of 'non-perception' are evident in the drama of Heiner Müller, for example in the Bochum premiere of *Der Auftrag*, which borrowed the format of a 'peep-show'. The idea was to highlight the imperfect position of the audience as voyeurs, as Müller remarks in one interview,

> daß man den Zuschauern klarmachen muß, daß sie Voyeure sind. Voyeure können nie alles sehen, was sie sehen wollen. So haben wir einen Raum entworfen, der das Publikum immer wieder zum Teil ausschließt aus dem Geschehen. [Müller 1986 136]

Müller suggests a similar device for staging the first part of *Verkommenes Ufer* [Müller 2002 84], and as far as Welsch's formulations are concerned, this

reduction of spectator to voyeur has its parallel in Welsch's understanding of the anaesthetic in everyday life as the mediation of reality by distance and images (although Welsch's suggestion of the 'instante Erfüllbarkeit' of desires in the 'Welt der Telekommunikation' [Welsch 1990 18] brushes over any question of whether simulation is any less real or satisfying than actual physical contact). In contrast to Handke's non-perception, the erotic overtones of this device, in keeping with the 'nacktes Glied' and 'Traum von einem ungeheuren/Beischlaf in Chikago/Blutbeschmierte Weiber/In den Leichenhallen' which inhabit Müller's *Verkommenes Ufer* [Müller 2002 73-4], are not so much sacred as profane. As these graphic images suggest, Müller's theatre is in some ways at direct cross-purposes with theatre which operates through imperceptibility and understatement. If Müller mentions silence, it is always a problem, something to regret. So when Norbert Eke calls Müller an 'Arrangeur der Abwesenheit' [Eke 1999 198] he is referring to a specific absence, namely the absence of revolution. In *Lessings Schlaf Traum Schrei* the central figure refers to his costly preference for silence: 'verbrannt von meiner immer heftigeren Sehnsucht nach Schweigen. Ich habe die Taubstummen um ihre Stille beneidet im Geschwätz der Akademien.' [Müller 1983 35] And in terms that directly connect with Welsch's essay 'Ästhetik und Anästhetik', in one interview Müller takes issue with Botho Strauß's work for its thematisation, and passive acceptance, of the 'zunehmende Unsichtbarkeit von Geschichte'. [Müller 1986 154] For Müller, this paradoxically renders Strauß a mere 'Fotograf' [Müller 1986 148], which is presumably

informed by Brecht's understanding of the limitations of realist photography referred to in chapter three. The question is how Heiner Müller claims to do more, and with what success.

Müller also rounds on the formal method of Beckett's minimalism as a theatrical cul-de-sac. It is no coincidence that the occasion of Müller's criticism of Beckett is his Büchner Prize acceptance speech, 'Die Wunde Woyzeck' (1985): for Müller, Beckett's theatre is trivial in comparison to the searing and painful vision of a playwright like Büchner, 'dem die Parzen bei der Geburt die Augenlider weggeschnitten haben'. [Hörnigk 1990 115] This echoes Gilles Deleuze's idea of the politicised writer as one who has experienced an 'excess of life' and who 'returns from what he has seen and heard with red eyes and pierced eardrums.' [Deleuze 1997 2] Welsch himself cites Buñuels *Andalusischem Hund*, 'wo ein Rasiermesser durch ein Auge schneidet' [Welsch 1990 37], which seems to be an instance of what he refers to as 'radikale Schnitte' which cut into 'ästhetische Gewohnheiten'. [Welsch 1990 37] This idea of 'ästhetische Gewohnheiten', which in Welsch's terms might mean either artistic norms or broader cultural habits of perception, another point I will take up below.

Thematic treatment of violence

The consideration of sensory excess as a formal or technical strategy might provisionally be distinguished from Müller's treatment of physical violence as a (historical) theme, whereby his gruesome texts are littered with bloody bodies and graphic violence, as the Hamlet figure in *Die Hamletmaschine* explains, 'WEILS BRAUCH IST EIN STÜCK EISEN STECKEN IN/DAS NÄCHSTE FLEISCH ODER INS ÜBERNÄCHSTE'. [Müller 2001 546] Most extreme in this respect are the pervasive brutality in Müller's version of *Macbeth* (1971) and the bloodbath of the later *Anatomie Titus Fall of Rome Ein Shakespearekommentar* (1984). Though largely faithful to Shakespeare's original, Müller's version of *Macbeth* distinguishes itself by its gruesome embodiment of relations of power. Duncan, for example, is introduced 'auf Leichen sitzend, die zu einem Thron geschichtet sind.' [Müller 2001 269] This is echoed later, when Macbeth justifies the plotted regicide in graphic corporeal terms: 'Ich war sein Fleischer. Warum nicht sein Aas/Auf meinen Haken. Ich hab seinen Thron ihm/Befestigt und erhöht mit Leichenhaufen.' [Müller 2001 274] Later he speaks of preventing his own demise with 'Ein Wall aus Leichen gegen meinen Tod'. [Müller 2001 309]

This corporality reflects the violence of Duncan's regime, as distinct from the latter's benevolence in Shakespeare's original. Macduff and Lennox's exchange with the hung-over porter on coming to wake the dead king, for example, turns suddenly and brutally violent:

MACDUFF   Soll ich dich an die Pforte nageln, Pförtner.

Tut es mit dem Schwert.

LENOX   Ich will dir Beine machen, Armstumpf. Lauf.

Haut ihm das Stelzbein ab. Beide lachen. [Müller 2001 284]

Later, Macduff rips out a servant's tongue, cutting off midstream his typically Shakespearian rhetorical flourish: 'Der König ist der König. Und/Ists der nicht ists ein andrer. Der oder der.' [Müller 2001 286] Macbeth's regime is one in which fear of violence secures fealty: 'ich besteh nicht auf Beweisen/Solang die Furcht Euch in der Treue hält'. [Müller 2001 310-1] But the soldiers' skinning alive of the traitorous Lord in Scene 18 brings out the proximity of Macbeth's violent order to chaos, only hinted at in Shakespeare's original, in a world in which not only servants, but noblemen are the victims of summary violence. Not that Macbeth is distinguished for his particular violence: in Scene 22 the English conquerors are shown to be no better than their Scottish counterparts, and at the end, rather than celebrating the return of benevolent governance, Malcolm has Macduff killed for fear of him covetting the crown: 'Wißt/Ihr könnt nicht spielen mit dem Knaben Malcolm./Für Euren Kopf ist Platz auf meinem Speer.' [Müller 2001 324] As Kalb notes, '[t]he world in this Macbeth, like that in Anatomy of Titus, never possesses any political health or divine order to which it can be restored by return of a rightful monarch'. [Kalb 1998 89]

Macbeth's gruesome but incidental violence descends into a fully-blown bloodbath in *Anatomie Titus Fall of Rome*, whose corporality is already emphasised in Müller's title. In its gruesomeness, Müller's version is little different from Shakespeare's original story of murderous revenge: in both the violence culminates in the scene in which Titus invites Tamora and Saturnin to a conciliatory banquet at which they are served their own heirs, and the exposure of Tamora's marital infidelity precipitates a string of killings in which all the main characters are serially disposed of. The key difference between Müller's and Shakespeare's versions is that, rather than Shakespeare's off-stage dispatches, the violence in Müller's version is more explicit, with the string of brutal murders supposedly taking place on stage, after the murdered bastard infant son is thrown onto the table. [Müller 2002 186-8]

Müller is resistant to simple considerations of the 'Maß an Brutalität' in these plays [Müller 1990 23], so one might ask what their purpose is. At one level it seems to be a presentation of History as violent, underlined by the remark in *Anatomie Titus*: 'DAS DENKMAL IST EIN TORSO UNTER DEM BEIL.' [Müller 2002 129] Humanity is here exposed by and in all its brutality, as Müller makes clear in the couplet on the title page to the play: 'Der Menschheit/Die Adern aufgeschlagen wie ein Buch/Im Blutstrom blättern'. [Müller 2002 99] So does this violence get in the way of Müller's theatre as history? For Bernhard Greiner, this violent action precludes any treatment of the historical continuum. [Greiner

362

1990 73] But alternatively, Müller's version of history might be understood as a radically materialist one, rectifying the 'zunehmende Unsichtbarkeit der Geschichte' in Botho Strauß's work. The historical authenticity of Müller's plays is the opposite of *inaccessible*, and might be said to be closer to the 'reality' of medieval political violence and power play. Might this be said to redress the imbalance identified by Leslie Adelson, 'that the grand abstraction of history would seem to obliterate the very concrete stuff of which it is made'? [Adelson 1993 1] Does it rectify the process of abstraction that Bryan Turner calls the 'submergence' of the body from history and theory? [Turner 1984 34]

Greiner is right that only a limited kind of history is presented in Müller's work. Although the focus on the personages and stories of classical drama still seems to be the stuff of what Negt and Kluge call 'long-distance history' [cited in Adelson 1993 12], *Anatomie Titus*, more so than *Macbeth*, is theatre not of ideas, but of murderous action seemingly stripped of all political intrigue. This exemplifies what Hans-Thies Lehmann identifies as a focus on the corporeal in theatre more generally: 'An die Stelle des mentalen Duells [...] rückt die körperliche Motorik.' [Lehmann 1999 367] Unreflected violence solves the problem of passivity and the paralysis of action by thought – Nietzsche's 'Hamlet-Problem', perhaps the obstacle to revolution in Müller's view – but for Theo Girshausen, this action is only made possible by delusion: 'Die Erkenntnis tötet das Handeln, zum Handeln gehört das Umschleiertsein durch die Illusion.' [Girshausen 1978 98-9]

In particular, action seems to be uncomplicated by ethical questions. *Anatomie Titus* dispenses with any moral discussion. Untroubled by guilt, the only backward glance in what Bernhard Greiner calls 'die Fortführung der Blutspur' [Greiner 1990 70] is one of revenge.

It is apparent that this kind of excessive theatre can treat themes, such as revolutionary action and the nature of History, but the focus on sheer and physical action raises the question of whether Müller's theatre suffers from the same incapacity for ideological subtlety as I have associated with Welsch's imperceptible art. Of course this materialist version of history that focuses on corporality is already ideologically charged, inasmuch as it holds up a tangible reality this side of 'long-distance' versions of history and those that centre on the question of how we got where we are today. But this model of history is something of a straw target, and the sensationalisation of history is an equally pressing problem in contemporary culture.

Andreas Keller associates the preference for the corporeal over the abstract with vitalist philosophy: 'Gegen die Sublimierung der vitalen Lebensinteressen in der zivilisierten Welt setzt Müller die sinnliche Revolte triebhafter Körperlichkeit.' [Keller 1994 111] But what makes Müller's corporality particularly vitalist, and as far as the issue of ideology is concerned, what are vitalism's politics? Is it forged only by the crude brutality – as a kind of anti-Enlightenment gesture – of

Heiner Müller's pieces? It is all very well for violent art to 'show what humans are capable of' [Sierz 2001 239], to thematise the violence of history and society, but an important question is whether this new brutalism, which has also been an important current in recent British and Irish theatre [see Sierz 2001], indicates or contributes to a worrying loss of humanity and compassion in the audience. Is Müller's land beyond subjectivity also a land beyond humanity? Antonin Artaud claims that violence can have a pacifying effect:

> Violent, concentrated action is like lyricism; it calls forth supernatural imagery, a bloodshed of images, a bloody spirit of images inside the poet's head as well as in the audience's. Whatever conflicts may obsess the mentality of the times, I defy any spectator infused with the blood of violent scenes [...] to indulge in thoughts of war, riot or motiveless murder. [Artaud 1993 62]

But this seems to be naïve to the problem of desensitisation – which might without too much contortion be associated with Benjamin's aestheticisation of politics – as well as the fact that the people who are alive to the didactic quality of violent imagery are probably not the kind to start wars or riots.

As far as Müller's work is concerned, any vitalist-type valorisation of murderous action there must contend with the fact that in his plays bodies tend to be treated

as the locus of conflict and abuse, rather than as a moment of resistance. This might point to a deeper humanity in some of Müller's treatments of pain and suffering. In contrast to the treatment of murderous violence as sheer and arresting action in Müller's Shakespeare adaptations, dismembered bodies and death are a constant undercurrent in Müller's more impressionistic and lyrical pieces. So whilst it is fair for Horst Domdey to emphasize Müller's focus on the moral burden of *Täter* [Domdey 1991 100], his version of history is also peopled by a succession of victims' bodies. I have already mentioned the 'Blutbeschmierte Weiber' which people the start of *Verkommenes Ufer*, and in the rest of the piece dead bodies inhabit the same world as the living. When Medea accuses her husband Jason, the murderer of her brother, of marital infidelity, for example, she stands there, 'den zerstückten/ Bruder im Arm'. [Müller 2002 74] Even the living are condemned as 'Gespenster/Der Toten des Krieges der morgen stattfinden wird'. [Müller 2002 81] Not relegated to history, violence and death is insisted on as a necessary and ever-present part of life, as suggested explicitly in the parody of the Lord's Prayer in *Die Hamletmaschine*: 'Unseren täglichen Mord gib uns heute'. [Müller 2001 551] In contrast to the idea of the amorality of murderous action above, these bodies seem to function as a reminder of injustice: 'Die Toten starren nicht ins Fenster/Sie trommeln nicht auf dem Abort/Das sind sie Erde von den Überlebenden beschissen'. [Müller 2002 74]

But the corporality in Müller's pieces is not only a reassertion of this 'submerged' aspect of history, whether the moral reminder of the forgotten victim or the vitalist's amoral carnival of violence. Rather it goes beyond mere *thematics* and marks a deployment of physical excess as a *formal* strategy, and moreover one that touches on the question of what is essential to drama. For Julian Hilton, the distinction between form and theme, whilst elastic, is crucial to drama, marking the schism between drama's *literary* aspect and its specific quality as *performance*. [Hilton 1987 8-11] Hilton identifies a literary bias from the outset of drama theory, with the relegation of questions of performance and spectacle in Aristotle's *Poetics* to an optional extra, the stuff of mere stage mechanics. [Hilton 1987 7-11] Of course, this reading of Aristotle overlooks the fact that his central concept of *catharsis* presupposes a certain impact in the audience [see Aristotle 1996 10], as well as the fact that a central component of a tragic plot for Aristotle is suffering, which 'is an action that involves destruction or pain (e.g. Deaths in full view, extreme agony, woundings and so on.)' [Aristotle 1996 19] But it is certainly fair to locate Müller in a broader movement in twentieth century drama which aims to redress the balance of theatre in favour of performance and spectacle.

The reassertion of the physical aspect of performance is articulated most persuasively in Antonin Artaud's ideas on theatre, for whom theatre's medium is not *verbal* but *sensory* – a concrete and physical experience for an audience who 'think with their senses first'. [Artaud 1993 65] Müller's own comments on theatrical technique in interviews and essays echo those of Artaud. In terms of production, he speaks of an artist's skill as consisting of 'auf den eigenen Körper zu hören und den eigenen Körperrythmus in das entsprechende Medium umzusetzen. [...] Kunst kommt aus dem Körper und nicht aus einem vom Körper getrennten Kopf.' [Müller 1990 128-9] Certainly, performers of Müller's *Hamletmaschine* have remarked on the need 'sich auf sich und ihre Körperlichkeit [zu] konzentrieren'. [Girshausen 1978 67] The parallel is apparent here with Beckett's focus on the rudiments of perception, discussed in the last chapter, and both writer-directors have elicited similar responses from their collaborators. In Beckett this return to the body imposes a simplicity in the performance, a minimalist turn against special effects and props, which works in parallel to the 'Subtraktion' of meaning and the 'Verlust aller Qualität'. [Adorno 1961 195] But Müller's pieces can hardly be described as minimalist, and as I will discuss below for the recipient the sensory nature of the experience is manifest in anything but a paring down of perception.

This reassertion of the body is in part also a meditation on issues of aesthetic representation and the status of art as 'real', akin to the turn against theatre's fictionality in Handke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung* and *Das Mündel*. I have already cited Scarry's notion of pain as 'language-destroying' [Scarry 1985 35], and likewise David Garner sees the body *in extremis* as 'occupy[ing] the non-linguistic space behind the play's verbal edifice'. [Garner 1990 153] Artaud's focus on the sensory is motivated by the wish to undo this relegation of the body as mere mouthpiece and vehicle of words and ideas, and to free it from its subservience to words, which Rice and Malone call its status as 'just the graphic representation of the written word'. [Rice & Malone 1993 113] The question is what fills this vacuum left by the evacuation of metaphorical meaning. The valorisation of the body as somehow an immediate experience of seemingly vital forces coincides with Foucault's conception of the body as *resistant in-itself* to ideology or consciousness. [See Foucault 1980 58] Certainly the emphasis on the physicality of the players shifts the focus from any generative or linear narrative to what Bernhard Greiner calls the 'Ereignischarakter des Theaters' in Müller's work [Greiner 1990 79], which would seem to satisfy what Frederic Jameson has referred to as aesthetics' 'hunger for the sheer event'. [Jameson 1991 309] The parallel is apparent between this immanence and Peter Handke's theatre, in which the *Sprecher* refute the connection of the things on stage with other, absent

referents: there authenticity is derived from absence, that is to say the evacuation from art of the fleeting and fictional; Müller's physicality and corporality suggests an opposite but essentially similar irresistible presence. David Graver also cites the example of the Fakir, a pain artist, whose effect on the audience is notable, generating an 'overpowering sense of reality' and an 'imposing immediacy' [Graver 1995 61, 53] bearing out what I have referred to above as a subversion of the metaphorical relation by a kind of 'immediacy'. But at its extreme corporality and performance are presumably mutually exclusive. David Graver, for instance, registers the tension between violence and theatrical representation as one in which the formal conventions of theatre are broken, that '[v]iolence generally destroys theatricality' and is 'hard to hold within a theatrical context'. [Graver 1995 43, 46] As in Handke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, violence contravenes the distance generated by the formal conventions and representative order of theatre, a point brought graphically to its logical conclusion in Joe Coleman's 'Kitchen', in which the artist threatens the audience with a gun, until they leave the auditorium. [See Graver 1995 49]

But it surely does not follow from this 'immediacy' that the body is in some way immune from ideological investment. It has after all been 'over-written' with many cultural and political ideas, such as the body alienated by labour, abused by torture, or manipulated into the body beautiful in the ideal world of the advertiser. At very least this alleged immanence seems to be a quintessentially

philosophical valorisation of the physical. Jacques Derrida, in his essay on Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', defines this anti-representative sensory as the attempt to reach an

> inaccessible limit of a representation which is not repetition, of a re-presentation which is full presence, which does not carry its double within itself as its death, of a present which does not repeat itself, that is of a present outside time, a nonpresent. [Derrida 1978 248]

This is of course a curious position for the antagonist of the 'metaphysics of presence' [see for example Derrida 1978 280] to take. This paradoxical idea of a 'nonpresent' seems to echo Kant's 'transcendent', which is to say those objects which we can never experience with our senses, and underlines the highly philosophy reading of this allegedly immanent experience. (It is worth noting in this respect that a similar shadow of metaphysics also falls over Antonin Artaud writings on theatre and the aesthetic, insofar as his ultimate answer to the question of what the corporeal, sensory, wordless and anti-psychological in drama is getting at is expressed in terms of 'certain predominant powers, certain ideas governing everything' [Artaud 1993 60] and 'the great metaphysical fear underlying all ancient theatre'. [Artaud 1993 32]) Moreover Derrida's valorization of the sensory extreme as breaking out of the metaphysical order of

representation seems to mix metaphors with his characterization of metaphysics'

'logocentrism' as operating by a kind of violence. [See Derrida 1978 79ff]

The sensory as anti-conceptual

That said, Müller also refers to the body as antithetical to discursive or

conceptual understanding, asserting with respect to a ballet dancer's body: 'Ein

Körper ist unverständlich. Ein Körper läßt sich nicht analysieren. [...] Man kann

ihn nicht verstehen. Man nimmt ihn wahr.' [Müller 1990 43] For Müller, even a

poetic text can operate at the level of the sensory: 'Wenn ich einen Text, einen

poetischen Text, lese, dann will ich den zunächst mal nicht verstehen. Ich will

ihn irgendwie aufnehmen, aber mehr als eine sinnliche Tätigkeit denn als eine

begriffliche.' [Müller 1990 43] Florian Vaßen refers to this focus on the body as

'politisches Körpertheater' [Vaßen 1992 25], but what exactly are the politics

here? Crucial is of course vitalism's primacy of the bodily over the conceptual,

which I registered above with reference to Keller's idea of the desire to overturn

civilization's 'Sublimierung der vitalen Lebensinteressen'. [Keller 1994 111] One

might associate this with a general post-1960s counter-cultural movement, what

Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf refer to as the 'lang erwartete Blockade des

Zivilationsprozesses'. [Kamper & Wulf 1982 9] But of course this anti-conceptual

and counter-cultural gesture has its roots in the eighteenth century, as discussed

in chapter two. Its most articulate proponent would be Nietzsche, for whom, in Gunther Marten's words, '[d]er Leib, der am Gesamtleben partizipierende Organismus, ist [...] eine solidere Grundlage des Erkenntnis als die begrenzende ratio des Menschen'. [Martens 1971 41] This quote comes from a book in which Martens elaborates the links between vitalism and Expressionism, characterizing vitalism as the conviction of the 'begriffliche Unfaßbarkeit des Phänomens'. [Martens 1971 35]

Identifying the deleterious effects of conceptual thinking is all very well, but what can a sensory extreme experience offer as an alternative? This question reiterates that of what politics or ideology might inhabit this vitalist aesthetic: does it propose itself as an immanent and irreducible value or might the sensory extreme be seen to operate at a conceptual or ideological level? In places Müller's utterances echo Artaud's fairly crude antipathy towards the verbal and the conceptual: 'Ich hab ja gar keine Ideen. Ich habe nie Ideen gehabt'. [Müller 1990 127] He also refers to the experience of art 'mehr als eine sinnliche Tätigkeit denn als eine begriffliche' [Müller 1990 43], and his theatre is conceived as a backlash by the body against ideas. In one letter he writes of the body on stage as offering resistance 'gegen die Notzucht durch den Sachzwang der Ideen, das WORT DAS MORD WIRD'. [Müller 1989 63] Andreas Keller reiterates this opposition of the corporeal to the conceptual: 'Besondere Bedeutung gewinnen für Müller Naturphänomen, die sich nicht auf ein konkretes begriffliches

Konzept zurückführen lassen.' [Keller 1994 111] And the stage offers precisely a forum for such 'Naturphänomen', in particular the violent body, which Müller describes as the 'Rebellion des Körpers gegen die Ideen, genauer: gegen die Wirkung von Ideen, von der Idee der Geschichte, auf menschliche Körper.' [Müller 1982 76]

The self-correction in the last sentence here points to a difference that might be significant, inasmuch the body pitted against ideas is a conceptual opposition, whereas the body pitted against the effects of ideas is a (more) practical opposition. Müller does not elaborate on what he means by this reference to the 'effect' of ideas. Does it refer to the themes referred to above of the succession of victims, or the broader 'submergence' of the body in history? The shift from thematic terrain to formal devices seems to precipitate a move to more philosophical or at least theoretical concerns centring on the turn against representation and the concept. These formal or philosophical issues can lead art into a self-reflexive cul-de-sac. Precisely one of the problems I associated with minimalism and the related refusal of reference in the last chapter is that it precludes the treatment of all but the most existential themes and issues. But just as Müller is unconvinced by the capitulation of Botho Strauß's 'increasingly invisible history', he also refuses to be distracted from thematic treatment. Moreover in my view the corporeal aspect cannot be said to work entirely at variance with the ideas and themes in Müller's theatre, and indicates that a more

grounded and this essentially philosophical opposition between bodies and ideas must be discarded for an understanding of their interaction. I can discern two levels on which this interaction takes place; firstly, the recognition that the body and the conceptual are not separate. The irruptions of the body in Müller's works cannot only be understood in the purely philosophical terms of anti-conceptuality or the vitalist turn against representation and the word, but rather as enacting a complaint against that which has been carried out on the body in the name if ideas: 'Solang es Ideen gibt, gibt es Wunden. Ideen bringen den Körper Wunden bei.' [Müller 1986 97] Even if ideas (and perhaps ideology) are ultimately at the root of physical actions the recognition here is that the physical domain is not something to be unproblematically valorised. Secondly, this interaction between body and ideas happens at a formal level within his work, and in my view goes to the heart of Müller's *formal* theatrical method. This deploys what I have already suggested, with reference to Rainer Nägele, is a 'mutual interpenetration' of corporeal and the cognitive which indicates that learning is more than a simply cognitive process. [See Nägele 1987 113] The formal nature of this interaction might suggest an increasingly esoteric and difficult mode of art, but I hope to show that this does not preclude the more practical dimension that Müller's reference to 'Wirkung' seems to be hinting at. In what follows I will elaborate two aspects of this arguably more 'practical' terrain, the first focussing on the producers of art, and the second on its recipients.

Enforced experiment

A crucial aspect of Müller's method does seem to be accurately described by Derrida's idea of an 'unrepeatable' artistic act: that is its enforced experimentation. The violence which peppers Müller's texts makes them extremely difficult to produce, and even harder to do so *seriously*. Performers have commented on the difficulty of enacting Müller's work [see Girshausen 1978 68], and the challenge to production is if anything compounded by Müller's many instructions to producers in the notes to his texts. Müller's remarks suggest that his work as something for those involved in making it, an idea that goes some way to refuting art's reduction to a perfect product [see Girshausen 1978 76], an object for passive consumption. In particular this difficulty for performers seems to be generated by Müller's treatment of identity and subjectivity, to which I will return below. More generally it is Müller's opinion that there can and should be no *perfect* production of his work, in view of his conception of literature as a fluid process of trial and error: 'Der Schreibgestus ist der des Forschers, nicht der des Gelehrten, der Forschunsergebnisse interpretiert, oder des Lehrers, der sie weitergibt.' [Müller 1989 35-6] In this respect, his work fulfils Brecht's *formal* and *technical* mandate, which Müller himself cites: 'Theater theatert alles ein, also muß man ständig dem Theater etwas in den Rachen

schieben, was das Theater nicht verdauen kann.' [Müller 1990 47] (This 'theatert alles ein' is echoed in Welsch's idea of art that turns against its ability to present everything.) Girshausen notes Müller's intention, 'Texte nicht spielbar zu machen, damit der Widerspruch ins Bewußtsein tritt und in der Arbeit ständig präsent ist.' [Girshausen 1978 66] This enforced 'Streben nach Originalität' [Georg Simmel, cited in Martens 1971 72] promotes experiment, which Andreas Keller associates with risk and experience: 'ein Risiko, ein Abenteuer, eine Erfahrung'. [Keller 1994 109] (Keller's use of terms here might go against that of Benjamin and others opposition between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, but the focus on the momentary and unrepeatable experience seems to be the same.)

Of course this unrepeatable experience is not without its philosophical aspect: I have cited Derrida above on the anti-representational force of such 'immanent' and unrepeatable theatre, but Gilles Deleuze is arguably an even more fruitful interlocutor for Heiner Müller. In *Difference and Repetition* (1968), he employs the term 'repetition' in the opposite way to Derrida, such that a 'theatre of repetition' is opposed to a theatre of representation, 'just as movement is opposed to the concept and to representation which refers back to the concept.' [Deleuze 1994 10] The double-edged nature of this compulsion to repeat and to act comes of course from Nietzsche's paradoxical concept of 'eternal return', which for him lends all the more weight to our actions. Other characteristics of Heiner Müller's work are reflected in Deleuze's – essentially Artaudian – theatre of repetition: the

idea of a 'language that speaks before words' and 'masks before faces', with spectres and phantoms before characters'. But my references to themes above speak against the ideas of a 'direct link' between theatre and nature and history and the notion of a theatre of 'pure forces'. [All quotes Deleuze 1994 10] Moreover, in my view the more formal focus on the experience of the participants introduces more located, marginal and cognitive implications of Müller's theatre.

Obstructed reception

The second locus of the marginal and cognitive implications of Müller's work is the recipient. I have already mentioned the shadow of metaphysics that falls over Antonin Artaud writings on theatre and the aesthetic. But alongside his references to the 'Idea' which hangs somewhere beyond individual psychology Artaud refers to a seemingly more grounded consciousness: '[t]here is no cruelty without consciousness, without the application of consciousness.' [Artaud 1993 80] And whilst Artaud writes of theatre as needing 'first of all to appeal to the senses' and first 'tak[ing] care to satisfy the senses' [Artaud 1993 27, 28], the physical does not occur as an immanent moment, but is intended to unsettle the 'dead' or 'obvious' ideas which have become habitual and second nature, or those ideas that bolster the individual psychology. It is in the same vein that

Karl Heinz Bohrer refers to the shocking effect of loud noises, which 'die Grenzen des Bewußtseins sprengt'. [Bohrer 1978 170] Such references to habits and the limits of consciousness return to the cognitive terrain which I argued in the last chapter might be taken to 'ground' Handke and to a lesser extent Beckett's work.

Contrary to Derrida's 'full presence', the sensory aspect of Müller's formal method seems to be at least in part a means to *disunity*. His pieces work to resist the processes of abstraction or intellection in the recipient, which for Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglas, are the primary adaptive responses which limit the 'absolute originality and unforeseeability' of experience. [Burwick & Douglas 1992 4] The common ground with Simmel's 'Streben nach Originalität' is evident here, albeit read in a cognitive rather than purely formal sense. And as far as my discussion is concerned, these ideas of originality and unforeseeability indicate that Müller's theatre is not simply a return to the physical, but also a meditation on issues of meaning, reference and cognitive preconditions to understanding.

In the first place, we should certainly take Müller's confession that literature is alien to him with a pinch of salt. [See Müller 1986 93] In contrast to Artaud's invective against the 'word', Müller's plays are characterised by their verbal richness, indicating a more complex interaction with Western linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as a refusal of a simplistic preference for the corporeal.

Significantly for Müller the writer, *words* are the go-between between ideas and the body: they are behind the pain caused by deeds, as Titus in *Anatomie Titus* complains: 'Tribunen/Reden mit ihren Zungen Männer tot'. [Müller 2002 131] And in view of the still very 'literary' quality of Müller's dramas, it is apparent that characteristics of sheer presence and physicality do not convincingly describe them. After all, his own comments notwithstanding, Müller's theatre is never simply 'physical' or 'sensory'. It is never a primitivist reduction to the experience of rudimentary elements of sense data, sounds rather than meaning, that Elizabeth Wright calls the 'experience of the splitting of perception'. [Wright 1989 131] Rather, Müller's radical avant-garde works operate at the level of reference, register, and identity, albeit confused and disordered, as he stipulates in the 'Anmerkung' to *Mauser*: 'die Reaktionen des Publikums [werden] durch Asynchronität von Text und Spiel, Nichtidentität von Sprecher und Spieler [kontrolliert].' [Müller 2001 259] Implicit in Artaud's rejection of theatre as psychology is the critique of theatre as narrative, and as with Handke and Beckett's work, narrative coherence is a casualty of Müller's formal method. Sometimes the disorder is inherent in the written texts, as in *Die Hamletmaschine* and *Verkommenes Ufer*, sometimes it is brought out in the production, for example, in Werner Gerber's production of *Bildbeschreibung* in the Literaturhaus in Berlin, where the text was both read out and a recording of it played over a PA, with additional music: 'Gelesen von Werner Gerber *gegen* ein Tonband'. [Promotional leaflet (my emphasis)] Similarly, this aim of confused signification

motivates Müller's suggested production strategy of overlapping action on stage in *Leben Gundling*. [Müller 1988 409] (For Nietzsche this kind of obstruction of understanding has always been crucial to opera: 'alle ihre Meister lassen es sich angelegen sein, zu verhüten, dass man ihre Personen verstehe'. [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 112])

So rather than Artaud's scepticism towards any and all conceptual meaning, Müller seems to valorise works which frustrate the audience's expectation of a 'single' or 'unified' meaning. As Girshausen writes of *Die Hamletmaschine*, 'Der Text weigert sich der Interpretation nach hermeneutischem Muster.' [Girshausen 1978 109] In this respect, Sarah Kane's reflections on the audience and critical responses to her debut play, *Blasted*, are interesting. As much as the onstage violence, she notes that

> the element that most outrages those who seek to impose censorship is form. Beckett, Barker, Pinter, Bond – they have all been criticized not so much for the content of their work, but because they use non-naturalistic forms that elude simplistic interpretation. [...] I more or less abandoned the audience to craft their own response to the imagery by denying them the safety of familiar form. [Quoted in Sierz 2001 102]

This denial of familiar form and the probematisation of meaning, which seems to be an instance of Adorno negated meaning as distinct from plain meaninglessness ('nicht Undeutlichkeit an sich, negierte Deutlichkeit' [Adorno 1970 438]), motivates Müller's preference for Kafka's parables over those of Brecht:

> weil sie Gesten ohne Bezugssystem beschreibt/darstellt, nicht orientiert auf eine Bewegung (Praxis), auf eine Bedeutung nicht reduzierbar, eher fremd als verfremdend, ohne Moral. [...] Die Blindheit von Kafkas Erfahrung ist der Ausweis ihrer Authentizität. [Müller 1989 30-1]

This notion of blindness as authenticity is another expression of Michael Hardt's 'negative metaphysics', which I have characterized elsewhere as resting on 'poetics of silence'. This sense of truth as ungraspable recurs elsewhere in Müller's writings, for example in the notes to *Mauser* Müller writes of the fleeting quality of any truth: 'die Authentizität des ersten Blicks auf ein Unbekanntes'. [See Vaßen 1990 194] This sounds very much like Handke's *Nachbild*, though the momentary nature of this authenticity suggests a truth that is extinguished as soon as it is conceptually or rationally grasped. The common ground, again, with Benjamin and others' opposition of *Erfahrung/Erlebnis* is clear, and the implication is that any understanding is falsification, whether truth is corrupted by the culturally predetermined norms which govern perception, or whether

positive truth is not possible because of the necessary mediating moment of reflection. Similarly, the description of Kafka's work as 'eher fremd als verfremdend' suggests that it refuses any kind of recuperation into thematically useful meaning. So does this reading of Kafka argue against the idea of Müller's own formal method as offering a more tangible reconnection with the issues of aestheticisation? In my view this reading of Kafka is uncharacteristic for Müller, and contradicts with the concerns about the 'invisibility of History' that in my view are more central to his work. Crucially in my view the emphasis on the physical as well as psychological in Müller's theatre navigates a line somewhere between the idea of truth as inherently inaccessible (and true by virtue of that inaccessibility) and the suggestion that the theatrical body is a somehow inherently anti-ideological and immanent *Realpräsenz*.

So how might the refusal of unified mean, of abstraction, contribute to an understanding of History, or at least engage with our experience of aestheticised reality? Does Müller's art reconnect with cultural preconceptions via *content*, as Handke's arguably does through partial reference to beliefs and culturally charged ideas, or via *form*, that is to say via the different *mode* of reception? Is his shock-effect compatible with an ultimately cognitive aim? Can it renew our understanding of anything in anyway? On seeing Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, one of a number of recent British and Irish plays that has deployed corporal violence in a similar way to those of Heiner Müller, Aleks Sierz's initial reaction was that it

was a play that 'makes you feel but it doesn't make you think'. [Sierz 2001 99]

On reflection, Sierz revises this opinion, writing: 'it does make you think, but only after you've got over the shock of seeing it'. [Sierz 2001 99] In my view this idea of cognitive overload suggests a more fruitful interplay between the physical and the cognitive which does not resort to simplistic claims of the immanent value of the physical and which might arguably offer more of a challenge to instances of ideological manipulation than the body as value-in-itself. In places the challenge to ideological manipulation seems to be couched in terms of cognitive 'freedom', which is what attracted Müller to Robert Wilson's work: 'Was mich interessiert bei Wilson, nach der Arbeit mit ihm, ist, daß er den Bestandteilen, den Elementen von Theater die Freiheit läßt.' [Müller 1986 153] Müller calls this a 'demokratisches Theaterkonzept' [Müller 1986 153], which might suggest that the audience have some degree of interpretive control. Moreover, in view of Wilson's characteristic slowed-down action, as in the completely wordless, seven-hour-long *Deafman Glance*, this might return us to theatre as anaesthetic. But in contrast, Müller expresses the aim 'möglichst viele Punkte gleichzeitig bringen, so daß die Leute in eine Wahlzwang kommen [...] Es geht, glaube ich, nur noch mit Überschwemmungen'. [Müller 1986 20] The contrast between this 'Überschwemmungen' and the emptying out of sensory signals in Welsch's anaesthetic is evident, and explains Müller's fondness for the strategy of multiple action on stage as noted above. And the paradoxical idea of 'Wahlzwang' suggests that Müller's aim is not necessarily to foster freedom and

384

democracy, in spite of his comments about working with Robert Wilson. If anything, the excess of signs refuses the audience the time and space for any freedom of choice, and more likely imposes a(n albeit momentary) cognitive paralysis. In this respect, Müller's work might be said to militate against art's traditional function as promoting contemplation, not unlike Walter Benjamin's reading of Dada in the *Kunstwerk* essay, which I referred to in chapter two: 'Auf die merkantile Verwertbarkeit ihrer Kunstwerke legten die Dadaisten viel weniger Gewicht als auf ihre Unverwertbarkeit als Gegenstände kontemplativer Versenkung.' [Benjamin 1974 463] The contrast with the promotion of a contemplative mood that I have identified in anaesthetic art is apparent. For Benjamin, Dada anticipates the technical (as well as technological) advances made in film, namely its montage and speed of presentation. Whereas the static representation on the canvas of a painting allows contemplation and free association, the speed and disjunctive representation on the canvas of the film screen denies the viewer this space: 'Kaum hat er sie ins Auge gefaßt, so hat sie sich schon verändert.' [Benjamin 1974 464] (It is worth noting that Walter Benjamin also emphasises the sensory quality of Dada's method: 'Es stieß dem Betrachter zu. Und es stand damit im Begriff, die taktile Qualität, die der Kunst in den großen Umbauepochen der Geschichte die unentbehrlichste ist, für die Gegenwart zurückzugewinnen.' [Benjamin 1974 463-4])

In this way, the deployment of sensory excess and significatory disorder in Müller's theatre is not so much about freedom *to* interpret, as about freedom *from* culturally imposed norms and from manipulated or 'pre-digested' consciousness. This is an essentially Brechtian position: in 'Der Autor als Produzent' Benjamin contrasts the way Brecht forces the audience to think and make decisions to *neue Sachlichkeit*'s theatre as 'einen Gegenstand kontemplativen Behagens, aus einem Produktionsmittel in einen Konsumartikel'. [Benjamin 1971 109] In Müller's terms, such disorder sets theatre apart from art which he calls 'Konsumismus' [Müller 1986 153], a kind of imposition of ideologically saturated experience which is arguably at the heart of Welsch's category of aestheticisation. The contrast between this experience which is 'authentic' by virtue of its raw, unpolished and still sensory nature, by virtue of its indeterminacy, and the presentation of the polished and pre-digested phenomena of aestheticisation is clear. This echoes my reservations about the politics of Welsch's project of reinstating an aesthetic of contemplation in the anaesthetic.

This disorder is a way of making theatre immune to the 'obvious ideas' that plagued Artaud. Andreas Keller writes of the attempt to counteract the 'Besetzung der Phantasie mit Klischees' [Keller 1994 99], and Müller himself speaks of allowing 'Freiräume für Phantasie'. [Müller 1986 174] Although this imaginative freedom might be taken to reinstate the sovereignty of reason as

Kant's traditional terminus of the aesthetic experience, the above notion of 'Wahlzwang' suggests a less tidy contest between mind and its cultural material. And whilst clearly a quality of consciousness, this deployment of significatory disorder is also arguably not entirely incompatible with Müller's remarks on theatre as physical, and rather suggests a theatre that operates precisely in the interstices between the physical and the intellectual. I have already suggested that Burwick and Douglas's idea of the physical as offering resistance to the mental processes of abstraction and intellection undermines any simple opposition of the corporeal and cognitive. The excess of 'signifiers' over 'signifieds' by which Müller aims to generate a confusion of meaning, which Keller calls an 'Überfülle theatralischer Zeichen' [Keller 1994 71], might arguably be received as an experience of sensory excess. For Hans-Thies Lehmann, events on stage are threatening due to the incompleteness of intellectual meaning [Lehmann 1999 380-1], and it is in this sense that he refers to Müller's pieces as 'psycho-physische Attacke'. [Lehmann 1999 390] Moreover, I would draw a parallel between the disconcerting effect of incomplete meaning, an excess of inputs, and the shock effect of graphic corporeal violence, each generating a similar *surplus* of experience which cannot be integrated rationally. Perhaps Müller is aiming for the momentary experience of the 'Danger' that is central to Artaud's concept of 'Cruelty'. [Artaud 1993 31] For Gilles Deleuze, in spite of his comments regarding the 'directness' of theatre noted above, the interaction of the head and heart is central to a future theatre, which he centres on his

characteristically enigmatic concept of repetition: 'The head is the organ of exchange, but the heart is the amorous organ of repetition. (It is true that repetition also concerns the head, but precisely because it is its terror or paradox.)' [Deleuze 1994 2][2] Again this sounds like an anti-conceptual mutual exclusion of separate realms of thinking and emotion, but Deleuze recognition that repetition 'also concerns the head' suggests some kind of interaction between mind and body. Even where understanding *fails*, this failure gives rise to a *cognitive* effect that Müller does not want to relinquish. This informs the standard reading of Müller as one of several recent playwrights who, in Rainer Nägele's words, synthesise Artaud's 'violence, excess, irrationalism, and absurdity' and Brecht's 'cool, distanced, ascetic, political and rational' theatre. [Nägele 1987 112][3] In the 'Nachwort' to *Anatomie Titus*, Müller links the

---

[2] For Gregg Lambert, Deleuze's essentially Nietzschean concept of repetition is 'primarily to be understood by its force'. [Lambert 2002 xiii] Typical of Deleuze's vitalist tendencies, it militates against the dualist notion of truth as the product of an abstract understanding. Such abstraction is replicated in the idea of art as 'presupposing a reality' [Deleuze 1989 135], Deleuze's objection to which makes clear the common ground with the general turn against representation in Beckett and particularly Handke, as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as Müller's dismantling of any clear and uncomplicated reference in some of the more impressionistic pieces.

[3] But the point of Nägele's essay is to point out that violence and cruelty are central to Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, with elements that 'cannot be integrated' being pivotal for turning the passive audience into active participant. [Nägele 1987 114]

gruesomely corporeal to the cognitive, 'DISMEMBER REMEMBER'. [Müller 2002 193] Elsewhere he emphasises the specifically cognitive benefit of the experience of fear and shock, which for him is one of learning: 'Es hat noch nie eine größere Gruppe von Menschen etwas gelernt ohne Schrecken, ohne Schock.' [Müller 1990 23] Similarly, he remarks: 'Die Angst ist ja etwas ungeheuer Pädagogisches. [...] Sie ist konstruktiv.' [Müller 1986 179]

As far as this pedagogical aspect of Müller is concerned, the difficulty with Deleuze's formulations is that he writes of theatre's 'shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system *directly*'. [Deleuze 1989 156, my emphasis] This idea of a direct link between the theatrical event and the nervous system accords with Deleuze's essentially *anti-dualist* concept of the force of repetition, but as well as neglecting the thematic concerns that are evident in Müller's work it seems to cut out any possibility of learning, indeed, it seems to cut out the subject that might be the sticking point where this learning might happen. In the same way Deleuze refers to this experience as an 'automatic' movement, but my point is that this sensory or corporeal irruption precisely *disconnects* our automatised perception of and

---

A comparable combination of the corporeal and cognitive is evident in Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade* play. Although much of what I have said above regarding the challenge to production and meaning of Müller's works militates precisely against the more rigorous formal unity of Weiss' play.

responses to things. It is in that respect ultimately indirect, part of a sublime-type cognitive dialectic. This notion of automatised perception returns of course to Shklovsky's ideas on aesthetics. And even though this is about cognitive habits of perception, I have already registered the references to the *sensory* nature of this renewal of language and perception, as in Shklovsky's 'roughening' of language and Nietzsche's reference to metaphors that have lost their sensual power. [See also Waugh 1992 155] Of course Nietzsche's root and branch critique of metaphysics is not present in Shklovsky. For Nietzsche, metaphysics' tendency to abstraction is precipitated by and promotes a closedness to the sensory element of life: 'Wachs in den Ohren [...] beinahe Bedingung des Philosophirens'. [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 305] And precisely the point of Nietzsche's characterisation of metaphysics as a second order effect is that it makes no sense to speak of eradicating the world of illusion to get to the truth beneath it. Truth can only be generated positively, by *forging* of new connections and associations [see Nietzsche 1973 V 2 98], as is echoed in Dada's ideas on art some half a century later. Shklovsky in his essay is less clear about what the 'ultimate' aim art is, but for both he and Nietzsche the *familiar* is the enemy of all experience: 'Das Bekannte ist das Gewohnte, und das Bekannte ist am Schwersten zu erkennen, das heist als Problem, das heißt als fremd, als fern, als "ausser uns" zu sehn.' [Nietzsche 1973 V 2 276] So does Müller want to 'know' or does he want to 'experience'? Does his 'erster Blick auf ein Unbekanntes' renew our

perception of an external object? One way of answering this might be by looking at Müller's treatment of the subject.

Contested subjectivity

Subjectivity and identity have been a persistent theme in my discussions of the status of aesthetics and are touchstone issues in Müller's work. Unlike Stanton Garner, for whom the return to the physical body is a return to a more secure truth founded in one's own experience ('The only truths we can return to are the ever-changing truths of our own experience' [Garner 1990 155]), Müller seems to want to get away from the moment of secure psychological identity as well as any identity of meaning. This is evident in the above idea that the difficulties for performers of his pieces centre on the issue of identity. The dismantling of subjectivity is realized in his treatment of character, as in *Die Hamletmaschine*, in the text itself, and as in his comments elsewhere on the distribution of roles, such as in the comments at the end of *Wolokolamsker Chaussee I: Rüssische Eröffnung*, where he writes 'Die Schauspieler sollen alternieren können.' [Müller 2002 97] Elsewhere the dissolution of individual subjectivity is explicitly thematised. In *Der Auftrag*, for instance, Sasportas refers to a landscape, 'die keine andre Arbeit hat als auf das Verschwinden des Menschen zu warten.' [Müller 2002 33] This might cast a more affirmative light to the dead bodies which inhabit Müller's

work: the sense of mortality is not entirely negative, but suggests that corporeal death functions as a metaphor for transformation, a relinquishing of subjectivity: 'Ich spürte MEIN Blut aus MEINEN Adern treten/Und MEINEN Leib verwandeln in die Landschaft MEINES Todes'. [Müller 2002 83]

In this respect both Deleuze and Artaud's ideas are once again instructive. In his many borrowings from Nietzsche, Deleuze does not focus on the infamous death of God, but the 'dissolution of the self' in favour of 'the most natural will of Nature in itself'. [Deleuze 1994 11] So when Deleuze writes of repetition as to be made 'the supreme object of will and of freedom' [Deleuze 1994 6], this is not the will of the individual, but that of an all-encompassing nature. But I would take issue with Deleuze's Spinozan concept of nature here: far from of man as belonging to nature and experiencing, in Welsch/Adorno's terms, his 'eigene Naturhaftigkeit', this internal division in man is more likely indicative of man's *difference* from the rest of nature. Schelling's idea of man as 'always a fragment' [see Bowie 2003 116] is pertinent here. But Deleuze's more useful point is that repetition is precisely opposed to individual memory and habit, which are dismissed as 'psychological moments [which] are of little consequence'. [Deleuze 1994 7] The common ground is apparent here with Artaud, who wants to 'rescue theatre from its human, psychological prostration'. [Artaud 1993 69]

Of course, I have already asked whether this relinquishing of subjectivity is plausible, particularly in view of my underlying view that the subjective, cognitive moment in art needs to be recognized and exploited. Andrew Bowie points out the contradictory nature of the Dionysian call to lose the self, inasmuch as the self is still there to do the losing. [Bowie 1990 27] When discussing this contested nature of subjectivity in chapter two I cited Manfred Frank's caution about entirely dismissing the constitutive moment of subjectivity, noting that Frank also calls for a more nuanced use of the diagnostic potential of post-structuralism's critique of the subject. One aspect of this would seem to recognise the culturally located nature of experience – which hermeneutics need hardly be taught – which in turn might point towards a cognitively sophisticated idea of the societal and cultural significance of the indeterminate aesthetic experience. I should reiterate however that this need not be a strictly philosophical position on the nature and plausibility of a self-identical self of the kind that post-structuralist takes issue with. Rather the momentary dissolution of self which some (and particularly 'excessive') aesthetic experiences afford might suggest a means of breaking such patterns of perception and thinking. Taken metaphorically, this idea of relinquishing subjectivity might be a compelling way of conceptualizing the defamiliarising tendency in Müller's method. It might even be in this sense that Artaud expresses his aversion to psychology as 'bringing the unknown down to a level with the known, which is to say with the everyday and pedestrian'. [Artaud 1993

58]   Heiner Müller echoes this in his conception of the learning function of theatre less as a question of what is *learnt* than of what is *unlearnt*: more specifically, it is a process of forgetting of the self.   In an interview with Wolfgang Heise Müller cites Beckett on the need for self-alienation: 'Jeder sollte sich von sich selber entfernen, sonst fällt der Schrecken weg, der zum Erkennen nötig ist.' [Müller 1990 55]

Of course this begs the question of where the capacity for such a departure from norms and habits might come from.   For Kant this spontaneity is purely a product of the rational faculties, evidenced in the self-generation of an idea of self that 'cannot itself be part of sensuousness'. [Bowie 2003 21]   But my point is that this forgetting of the self is a metaphor for letting go of those cultural predeterminations which are as constitutive of our identity as Kant's spontaneously reaffirmed transcendental unity.   Moreover, the broadly 'sensory' element of Müller's art is the means of forging (or forcing – akin to the paradox of Müller's 'Wahlzwang') a certain kind of spontaneity.   In Kant's terms, it would be paradoxical to suggest that the body should be a means to overcoming the self, but if the self and the habits that sustain it are in some way the enemies of spontaneity, might not the body be viewed as a key locus of resistance to cultural norms?   I have already pointed out the sensory element in Shklovsky's notion of 'roughening' language or 'making the stone *stony*'.   Richard Sheppard echoes this idea with his reference to the corporeal or sensory method of Dada's new type of

art. [See Sheppard 1978 335]   Certainly in Müller's terms, if the atrophied consciousness which accompanies aestheticisation is the enemy, the *body* seems to be central to in any future freedom, to the necessary process of self-alienation. In the 'Anhang' to *Anatomie Titus* again corporeal functions like blood pressure and temperature are conceived as a 'Kompaßnadel' [Müller 2002 193], guiding us through an unknown landscape beyond subjectivity.

The sensory versus aestheticisation

The connection might also be made with Welsch's ideas on aestheticisation. Müller's themes do not seem to engage directly with Welsch's diverse diagnosis of contemporary culture as predominated by surface effects, harmonization of experience and sensory excess, aside from his acerbic sideswipe at the 'Parade/Der Zombies perforiert von Werbespots' at the end of *Verkommenes Ufer.* [Müller 2002 81]   But his *formal* method might address problems specifically associated with the mode of reception that aestheticisation encourages, and moreover in a way that returns my underlying concerns of the sensory and cognitive nature of the aesthetic experience.   Like a more direct version of Handke's misperception, theatre that deploys an almost physically tangible 'Ereignis' might be understood to break through our predispositions and preconceptions, or at least offer an alternative to the predigested, aestheticised

'pseudo-experience'. Aleks Sierz describes this 'theatre of sensation', for him the dominant style of theatre in the last decade, as one which 'jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm'. [Sierz 2001 4]

This kind of violent theatre might just add to sensory overdose of aestheticisation. Provocative and 'shocking' drama is always open to the charge of sensationalism, as Harry Eyres writes in response to the theatre of sensation which Sierz documents: 'Sensationalism is predicated on insensitivity. The idea that dulled audience response must be jerked into life by whatever violent means are necessary.' [Cited in Sierz 2001 242] For Karl Holl, writing already in 1926, excessive violence as a response to increasing desensitization is self-defeating: 'Die ganze Zeit bietet das Bild eines Narkotikers, der immer stärkere Dosen eines Reizmittels bedarf, um die erschlaffenden Sinne, die abgestumpften Nerven erneut aufzupeitschen.' [Cited in Martens 1971 100] Welsch seems to be referring to the same mechanism when he states that 'Ästhetisierung [...] erfolgt als Anästhetisierung'. [Welsch 1990 14] For Harry Gibson, this kind of sensation is essentially voyeuristic, 'the excess of the wild folk becomes a spectacle for the tame folk' [cited in Sierz 2001 243], an issue which returns to the central problem of *passivity* in our reception which I have identified as a central characteristic of aestheticised perception. Eyres goes further and, in a way that returns to the terms of my discussion of such art's questionable humanity above, claims that

this over-stimulation leads to a further loss of humanity. [See Sierz 2001 242] But whilst one need not go as far as Artaud's claims of pacifism, my remarks above about Müller's differentiated treatment of violence and victims suggest that his work cannot be so easily lumped together with this new sensationalism.

Alternatively, crude physicality might be taken as a 'de-aestheticisation' of art which acts against the increasing presence of elements traditionally associated with art, such as beautification and formal coherence, in everyday life. This would coincide with Welsch's understanding of some modernist art as turning against 'all die schönen und etablierten Angebote des Ästhetischen'. [Welsch 1990 37] Müller certainly conceives of the corporeal as challenge to 'alle bisherige Kultur', as suggested in his Shakespeare address, 'Shakespeare eine Differenz' (1988):

> Prospero ist der untote Hamlet: immerhin zerbricht er seinen Stab, Replik
> auf Calibans, des neueren Shakespearelesers, aktuellen Vorwurf an alle
> bisherige Kultur:
> YOU TAUGHT ME LANGUAGE AND MY PROFIT
> ON'T
> IS I KNOW HOW TO CURSE. [Müller 1989 108]

This idea of art as a turn against the legacy of culture and language raises the question of the relationship of Müller's work to the modernist experience of an irreparable crisis of language. Müller is of course separated from Hofmannsthal and other's concerns by over half a century, and is part of a quite different tradition of cultural critique, informed by sociological changes in post-war Europe as much as by the intra-aesthetic concerns about representation et cetera. That said I have referred to the parallel between this turn to the sensory and some aspects of Dada, and a central tenet of Dada was the idea that art needed to abandon the neo-classical pretensions that high culture is in some way a source of or allows access to eternal values. I noted Richard Sheppard's view that Dada's shock tactics comprised art's first progress beyond the crisis of representation and language without resorting to the elitism and nostalgia for a lost wholeness which marks the modernism of Rilke and Yeats. [Sheppard 1978 330] Certainly Dada's anti-elitist counter-cultural happenings conceived of a new relationship between art and surrounding reality, of which an essential element was the primitivist aspect and the culture of the body. [See Sheppard 2000 182-5] It is not straightforward how such effects might be allied to a kind of thematic consciousness-raising, and the question remains whether Müller's momentary extreme forfeits a treatment of the more complex ideological issues which underlie aestheticisation, perhaps offering nothing more than just a paradoxically uncomfortable respite from this manipulation. The momentary nature of our experience of this kind of art is incontestable: life goes on once we

leave the theatre.   But I would argue that, by resisting the role of art as a compensatory reality or truth and by undermining any contemplation, Müller's uncompromisingly avant-garde theatre operates to undermine some of the *means* that are deployed in aestheticisation, and as such, the ideologies that they convey.

Conclusion

My aim in this thesis has been to present and assess Wolfgang Welsch's contribution to aesthetics. This has comprised a treatment of his ideas on *aisthesis* as a possible framework for widening the scope and significance of the discipline of aesthetics as a whole, his idea of the sensory effects and philosophical or ideological implications of contemporary aestheticisation, which in Welsch's view underpins the particular relevance of the aesthetic for describing contemporary experience, his focus on the sublime as a crucial category for modernist art and postmodern philosophy, and finally his (also essentially sublime) conception of a new focus for aesthetics, the anaesthetic. The final section of my thesis has been concerned with an application of his ideas and the issues that arose in my discussion to actual examples of art which I have characterised as operating at the limits of perception.

As far as the more general features of Welsch's formulations are concerned, it is apparent his wide focus sometimes detracts from the clarity and focus of his ideas for aesthetics. So, for instance, whilst his interest in the sublime pinpoints a crucial category for aesthetics, he does not fully discuss how this might coincide with his idea of the aesthetic as sensory, nor indeed with his own category of the anaesthetic. He also writes approvingly of both Adorno and Lyotard's aesthetics as sublime, even though one is arguably characterised by its self-reflexivity and

pervasive negativity, the other by the 'happy positivism' of formless, plural and infinite experiment. Neither in my view is without problems. Welsch's suggestion (after Adorno) that the sublime precipitates a kind of return to nature seems to be singularly inappropriate, particularly in view of Welsch's ideas on an increasingly artificial and alterable life-world, to say nothing of man's increasingly problematic relationship to nature. But central to my discussion of the sublime was the recognition that the concept's nebulous nature, thriving on oppositions whilst suggesting their dialectical relation. Perhaps an insufficiently dialectical approach is Welsch's main failing in his treatment of the sublime, insofar as he opts for such concepts as heterogeneity, experiment and justice, but seems to dissolve precisely the tensions which might make these categories valuable. In particular my concern has been to suggest that ideas of immanence of plurality do not do justice to the modernist aesthetic that Adorno refers to in his own sparing reference to the sublime, nor the kinds of art that might be classified under Welsch's own concept of the anaesthetic artwork. A more antagonistic view of modernist aesthetics – of which its increasing conceptuality and cognitive nature are key points for me – also seems to be presupposed in Welsch's own ideas of emphasising the dialectical nature of the aesthetic experience (aesthetic/anaesthetic), and my point is that this focus on the cognitive and dialectical nature of the modernist aesthetic as a limit experience might usefully be theorised in terms of the sublime.

Arguably more problematic is the tension in Welsch's ideas on the anaesthetic between its conceptualisation as an absence of sensory experience (for whatever reason) and its use as a term for the latent and unthematised norms which make perception possible at all. This contributes to and is compounded by the problem that he generates several distinct models of how art might interact with its context. This is consistent with his arguments elsewhere for the heterogeneous and plural nature of the aesthetic, but the difficulty is that with the changing definitions of both aesthetic (sensory, excess, norms of artistic representation) and anaesthetic (imperceptible, anti-fiction, necessary non-perception, perceptual selection) he fails to articulate the potential incompatibilities between them which even the dialectical nature of the aesthetic/anaesthetic cannot quite resolve. This is particularly problematic as the positivism of his remarks on the heterogeneous and 'horizontal' nature of the aesthetic seems to be at odds with the 'vertical' sense which characterises his preference for the anaesthetic as a respite from the fiction of the aestheticised world, and as somehow crucial to the oppositional force of the aesthetic. Rather than a specifically post-modernist mode of art, this imperceptible seems to suggest a cul-de-sac of modernism. Rather than the re-admission of the receiving subject into the significance of the aesthetic, this seems to return to the position of relegating the recipient as untrustworthy, not to say, with Marcuse 'the devaluation of the entire realm of subjectivity'. [Marcuse 1978 3]

That said I do use Welsch's terms to explore ways in which the two aspects of the anaesthetic might be combined to fruitfully describe art that operates at the limits of perception. This discussion touched on Peter Handke's strategy of re-engaging the recipient – a crucial instance of what Erika Fischer-Lichte has referred to as the 'Entdeckung des Zuschauers' in twentieth century drama. [See Fischer-Lichte 1997] In both *Das Mündel* and *Quodlibet* Handke's theatre was seen to deploy a more modulated *mis*perception, which retains reference to cultural norms and preconditions, in such a way that may be said to reunite the two halves of Welsch's ideas on anaesthetics. The dismantling of norms of the audience's reception, not only by Handke's thematisation of perception and cognition, but the denial of a determinate let alone convincing new reality was seen to be the opposite of packaged understandings and tweaked subjectivity of aestheticised world. In this respect it might be said to create what Marcuse calls a 'counter-consciousness'. [Marcuse 1978 9] This idea of art as a more modulated problematised perception might be taken as a means to cutting into what Welsch calls 'ästhetische Gewohnheiten'. [Welsch 1990 37] Handke's half-reference and playing with cultural buzz words suggests both representation of social or cultural reality and its subversion.

A similar dismantling of norms and expectations might be achieved by what I have characterized as the opposite of the imperceptible, namely art which deploys sensory and significatory excess. This echoes Welsch's focus on the

sensory aspect of aesthetics, but also keeps faith with my concern to draw out the cognitive implications of the aesthetic experience. I trace the history of this kind of art in terms of the resurgence of materialism and the sense overturning the submergence of the body in history, Nietzsche's quasi-philosophical comments about the vital source of life, and the more recent variants of this refutation of the dialectic, such as what Jameson calls 'the hunger for the sheer event' or Derrida's valorisation of art as 'full presence', as well as Artaud's crude preference for the corporeal over the verbal or conceptual. But ultimately the doubt remains whether the sensory or material ever be said to be there 'in its own right'. At very least the deployment of sensory excess is already a formal method, and moreover one which does not entirely absolve itself of metaphysical connotations. Artaud was seen to refer to 'certain predominant powers, certain ideas governing everything' [Artaud 1993 60] which his Theatre of Cruelty is designed to give us a sense of. I also argued that the disjunction between the sensory and the verbal is never so clear cut in Müller's still highly 'literary' work, always still a strategy for obstructing meaning and denying theatricality. I proposed that its 'formal' nature does not mean that Müller's verbally excessive works have no ramifications for the wider concerns of Welsch ideas on aestheticisation. For participants Müller's theatre enforces experimentation – itself a riposte to the idea of art as something for the consumer. And for the recipients the defamiliarising shock tactic of Müller's verbal 'Überschwemmung', and the paradoxical combination of force and freedom that it precipitates (his

'Wahlzwang'), suggest a mode of perception that is crucially opposed to the 'tweaked receptivity' of the aestheticised world. Müller goes as far as to write of shock as pedagogical – and this process intersects with Welsch's ideas on the cultural preconditions of perception insofar as it is less as a question of what is *learnt* than of what is *unlearnt*. More specifically, and in a way that intersects with a crucial focus of philosophical aesthetics more generally and my concerns in particular, this unlearning is conceptualized in terms of a process of (albeit metaphorical) forgetting of the self.

This reflection on the crucial function of subjectivity is of course not the only overlap with the traditional terrain of philosophical aesthetics. Müller's idea of freedom and indeterminacy being precipitated by a paradoxical imposition sounds like an updated version of Kant's sublime, but crucially freedom is not conceived as a positive product of the transcendental mind, but a process of dismantling the more culturally bound preconceptions that stake out our understanding of self in the world. This suggests a crucial interaction of representation and consciousness that in my view offers an alternative to the refutation of the self in Kant's disinterest. A cognitive experience at the limits of perception or meaning, which cannot be said to be sheerly 'non-conceptual' and which allows a more convincing interaction with non-art perception, a central plank of Welsch's focus on the sensory in the first place.

This touches on a key strand of my thesis which is tangential to my discussion of Welsch's ideas, but ultimately gets its impetus from them. I am referring to my distinction between the idea of the aesthetic as primarily of significance for its contribution to the essentially philosophical issues of grounding knowledge and value and the more marginal reading of the experience of the limits of our understanding and cognition as in some way fruitful for what it can tell us about less 'transcendental' concerns, such as our own preconceptions or habits of thinking. These two positions draw conclusions in quite opposite directions, to the point of hostility: the former, transcendental, reading of the aesthetic tends not to be interested in art as a particular intervention, even going so far as to say that these are deleterious to art's philosophical claims. This underlies the refutation of the significance of the subjective recipient that I traced in chapter one. Alternatively, those who assert a more marginal and located notion of art as a dimension for changing consciousness can see the transcendental implications as a distraction from real concerns, as in Marcuse's critique of difficult art discussed in chapter three, or as in Daniel Bell's apocalypse which blinds us to the mundane. But are these positions necessarily mutually exclusive? I have already registered that departures from habitual ways of seeing depends on the capacity for thinking the new. Might a more located, hermeneutically sophisticated significance of aesthetic indeterminacy be rendered without reducing it to its external ideological determinants? Programmatical ideology critique certainly suffers from its procedure of reducing art to what it means in

other terms – denuding art often of what is most entrancing in it. At the same time, I have suggested in my discussions above that the demand that it be the locus of the unsayable or the incommunicable also leaves the artwork very little room in which to manoeuvre – Welsch's sublime anaesthetic is a case in point and the fact that he offers only one example of it is probably indicative of the problem. From my discussions of possible practical examples of art at the limits of perception it seems plausible to argue that non-perception is a more fruitful mode of critical art when it is engaged with actual experience and cultural content. Kant's transcendental capacity for freedom is a curious freedom if it has nothing from which it must tear itself away time and again. As Schiller writes, '[w]as man beim Philosophieren notwendig voneinander trennen muß, ist darum nicht immer auch in der Wirklichkeit getrennt.' [Schiller 1966 393] And as far as Welsch's are formulations are concerned, my view is that the more modulated and cognitively sophisticated playing with sense perception offers the scope for a more plausible interaction with both the content and the mode of the aestheticised world, a better sense of the fragile and dialectical nature of the aesthetic experience, and a more sophisticated understanding of the still crucial sensory element in aesthetics.

Works cited

Two works by the same author published in the same year will be distinguished by letter, indicated in brackets after the authors name, e. g.
Bowie, Andrew. (2003a) *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche.* Second Edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Adams, Robert Martin. *Nil: Episodes in the literary conquest of void during the 19th century.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Adelson, Leslie. *Making Bodies Making History: Feminism and German Identity.* Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Ästhetische Theorie.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970.

Adorno, Theodor W. 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka' in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I. Gesammelte Schriften 10, 2.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977. pp. 254-287.

Adorno, Theodor W. 'Vermittlung' in Bürger 1978, pp. 163-190.

Adorno, Theodor W. 'Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie' in Bürger 1978, pp. 204-212.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Noten zur Literatur.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974.

Ameriks, Karl. *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Aristotle. *Poetics* (trans. Malcolm Heath). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996.

Arndt, Andreas. 'Widerstreit und Widerspruch in der frühidealistischen und frühromantischen Philosophie' accessed on 13th July 2004 at http://home.arcor.de/a.e.arndt/sites/wiwi.html.

Artaud, Antonin. *Theatre and its Double* (trans. Victor Corti). Montreuil: Calder, 1993.

Aschenbrenner, Karl and William B. Holther. 'Translators' Introduction' in Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb. *Reflections on Poetry* (trans. Aschenbrenner, Karl and William B. Holther). Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954. pp. 1-32.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson). Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984.

Barnes, Barry & David Bloor, 'Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge' in Hollis, Martin & Steven Lukes (eds.). *Rationality and Relativism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982. pp. 21-47.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation* (trans. Sheila Faria Glaser). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Baugh, Carlton and Carlos Frenk. 'How are galaxies made?' May 1999 accessed on 8th April 2003 at http://physicsweb.org/article/world/12/5/9.

Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb. *Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik* (ed. and trans. Hans Rudolf Schweizer). Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983.

Beckett, Samuel. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986.

Beidler, Paul G. 'The Postmodern Sublime: Kant & Tony Smith's Anecdote of the Cube' in *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*. Volume 53, Number 2. Spring 1995. 177-186.

Bell, Daniel. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. London: Heinemann, 1976.

Benjamin, Walter. *Versuche über Brecht*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971.

Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften. Band I, 1 & 2* (ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäusser). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974.

Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften. Band II, 1* (ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäusser). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977.

Berger, Peter & Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday, 1966.

Berghahn, Klaus L. 'From Classicist to Classical Literary Criticism' in Hohendahl 1988, pp. 13-98.

Bergson, Henri. *Key Writings* (ed. Keith Ansell Pearson & John Mullarkey). London: Continuum, 2002.

Berlin, Isaiah. 'Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958' Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Best, Steven & Kellner, Douglas. *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.

Biddiss, Michael D. *The Age of the Masses: Ideas and Society in Europe since 1870*. Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977.

Bohrer, Karl Heinz. *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens: Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978.

Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-event in America*. New York: Vintage, 1961.

Bowie, Andrew. *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.

Bowie, Andrew. 'Aesthetic Autonomy' in Cooper, David E. (ed.). *A Companion to Aesthetics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. pp. 33-37.

Bowie, Andrew. *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Bowie, Andrew. (2003a) *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*. Second Edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Bowie, Andrew. (2003b) 'What comes after art?' in Jaughin & Malpas 2003. pp. 68-82.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Schriften zum Theater. Über eine nichtaristotelische Dramatik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1957.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst I: 1920-1932*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967.

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Stage*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.

Brustein, Robert. *Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama*. Boston: Little Brown, 1964.

Bubner, Rüdiger. 'Einführung' in Hegel, G. W. F. *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Erster und zweiter Teil* (ed. Rüdiger Bubner). Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1971. pp. 3-27.

Büchner, Georg. *Lenz*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1957.

Buck-Morss, Susan. 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics. Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered' in *October*. Volume 62, Fall 1992. 3-41.

Bürger, Peter. *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974.

Bürger, Peter (ed.). *Literatur & Kunstsoziologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978.

Bürger, Peter. (1983) *Zur Kritik der idealistischen Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983.

Burke, Edmund. *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful*. London: J. Dodsley, 1773.

Burwick, Frederick & Paul Douglas. 'Introduction' in Burwick, Frederick & Paul Douglas (eds.). *The crisis in modernism: Bergson and the vitalist controversy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. pp. 1-14.

Butler, Christopher. *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*. Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

Cahoone, Lawrence. 'Introduction' in Cahoone, Lawrence (ed.). *From Modernism to Postmodernism, An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. 1-23.

Cassirer, Ernst. *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*. Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr Verlag, 1932.

Cavell, Stanley. *Must we mean what we say? A book of essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Caygill, Howard. *A Kant Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995.

Caygill, Howard. 'Kant's Apology for Sensibility' in Jacobs, Brian and Patrick Kain (eds.). *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. pp. 164-93.

Clark, T. J. *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Connolly, Kate. '639-year Organ piece gets off to quiet start.' *The Guardian*. 5 September 2001.

Counsell, Colin. *Signs of Performance: an introduction to twentieth century theatre*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Crawford, Donald W. *Kant's Aesthetic Theory*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974.

Croce, Benedetto. *Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (trans. Douglas Ainslie). London: Macmillan, 1922.

Crowther, Paul. '"Les Immatériaux" and the Postmodern Sublime' in Andrew Benjamin (ed.). *Judging Lyotard*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Crowther, Paul. 'The Kantian Sublime, the Avant Garde and the Postmodern: A Critique of Lyotard' in *New Formations*. Number 7: Spring 1989. 67-75.

de Caro, Eugenio. 'Ars analogi rationis: new Relations between Philosophical Anthropology and Aesthetics' accessed on 13th July 2004 at http://www.newcom.pr.it/filosofia/deca3_bi.htm.

de Man, Paul. *Aesthetic Ideology* (ed. Andrzej Warminski). Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996.

Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane). London: Athlone Press, 1984.

Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (trans. Dana Polan). Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam). London: Athlone Press, 1989.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition* (trans. Paul Patton). London: Athlone Press, 1994.

Deleuze, Gilles. 'Literature and Life' in Deleuze, Gilles. *Essays critical and clinical* (trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. pp. 1-7.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference* (trans. Alan Bass). London: Routledge, 1978.

Dixon, Robert. *The Baumgarten Corruption: From Sense to Nonsense in Art and Philosophy*. London: Pluto Press, 1995.

Docherty, Thomas. 'Aesthetic education and the demise of experience' in Joughin & Malpas 2003, pp. 23-35.

Domdey, Horst. 'Die Tragödie des Terrors: Heiner Müller – letzter Poet der Klassenschlacht' in *Theater 1991: Jahrbuch für Theater Heute*. 100-4.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

Eke, Norbert Otto. 'Nachwort' in Müller, Heiner. *Revolutionsstücke*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988. pp. 115-46.

Eke, Norbert Otto. *Heiner Müller*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999.

Featherstone, Mike. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage Publications, 1991.

Federman, Raymond. 'Samuel Beckett's Film or the Agony of Perceivedness' in *James Joyce Quarterly*. Volume 8 Number 4. Summer 1971. 363-70.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 'Einleitung: Wahrnehmung – Körper – Sprache: Kulturelle Wandel und Theateravantgarde' in Fischer-Lichte, Erika (ed.). *Theateravantgarde: Wahrnehmung – Körper – Sprache*. Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1995. pp. 1-14.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *Die Entdeckung des Zuschauers: Paradigmenwechsel auf dem Theater des 20. Jahrhundersts*. Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1997.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Foster, Hal. 'Postmodernism: A Preface' in Foster, Hal (ed.). *Postmodern Culture*. London: Pluto Press, 1985. pp. vii-xiv.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Frank, Manfred. *Was ist Neostrukturalismus?* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984.

Franke, Ursula. *Kunst als Erkenntnis: Die Rolle der Sinnlichkeit in der Ästhetik des Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1972.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Gesammelte Werke. Band 1: Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1968.

Gallagher, Shaun & Jonathan Shear. *Models of the Self*. Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 1999.

Garner, Stanton B. Jr. 'Post-Brechtian Anatomies: Weiss, Bond, and the Politics of Embodiment' in *Theatre Journal*, Volume 42, Number 2, 1990. 145-64.

Giles, Steve. *The Problem of Action in Modern European Drama*. Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Han-Dieter Heinz, 1981.

Giles, Steve. 'Sociological Aesthetics as a Challenge to Literary Theory: Reppraising Mukarovsky' in *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies*. Number 19, Spring 1995. 89-106.

Giles, Steve. *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory: Marxism, Modernity and the Threepenny Lawsuit*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1997.

Giles, Steve. 'Afterword: Avant-garde, Modernism, Modernity: A Theoretical Overview' in Giles, Steve (ed). *Theorising Modernity: Essays in Critical Theory*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Giles, Steve. 'Limits of the Visible: Kracauer's photographic dystopia' in Giles, Steve and Maike Oergel (eds.). *Counter-Cultures in Germany and Central Europe: From* Sturm und Drang *to Baader-Meinhof*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2003.

Girshausen, Theo. 'Vom Umgang mit Nietzsche in der Hamletmaschine: Anmerkung zur Technik des literarischen Zitats bei Heiner Müller' in Girshausen, Theo (ed.). *Hamletmaschine, Heiner Müllers Endspiel*. Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1978. pp. 98-103.

Gitlin, Todd. *Media Unlimited: how the Torrent of Images and Sounds overwhelms our Lives*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001.

Graver, David. 'Violent Theatricality: Displayed Enactments of Aggression and Pain' in *Theatre Journal*. Volume 47, Number 1, 1995. 43-64.

Greiner, Bernhard. '"Einheit (Gleichzeitigkeit) von Beschreibung und Vorgang.": Versuch über Heiner Müller's Theater' In Klussmann, Paul Gerhard and Heinrich Mohr (eds.). *Spiele und Spiegelungen von Schrecken und Tod: Zum Werk von Heiner Müller. Jahrbuch zur Literatur in der DDR. Band 7*. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990. pp. 69-81.

Guyer, Paul. 'Review of Hammermeister, Kai. *The German Tradition in Aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, 2002' in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews 3rd August 2003, accessed on 13 July 2004 at http://ndpr.icaap.org/content/archives/2003/8/guyer-hammermeister.html.

Habermas, Jürgen. (1985a) *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985.

Habermas, Jürgen. (1985b) 'Modernity – an unfinished Project' (trans. Seyla Ben-Habib) in Foster 1985, pp. 3-15.

Hamilton, Paul. 'From sublimity to indeterminacy: new world order or aftermath of Romantic ideology' in Larrissy, Edward (ed.). *Romanticism and Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. pp. 13-28.

Handke, Peter. *Stücke I*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972.

Handke, Peter. 'Die Geborgenheit unter der Schädeldecke' in Handke, Peter. *Als das Wünschen noch geholfen hat*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974. pp. 71-80.

Handke, Peter. *Die Theaterstücke*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992.

Handke, Peter. *Mein Jahr in der Niemandsbucht*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1994.

Handke, Peter. *Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms: Aufsätze*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972.

Hardt, Michael. 'The Art of Organisation: Foundations of a Political Ontology in Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Negri.' Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1991.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Werke*. Band 2. (Ed. Johan Schulze) Berlin: Verlag von Daader und Humbolt, 1841.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Ph:anomenologie des Geistes. Sämtliche Werke, Jubiläumsausgabe. Band II*. (ed. Hermann Glockner) Stuttgart: Frommanns Verlag, 1951.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Vorlesung über die Ästhetik: Erster und zweiter Teil*. (ed. Rüdiger Bubner) Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1971.

Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. (Trans. and ed. Hofstadter, Albert.) New York: Perennial Library/Colophon Books, 1975.

Heidegger, Martin. 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes' in *Holzwege*. (ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann) Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950. pp. 1-74.

Hilton, Julian. *Performance*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987.

Hodge, Joanna. 'Aesthetics and Politics: Between Adorno and Heidegger' in Joughin and Malpas 2003, pp. 218-36.

Höffe, Otfried. *Immanuel Kant*. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1983.

Hohendahl, Peter Uwe (ed.). *A History of German Literary Criticism 1730-1980*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

Horkheimer, Max & Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988.

Hornigk, Frank (ed.). *Heiner Müller Material: Texte und Kommentare*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1989.

Hristic, Jovan. 'On the Interpretation of Drama' in *New Literary History*. Volume III, Number 2. Winter 1972. 345-354.

Hübener, Wolfgang. 'Die Logik der Negation als ontologisches Erkenntnismittel' in Weinrich 1975, pp. 105-140.

Husserl, Edmund. *Gesammelte Werke Band VI: Die Krise der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie: eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologische Philosophie* (ed Walter Biemel). The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1954.

Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986.

Iden, Peter 'Das pure Theater des Peter Handke' in Scharang 1972, pp. 144-147.

Innes, Christopher. *Modern German Drama: A Study in Form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Innes, Christopher. *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Iser, Wolfgang. 'Negativität als tertium quid von Darstellung und Rezeption' in Weinrich 1975, pp. 530-532.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

Jarvis, Simon. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.

Jauß, Hans-Robert. 'Negativität und Identifikation. Versuch zur Theorie der ästhetischen Erfahrung' in Weinrich 1975, pp. 263-340.

Jauß, Hans Robert. *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970.

Jay, Martin. *Adorno*. London: Fontana, 1984

Joughin, John J. & Simon Malpas. 'The new aestheticism: an introduction' in Joughin, John J. & Simon Malpas 2003, pp. 1-22.

Joughin, John J. & Simon Malpas (eds.). *The New Aestheticism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Junger, Ernst. *Gesammelte Werke: Band 7: Essays I: Betrachtungen zur Zeit*. Klett-Cotta: Stuttgart, 1980.

Kaiser, Georg. 'Das Drama Platons *oder* der gerettete Alkibiades; der Platonische Dialog' in *Werke IV*. (ed. Walther Huder) Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen Verlag, 1971. 544-5.

Kalb, Jonathan. *The Theatre of Heiner Müller*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Kaminsky, Jack. *Hegel on Art: An Interpretation of Hegel's Aesthetics*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1962.

Kamper, Dietmar & Christoph Wulf. 'Die Parabel der Wiederkehr: Zur Einführung' in Kamper, Dietmar & Christoph Wulf (eds.). *Die Wiederkehr des Körpers*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982.

Kant, Immanuel. *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schonen und Erhabenen*. Leipzig: Im Insel Verlag, 1913.

Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1963.

Karasek, Hellmuth. 'Von Äpfeln, Fussnägeln und Katzen' in Scharang 1972, pp. 148-151.

Keller, Andreas. *Drama und Dramaturgie Heiner Müllers zwischen 1956 und 1988*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1994.

Kenner, Hugh. *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968.

Kerr, Donna H. 'Aesthetic Policy' in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. Volume 12, Number 1. January 1978. 5-22.

Kester, Grant H. 'Aesthetics after the End of Art: an Interview with Susan Buck-Morss' in *Art Journal*. Volume 56, Number 1. Spring 1997. 40-45.

Kostelanetz, Richard (ed.). *John Cage*. London: Allen Lane, 1971.

Kostelanetz, Richard (ed.). *Conversing with Cage*. New York: Limelight, 1988.

Lambert, Gregg. *The Non-Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*. London: Continuum, 2002.

Langer, Renate. 'Wir sehn nur ihr Verstummen: Zur Sprachproblematik bei Peter Weiss' in Höller, Hans (ed.). *Hinter jedem Wort die Gefahr des Verstummens: Sprachproblematik und literarische Tradition in der Ästhetik des Widerstandes von Peter Weiss*. Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1988. pp. 39-57.

Leach, Neil. *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*. Cambridge MA.: MIT Press, 1999.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 'Georg Büchner, Heiner Müller, Georges Bataille: Revolution und Masochismus' in *Georg Büchner-Jahrbuch*. Volume 3, 1983. 308-29.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatisches Theater*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999.

Linklater, Magnus. 'There's no escape from the monster in the corner that leaves children struck dumb' in *The Times*, Thursday June 12 2003, p. 20.

Litten, Rainer. 'Theater der Verstörung: ein Gespräch mit Peter Handke' in Scharang 1972. 156-9.

Lyotard, Jean-François. 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime' in *Artforum*, April 1982. 64-69.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (trans. Geoff Bennington) Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Lyotard, Jean-François. 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' in *Paragraph*, Volume 6, October 1985. 1-18.

Lyotard, Jean-François. 'After the Sublime: The State of Aesthetics' in David Carroll (ed.). *The States of Theory: History, Art, & Critical Discourse*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1990. pp. 297-304.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby). Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

Maeterlinck, Maurice. *The Modern Drama*. Delhi: Oriental Publications, 1994.

Maeterlinck, Maurice. *Théâtre I*. Bruxelles: Paul Lacomblez, 1908.

Marchand, Leslie A. (ed.). *Byron's Letters and Journals*. Volume 3. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Kultur und Gesellschaft I*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965.

Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension: towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (trans. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover) Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

Marquard, Odo. *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica. Philosophische Überlegungen*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989.

Martens, Gunter. *Vitalismus und Expressionismus: Ein Beitrag zur Genese und Deutung expressionistischer Stilstrukturen und Motive*. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1971.

Marx, Karl. *Early Writings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.

Matejka, Ladislav & Pomorska, Krystyna (eds.). *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*. Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1971.

McGuinness, Patrick. *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Menke, Christopher. 'Modernity, subjectivity and aesthetic reflection' in Osborne 2000, pp. 35-55.

Mukarovsky, Jan. *Structure, Sign, and Function* (ed. and trans. John Burbank and Peter Steiner). London: Yale University Press, 1977.

Mukarovsky, Jan. *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Social Value as Social Facts* (trans Mark E. Suino). Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1979.

Müller, Heiner. *Herzstück*. Berlin: Rotbuch, 1983.

Müller, Heiner. *Gesammelte Irrtümer 1*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1986.

Müller, Heiner. *Stücke*. Berlin: Henschelsberg Verlag, 1988.

Müller, Heiner. 'Fatzer +/-' in Hörnigk 1989, pp. 30-36.

Müller, Heiner. 'Brief an den Regisseur der bulgarischen Erstaufführung von Philoktet am Dramatischen Theater Sofia' in Hörnigk 1989, pp. 62-70.

Müller, Heiner. 'Die Wunde Woyzeck' in Hörnigk 1989, pp. 114-5.

Müller, Heiner. *Gesammelte Irrtümer 2*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1990.

Müller, Heiner. *Gesammelte Irrtümer 3*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1994.

Müller, Heiner. *Werke 2: Die Prosa*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999.

Müller, Heiner. *Werke 3: Die Stücke 1*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000.

Müller, Heiner. *Werke 4: Die Stücke 2*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001.

Müller, Heiner. *Werke 5: Die Stücke 3*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002.

Myskja, Bjørn K. *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett: Aesthetic Judgement, Ethics and Literature*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001.

Nägele, Rainer & Renate Voris. *Peter Handke*. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1978.

Nägele, Rainer. *Reading after Freud: Essays on Goethe, Hölderlin, Habermas, Nietzsche, Brecht, Celan, and Freud*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. (ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari) Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of the Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Osborne, Peter. 'Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism: The Problems of a Postmodern Art' in Benjamin, Andrew (ed.). *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*. London: Routledge, 1989. pp. 23-48.

Osborne, Peter. *From an Aesthetic Point of View: Philosophy, Art and the Senses*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2000.

Otto, Rudolph. *The Idea of the Holy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959.

Paulin, Tom. *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style*. London: Faber & Faber, 1998.

Plato. *The Republic* (trans. Desmond Lee). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953.

Poole, Stephen. 'Prick up your ears.' *The Guardian*. 17 Nov 2001. Review Section, p. 9.

Pries, Christine. 'Einleitung' in Pries, Christine (ed.). *Das Erhabene: Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Größenwahn*. Weinheim: VCH Acta humaniora, 1989. pp. 1-30.

Proust, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time, Volume I: Swann's Way* (trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff & Terence Kilmartin). London: Random House, 1981.

Rancière, Jacques. 'What aesthetics can mean' (trans. Brian Homes) in Osborne, Peter (ed.). *From an Aesthetic Point of View: Philosophy, Art and the Senses*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2000. pp. 13-33.

Renner, Rolf Günter. *Peter Handke*. Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1985.

Revill, David. *The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life*. London: Bloomsbury, 1992.

Rice, John & Paul Malone. 'Text or Performance. The rationalism and Intoxication of Presence in Theatre' in Eitel, Timm and Kenneth Mendoza (eds.). *The Poetics of Reading*. Columbia, NY: Camden House, 1993.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Routledge, 1983.

Richter, Hans. *Dada: art and anti-art*. (trans. David Britt) London: Thames and Hudson, 1965.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *Pour un Nouveau Roman*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1963.

Rühle, Günter. 'Irritationen – Nackt und Stumm' in Scharang 1972, pp. 140-4.

Sassatelli, Monica, 'Aestheticised Life, An-aestheticised Art: The Case of Visual Artist Mona Hatoumi' presented at the XIVth International Congress of Aesthetics (1-5 September 1998, Llubljana, Slovenia) access on 3rd November 2000 at http://www.unibo.it/parol/files/sassatelli.htm.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Scharang, Michael (ed.). *Über Peter Handke*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972.

Schiller, Friedrich. *Werke in drei Bänden. Band II*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1966.

Schröder, Lothar. 'Körperloser Schmerz und die Angst, die das Leben meint: vor 40 Jahren wurden Günter Eichs *'Träume'* urgesendet' in *Literatur für Leser*. Volume 4, 1991. 211-224.

Schulte-Sasse, Jochen. 'German Romanticism, 1795-1810' in Hohendahl 1988, pp. 99-177.

Schweizer, Hans Rudolf. *Ästhetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis: Eine Interpretation der "Aesthetica" A.G.Baumgartens mit teilweiser Wiedergabe des lateinischen Textes mit deutscher Übersetzung*. Basel: Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 1973.

Schweizer, Hans Rudolf. 'Introduction' in *A.G.Baumgarten: Texte zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik* (ed. & trans Hans Rudolf Schweizer). Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983. pp. vii-xxii.

Sellars, Wilfrid. *Empiricism & the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Sheppard, Richard. 'The Crisis of Language' in Bradbury, Malcolm and James McFarlane (eds.). *Modernism, 1890-1930*. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978. 323-336.

Sheppard, Richard. *Tankred Dorst's* Toller: *A Case-Study in Reception*. New Aylth: Lochee Publications, 1989.

Sheppard, Richard. *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2000.

Shklovsky, Viktor. 'Art as Technique' in Lemon, Lee T. & Marion J. Reis (eds.). *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. pp. 3-24.

Sierz, Aleks. *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001.

Simpson, David. 'Commentary: Updating the Sublime' in *Studies in Romanticism*. Volume 26, Summer 1987. 245-258.

Sircello, Guy. 'Towards a Critique of Contemporary Anaesthetics' in *Philosophical Exchange*. Volume 21-22, 1991. 39-52.

Solomon, Larry J. 'The Sounds of Silence: John Cage and 4'33"' at Solomon's Music Theory & Composition Resources, 1998, accessed on 2nd May 2001 at http://www.azstarnet.com/~solo/4min33se.htm.

Steegmuller, Francis (ed. and trans.). *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954.

Stewart, Susan. *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Stierle, Karlheinz. 'Fiktion, Negation und Wirklichkeit' in Weinrich 1975, pp. 522-525.

Strati, Antonio. *Organization and Aesthetics*. London: Sage Publications, 1999.

Strauß, Botho. *Fragmente der Undeutlichkeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999.

Strauß, Botho. *Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999.

Taban, Mereille. *Vermittlung und Unmittelbarkeit: Die Eigenart von Peter Handkes fiktionalem Frühwerk (1966-1970)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990.

Taylor, Charles. *Human Agency and Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Trifonow, Jurij & Martin Walser. 'Wir sind nicht die Ärzte, wir sind der Schmerz: Ein Briefwechsel' in *Sowjetliteratur Heute* (ed. Gisela Lindemann). München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1979.

Turner, Bryan S. *The Body & Society: Explorations in Social Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984.

Tynjanov, Jurij. 'On Literary Evolution' in Matejka, Ladislav & Krystyna Pomorska (eds.). *Readings in Russian Poetics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1978. pp. 66-78.

Tynjanov, Jurij. 'Das literarische Faktum' in Striedter, Jurij (ed.). *Texte der russischen Formalisten. Band I: Texte zur allgemein Literaturtheorie und zur Theorie der Prosa*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1969. pp. 493-548.

Vaßen, Florian. 'Lehrstück und Gewalt "Die Wiederkehr des jungen Genossen aus der Kalkgrube" in Klussmann, Paul Gerhard and Heinrich Mohr (eds.). *Spiele und Spiegelungen von Schrecken und Tod: Zum Werk von Heiner Müller. Jahrbuch zur Literatur in der DDR*. Band 7. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1990. pp. 189-200.

Vaßen, Florian. 'Das Theater der schwarzen Rache: Grabbes Gothland zwischen Shakespeares Titus Andronicus and Heiner Müllers Anatomie Titus Fall of Rome' in Broer, Werner, Detlev Kopp and Michael Vogt (eds.). 'und nichts als nur Verzweiflung kann uns retten!' Grabbe-Jahrbuch, 1992 (11). Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 1992. pp. 14-30.

Waugh, Patricia. *Practising Postmodernism, Reading Modernism*. London: Edward Arnold, 1992.

Weinrich, Harald (ed.). *Positionen der Negativität*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975.

Weiskel, Thomas. *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Weiss, Peter. *Rapporte*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968.

Weiss, Peter. *Notizbücher 1971-1980*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981.

Weiss, Peter. *Ästhetik des Widerstandes*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998.

Wellbery, David E. *Lessing's Laocoon: Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Wellershoff, Dieter. 'Fiktivität in fiktionalen und nichtfiktionalen Texten' in Weinrich 1975, pp. 529-530.

Wellmer, Albrecht. 'Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation: Adorno's Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity' in Wellmer, Albrecht. *The Persistence of Modernity*. Tr. David Midgley. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.

Wellmer, Albrecht. 'Adorno, die Moderne und das Erhabene' (1991) in Wellmer, Albrecht. *Endspiele: Die unversöhnliche Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993. 178-203.

Welsch, Wolfgang. *Aisthesis: Grundzüge und Perspektive der Aristotelischen Sinneslehre*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1987.

Welsch, Wolfgang. *Ästhetisches Denken*. Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1990.

Welsch, Wolfgang and Christine Pries. 'Einleitung' in Welsch, Wolfgang and Christine Pries (eds.). *Ästhetik im Widerstreit: Interventionen zum Werk von Jean-François Lyotard*. Weinheim: Akademie Verlag, 1991.

Welsch, Wolfgang. *Ästhetische Zeiten? Zwei Wege der Ästhetisierung*. Saarbrücken: Deutscher Werkbund Saar, 1992.

Welsch, Wolfgang. 'Vorwort: Das Ästhetische: eine Schlüsselkategorie unserer Zeit' in Welsch, Wolfgang (ed.). *Die Aktualität des Ästhetischen*. Munich: Fink Verlag, 1993.

Welsch, Wolfgang. 'Einleitung' in Welsch, Wolfgang. (ed.) *Wege aus der Moderne: Schlüsseltexte der Postmoderne-Diskussion*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1994. pp. 1-43.

Welsch, Wolfgang. (1996a) *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik*. Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1996.

Welsch, Wolfgang. (1996b) *Vernunft: Die Zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag Verlag, 1996.

Welsch, Wolfgang. *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. Weinheim: Akademie Verlag, 1997.

Wessell, Leonard P. 'Alexander Baumgarten's Contribution to the Development of Aesthetics' in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 30, No. 3. Spring, 1972. 333-342.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. (trans. D.F.Pears and B.F.McGuinness) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922.

Wolin, Richard. 'Modernism vs. Postmodernism' in *Telos*. Volume 62, Winter 1984. 9-29.

Woodmansee, Martha, *The Author, Art and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Worsdworth, William. *The Prelude: Books I, II, and parts of V and XII* (ed. Helen Darbishire). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1028.

Wright, Elizabeth. *Postmodern Brecht: a re-presentation*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.