

A Case for Art as a Socially Engaged, Politicising Force, Utilising the Work of Alfredo Jaar

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By
Janet Kilcoyne (JK)

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Abstract

My original contribution to knowledge is a framework constructed via the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin for understanding what distinguishes art as a political object from art as a socially engaged, politicising force. The dominant understanding of art's reformative social agency raises two ethical problems that the thesis addresses. The first involves the artist's right to assume the authority to represent people and social conditions. The second involves an ethical aesthetic of tastefulness that engages with viewing as opposed to action. The framework I develop argues that art's functionalisms, for good or for ill, do not work with categories of art but are embedded in the politics of all cultural production.

By disentangling art from the elitist paradigms enmeshed in concepts of artistic skill and art's own internal history of development, the thesis clarifies what separates art as political object from art as a socially engaged, politicising force. In the thesis, I argue for the advantages of the framework I develop via critical engagements with influential approaches such as those advocated by Clement Greenberg and Roland Barthes, artworks such as those produced by Judy Chicago and Art & Language, and theorists of art's social and political role such as those offered by Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière. A key point made across the thesis is that *political* art is not necessarily *politicising* art, with the former being more interested in modifying the forms taken by art – what art *is* – and the latter asking how art can contribute to social and political change – what art *does*.

Subsequently, the thesis outlines in detail the aforementioned framework inspired by Gramsci and Benjamin. This sets the scene for the second half of the thesis, which discusses the installations and interventions of Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar, whose practices are an exemplary case for illustrating the potential of the framework outlined above. As a self-professed Gramscian, Jaar works to actively participate in practical life as a constructor, organiser and 'permanent persuader' (Gramsci, 1971, p.10), through creating models for 'learning to think, for solving a problem' (Jaar, 2006, p.76). Moreover, as someone who is explicitly political in his practices, and who has been lauded worldwide for his works since the late 1970s, Jaar is a highly appropriate artist through which to highlight the challenges inherent to attempts to make the most of art's social and political potential. The chapters on Jaar consider, in turn, his Chilean works in the late 1970s and early 1980s, his photographic installations, and his explicitly political interventions. I argue that, while at times the work has

embodied a politicising dynamic, more often than not the work has remained political and thus within more traditional understandings of art and of the artist.

As such, the thesis offers a richer, more holistic approach to theorising art and discussing artistic practices compared to existing scholarship and criticism, and it also enables us to develop more nuanced analyses of artworks which are presented as political and potentially transformative than has hitherto been the case.

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Author's declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature:

Date:

Chapter 1

Approaches to Societal Reform

1.1. Introduction

I have undertaken this research in order to map a way of contesting elitisms within historically dominant forms of relations in art production, because I am concerned with how they disable the potential of art to work as a socially engaged, politicising force. I reason that these traditional relations service a social functionalism through (intentionally or not) approving the elitisms which keep the artist/author separated from the viewer/receiver, thereby disabling their combined potential as counter-hegemonic agents. Importantly I hold that the making and viewing of art always has an impact beyond an autotelic world of art, and acknowledging this opens up the possibilities for coalitions of artists and viewers to contest social unfreedoms via an emancipated understanding of the relations of artistic production.

My initial objective is to clarify the distinction that separates art as political object from art as a socially engaged, politicising force. I argue that the former continues to involve the viewer in elitist paradigms that reverberate beyond the values of aura and viewers' aesthetic expertise – even in putatively 'critical' understandings of art. In contrast, the latter works towards societal reform by overcoming these paradigms to enable the artist's and the viewer's independent agencies. I thereby make the case that when artists (again, intentionally or not) service the elitisms of traditional intellectualism and pedagogy their ambitions to exercise reformative, politicising agency can only be frustrated.

Ultimately, this thesis combines the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin concerning how subjectivities are shaped through socially scripted positions in all forms of production. This is particularly the case for traditional intellectualism, as identified by Gramsci and further enriched by Benjamin's analysis, which holds sway 'where the conception of the "intellectual"— [is] as a type of person defined by his opinions, attitudes, or dispositions, but not by his position in the process of production' (Benjamin, 2005, p.773). They argue that reform needs 'a new stratum of intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971, p.9), whose duty is to act socially by questioning how dominant forms of social relations inhibit peoples' role as thinking actors. It therefore has direct relevance to how art can bring together the intellectual agencies of artists and viewers in combined social action, not as a form of protest *through* art but as a social reform *in and beyond* art.

My argument, therefore, is for a reformed practice and purpose for art that opposes traditional intellectualism; its focus is on the social and political potential inherent to an appreciation of the relational dynamics of art production. In this way I make an important distinction between art as a political object and art as a socially engaged, politicising force: hence, the thesis interrogates traditional perceptions of authorship in art criticism, art theory and art practices, perceptions which are present even in putatively critical and progressive worldviews. I thus understand art as a matter of societal significance and not simply in and of itself.

Accordingly, this thesis plots a course for a shared, productive collaboration between artist and viewer with the aim of advancing their joint agency in the name of an emancipated society. In thus confronting what art *does*, rather than what it *is*, I link my contribution to the work of Marxist scholars on art: the thesis builds on their interventions by incorporating insights from Gramsci and Benjamin into the understanding of art, and more specifically the installations and interventions of Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar. My interest in Jaar as a political, and potentially politicising, artist started with a B.A. Fine Art dissertation, where I began work on an analysis of the methodologies of his gallery installations, arguing that viewing the act of viewing was their central dynamic. Subsequently I have been to his *Marx Lounge* (discussed in Chapter 7), launched for the 2010 Liverpool Biennale, and studied his major installations and some interventions first-hand in galleries in Paris and at the 2011 Berlin Biennale, which staged a Jaar retrospective that enabled me to encounter his little-seen, early Chilean work (discussed in Chapter 5).

Jaar's practices are an exemplary case for illustrating the potential of the framework advocated across the thesis, because he understands his practices to be in line with what the thesis takes to be the social and political potential of art. Jaar has claimed that Gramsci's belief in the power of culture to improve social and political life is the major influence shaping his work as an artist (Jaar, 2008). As such, Jaar works to actively participate in practical life as a constructor, organiser and 'permanent persuader' (Gramsci, 1971, p.10), through creating models for 'learning to think, for solving a problem' (Jaar, 2006, p.76). By working across the standard sites of galleries, public spaces and education he wages an ostensibly Gramscian war of position (Gramsci, 1971, pp.235 and 243) that seeks to enable a counter-hegemonic strategy of dialogue within, and most importantly between, different parts of society. More specifically, Jaar challenges his students to address the question: 'How does one make visible the invisible?' (Jaar, 2005a), thereby tasking them to engage with the functionalisms of dominant forms of common sense. In particular, he articulates Gramsci's understanding of the organic intellectual through his social interventions and his work with

the mediatic image. In the latter, he deploys art's capacity to establish dialogue with the viewer into exposing how and why society is conditioned to accept the image as the depository of social truth. Accordingly, the immersive installations that he designs for these images function as a connecting link in a chain of communication, where he and the viewer join as second-hand witnesses of tragedies in which everyone is implicated through the very act of viewing.

Hence, in the second half of the thesis, I demonstrate the advantages of the Gramsci/Benjamin approach I advocate throughout the thesis (outlined primarily in Chapter 4) via a detailed discussion of Jaar's art practices. This offers a way of highlighting the contribution art could make towards realising Gramsci's faith in the possibility of establishing forms of communication between the thoughts of the masses (Gramsci, 1971, p.365), and Benjamin's position on the necessity of transcending specialisation in the process of intellectual production if that production aspires to reformative political force and the critical theory of society (Benjamin, 1999, p.775). The thesis therefore proceeds from a Gramscian optimism of the will, although the Gramscian pessimism of the intellect will be apparent in the discussion of the limitations of and flaws in Jaar's practice. Moreover, while the main contributions of the thesis relate to the framework developed for engaging critically with existing forms of art theories, criticisms and practices, with the discussion of Jaar being illustrative of the advantages of this approach, it is hoped that future work on political and politicising art makes use of the framework for examining the practices of other political, and potentially politicising, artists.

Accordingly, the main research question that this thesis addresses is: 'How can art be conceived of, and practised as, a socially engaged, politicising force?'

The subsidiary questions, which correspond to the main themes covered in the thesis, are:

- i. How is art's function conceived in both mainstream and critical contributions? What do these have in common and where do they differ? (covered principally in chapters 1-3).
- ii. What problems are caused by the commonalities shared across seemingly different understandings of art's function? How do they affect how art could contribute to social and political change? (covered principally in chapters 1-3).
- iii. In what ways does a return to the writings of Gramsci and Benjamin, and their combination in one framework, advance our understandings of art's function and thus of how it could contribute to social and political change? (covered principally in chapters 1 and 4).

- iv. How does this framework enable us to analyse the practice of artists who explicitly self-identify as socially and politically engaged? (covered principally in Chapter 4).
- v. What does this framework reveal about Jaar's art practice, both its potentials and its limitations? (covered principally in chapters 5-7).
- vi. What does this framework reveal about Jaar's self-identification as socially and politically engaged, both its potentials and its limitations? (covered principally in chapters 5-7).

It is the task of the rest of the present chapter to plot the key issues that are at stake when undertaking a study such as this. As such, I discuss critically the contributions of two pre-eminent critical theorists – Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière – who not only engage substantively with art's social and political possibilities but also specifically consider Jaar's art practice in doing so.

1.2. Key critical approaches to art's politicising function: Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière

While there are numerous contributors to discussions of art's social and political possibilities, it is clear that the work of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière are central to them. Indeed, one could even pose their arguments as lodestars for others, via their contributions on agonism and social movements (Mouffe) and on the politics of aesthetics and the emancipated spectator (Rancière). Additionally, both have written about Alfredo Jaar in relation to their broader, more conceptual approaches. Hence, the following critical review of Mouffe and Rancière regarding the problem of how art can be a socially engaged, politicising force meets the objectives of the thesis in two ways. Firstly, it critiques their related understandings of a reformative agency for art and the claims they make for it in their writing on the work of Alfredo Jaar; secondly, in light of this, it establishes the basis for a Marxist approach to the research questions outlined above. It thus introduces the thesis' position on the substantive conceptual (chapters 2-4) and practical (chapters 5-7) challenges that art must confront when seeking to work as a socially engaged, politicising force.

Mouffe's analysis of Jaar's work has its origins in the thesis she co-authored with Ernesto Laclau in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985, 2nd edn. 2001) (hereafter *HSS*). *HSS* is significant because of its rejection of the priority of class struggle and the understanding of oppression that is 'founded upon the privileged status of "classes"' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.159). Accordingly, Laclau and Mouffe hold that subjectivities are shaped through discourse rather than material conditions. Therefore, it is necessary from the outset to ground the thesis in relation to their argument that a plurality of subject positions constitutes a more effective force for dislocating social patterning than what they see as the pre-determined

structures of traditional Marxism (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, pp.xiii-xiv). This is all the more relevant since it is a position that is elaborated from Gramsci's understanding of a synthesis between ideology and hegemony, but which rejects his materialist emphasis on the significance of class for the study and critique of society.

The same necessity establishes the thesis' position on Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) and *Dissensus* (2010), since he also views art's political role as functioning discursively. His argument that art's socially reformative agency lies in the conditions of its reception, not those of its making, bypasses the socially reformative significance of democratising artistic relations of production:

To dismiss the fantasies of the word made flesh and the spectator rendered active, to know that words are merely words and spectacles merely spectacles, can help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in (Rancière, 2009, p.23).

As such, it is essential to engage with the positions of Mouffe and Rancière in order to establish the ground from which a practically based approach for artists working in the field of societal reform can be developed.

1.2.1. Mouffe and the formation of subjectivities

Chantal Mouffe addresses the problem of art's agency in struggles for democracy through the post-Marxist theory she initially articulated in *HSS*, with its focus on societal antagonisms and the articulating principle for understanding ideology — a theory described by Jules Townshend as 'a lofty ambition...recast the political strategy of the Marxist left through a critical examination of its theoretical foundations' (Townshend, 2004, p.269). Hence *HSS* argues for a rejection of the concept of class as the formative force that shapes subjectivities and replaces it with multiple subject positions and needs. It maintains that the 'final act of the dissolution of the Jacobin imaginary' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.2) has proved any totalising control of representation to be inadequate for reformative purposes, which must thereafter meet a plurality of social desiderata. Hence, they argue that 'in every case what allows the forms of resistance to assume the character of collective struggles is the existence of an external discourse which impedes the stabilization of subordination as difference' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.159).

Accordingly, *HSS* argues that political struggle can only inhere in the dynamics of agonistic discourse. Therefore, their democracy is understood as a process in which differences are

expressed and confronted. They reject the traditional Marxist rationale of class and the superstructure/base hierarchy, and instead argue for a non-deterministic approach, whence their aim is to deepen the ‘democratic revolution’ by means of the conflict and antagonisms inherent in agonistic discourse, with the purpose of extending a plurality of democratic struggles ‘for equality and liberty to a wide range of social relations’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.xv).

Hence, Mouffe argues (as stated here in an interview with her) for a politics of pluralism stemming from the principle ‘that there is no ultimate reconciliation possible’ (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006, p.9). This means that reformative agency is evaluated through its ability to accommodate ‘a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.191). Hence, Mouffe reasons that ‘the aim of democratic politics is to transform antagonism — the struggle between enemies, [into] agonism — the struggle between adversaries’ (Mouffe, 2000, pp.102-3) and consequently proposes agonism as the means by which art’s socially reformative practice could be enabled.

The thesis contests this position, arguing that to repudiate the understanding of traditional art-values functioning within a totality of class relations raises a twofold problem. Firstly, it denies art substantive reformative force when it dismisses the political dynamic of artistic relations of *production*, because the outcome is a dominant focus on more forms of artistic *representation*. While representation is important, to neglect conditions of artistic production is to impose a determinism that Mouffe claims to reject. I thus contest the agonistic principle that un-sutured subject positions are necessary for societal reform, because it is limited to a conception of the social that negates the materiality of life and productive human activity. Instead I work from the enduring relevance of class structure on the practical grounds that only from a sutured nature of society it is possible to fix the meaning of an event (Geras, 1990, p.67). To refute this principle would commit art to a multiplicity of representational positions as an end in itself.

1.2.2. Representing subjectivity through art

Problems inhering in the representation of subjectivities, which is a major concern of HSS, are also inflected in Mouffe’s approach to artistic activism (Mouffe, 2007), and therefore shape her view of art’s potential reformative agency. Indeed, the insistence on subjectivities as multiple in the individual in whom they shift, form and reform themselves makes sense given the rejection of the unifying concept of class:

the field of politics can no longer be considered a ‘representation of interests’, given that the so-called representation modifies the nature of what is represented...Finally, insofar as the identity of social agents ceases to be exclusively constituted through their insertion in the relations of production, and becomes a precarious articulation among a number of subject positions, what is being implicitly challenged is the identification between social agents and classes (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.58).

Thus Mouffe’s approach to critical artistic practices is directed by the credo that representation, as a hegemonic relation, transforms the particular into a generalised universality. Hence, she states that for critical art:

The real issue concerns the possible forms of critical art, the different ways in which artistic practices can contribute to questioning the dominant hegemony. Once we accept that identities are never pre-given but that they are always the result of processes of identification, that they are discursively constructed, the question that arises is the type of identity that critical artistic practices should aim at fostering (Mouffe, 2007, p.4).

She therefore argues that the demand agonism makes of political artists is that they ‘should not aim at dissipating a supposedly false consciousness in order to reveal the “true reality” [since] identities are always the result of processes of identification’ (Mouffe, 2012, p.272).

Accordingly, Mouffe’s position requires art to inscribe the social agent in practices ‘that will mobilize its affects in a way that subverts a given frame of identification to allow for other modalities of subjectivities’ (Mouffe, 2012, p.272). Therefore, the focus is less on art as potential opinion formation, which would be in accordance with the broad pedagogical relationship that Gramsci conceptualised in hegemony, and more on art as expressive of wider representative practices. In contrast, Gramsci understood the function of hegemony to be potentially reconstructive – ‘every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship’ (Gramsci, 1971, p.350) – and not just deconstructive critique.

Mouffe’s approach to art as intervention therefore keeps faith – perhaps unwittingly – with conservative traditions of representation that understand art as object production, albeit through varied media and multiple subject positions. This, I argue, is the case with *‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces’* (Mouffe, 2007), which reflects an alliance with a nostalgic view that avant-garde art production works outside the history and logic of art practice. In particular, I maintain that it conflates art as a political object with art as a politicising force when it questions whether ‘artistic practices can *still* play a critical role in society’ (Mouffe, 2007; emphasis added), a position which it later links with the ‘abandoned’ idea of the

modernist avant-garde (see Chapter 2 for more on the illusory radicalism of art criticism's understanding of the avant-garde).

Here Mouffe concurs with views of the artistic avant-garde when such critics claim a political significance beyond art for their critical self-enactments. These assertions work on the assumption that radical changes to traditional concepts of style — as in conceptual art, where form does not have to be materialised in object production — will, *per se*, serve social reform. The thesis contests this position, arguing the fundamental importance of distinguishing between art as a political object within expanded traditions of representation and art as a politicising force as part of a transformed conception of society. Crucially, the latter understands representation as a self-defining dynamic that is enabled within democratised, artistic relations of production – as will be detailed later in this chapter and more fully in Chapter 4.

1.2.3. Approaches to hegemony

In addition to the above concerns, *HSS* also centres the counter-hegemonic function in the discursive, which privileges the 'moment of political articulation' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.x). By contrast, Gramsci discusses hegemony from a Marxist position of the fullness of class identities that incorporates ideological influences as they evolve. Mouffe thus approaches art's counter-hegemonic agency from the *HSS* position that 'recover[s] the basic concepts of Gramsci's analysis...to radicalize them in a direction that leads us beyond Gramsci' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.136), submitting that:

What is at a given moment considered as the 'natural' order - jointly with the 'common sense' which accompanies it - is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices; it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity exterior to the practices that bring it into being (Mouffe, 2007).

From this perspective she commends the satirical strategy of the Yes Men's 'identity correction' as an example of counter-hegemonic strategy. The Yes Men are activists whose aim is to raise awareness of problematic political and social issues by inhabiting different identities; through them they target institutions whose neo-liberal ideologies impact on people's wellbeing. Thus, operating from the premise that satirical lies can expose the truth, they set up fake websites similar to the ones they intend to spoof. Mouffe cites their parodic text of the neo-liberal ideology of The World Trade Organisation (WTO), which helps transnational businesses to do whatever way they see fit, as a strategy that will facilitate

dissensual identities amongst those who lack the means and opportunities to have their voices heard:

The WTO places this freedom above all other freedoms, including the freedom to eat, drink water, not eat certain things, treat the sick, protect the environment, grow your own crops, organize a trade union, maintain social services, govern, have a foreign policy. All those freedoms are under attack by huge corporations working under the veil of free trade, that mysterious right that we are told must trump all others (Theyesmen Group quoted in Mouffe, 2007).

Since Mouffe holds identity to be discursively constructed, she tasks critical art practices to shape people's identities by engaging them in agonistic discourse. Hence she submits that:

According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus to make visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony (Mouffe, 2007).

I argue that this position consequently promotes a functional indeterminacy when rationalising a view of subjectivities and hegemony, which is crucially sited in a notion of unending plurality. Hence there is a departure from Gramsci's class-shaped articulatory logic, which they read as understanding 'hegemonic subjects...[to be] constituted on the plane of the fundamental classes' where 'every social formation structures itself around a single hegemonic centre' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, pp.137-8). Therefore, while they retain the Gramscian 'logic of articulation and the political centrality of the frontier effects' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.137), they nevertheless insist on a plurality of discursive spaces containing a plurality of democratic struggles. Hence, distinctions between discursive and non-discursive practices are refused on the grounds 'that every object is constituted as an object of discourse' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p.107). Philip Goldstein neatly summarises their position:

Laclau and Mouffe's version of ideological interpellation adopts the poststructuralist belief that, since objects do not simply or literally mirror their socio-historical contexts, the distinction between object and context, discursive and non-discursive practices, or 'thought and reality' breaks down; in Laclau and Mouffe's terms, 'synonymy, metonymy, metaphor...are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted' (HSS, p.110), (Goldstein, 2005, p.55).

In summary therefore, Mouffe proposes a functional indeterminacy for both subjectivities and counter-hegemonic action. This is initially inspired by, but ultimately rejects, Gramsci's work on hegemony, because its utopianism understands subjectivities as formed within conditions whose material improvement and democratisation can be bettered through agnostic discourses rather than counter-hegemonic action. In this sense, the alignment of Mouffe's project with the avant-garde is not too surprising – it dovetails formalism with political opacity by working through engaged practices of reconfiguring and reactivating existing cultural elements, an approach to art that chimes with her dematerialised understanding of social and political struggle (again, see Chapter 2 for more on the avant-garde).

1.2.4. Alfredo Jaar: the artist as organic intellectual

The logic of this theoretical ground is evident in Mouffe's paper on Alfredo Jaar's political functioning as an artist, part of the catalogue for his 2012 Berlin retrospective *The Way It Is: An Aesthetics of Resistance* (Mouffe, 2012 pp.266-81). Here, she addresses questions of how artistic practices can provide a space for critical intervention, and how an aesthetic of resistance can be envisaged in a post-political society. She proceeds from the theoretical framework of the hegemonic approach argued in *HSS* as 'ideally suited to apprehend the relations between art and politics, and...important aspects of Jaar's engagement as an artist' (Mouffe, 2012, p.266).

Although Mouffe reasons from a Gramscian perception that our knowledge of the world is constructed by sedimented, hegemonic practices, she differs from Gramsci in asserting that they are 'never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity exterior to the practices that bring it into being' (Mouffe, 2012, p.267). Accordingly, she approaches art, and Jaar's practice, through the discursive emphasis initially posited in *HSS*'s rationalisation that in the post-political landscape that succeeded the failure of the left, it is the discursive conflict of adversarial positions that can make an essential contribution to 'a vibrant democracy' (Mouffe, 2012, p.268).

Thus she identifies art's reformative political agency – as 'critical art' (Mouffe, 2012, p.269) – through its contribution to a revised common sense, which in accordance with Gramsci's use of the term, provides for a specific understanding of reality which guides our everyday practices (Gramsci, 1971, pp.323-33). Hence, Gramsci continues to inform part of her argument when she applies his concept of 'a war of position' (Gramsci, 1971, pp.328-9), where meanings and values constitute the object of art's struggle, but she understands this in terms of the multi-positional challenges to the hegemonic common sense that agonistic discourse potentially enables.

For Mouffe, it is this understanding which puts art in a strong position to effect social change, because it operates in the realm of culture, 'making visible what it tends to obscure and obliterate' (Mouffe, 2012, p.271). Although this is Gramscian in formal exposition, it remains tied to the aforementioned de-materialised understanding of political and social contestation. Thus by siting art's interventionist practices within agonistic debate, whence she underlines that the aim of 'critical artistic practices' is not to dissipate 'a supposedly false consciousness in order to reveal the "true reality"', but to 'subvert a given frame of identification to allow for other modalities of subjectivity' (Mouffe, 2012, p.272), Mouffe firmly locates the efficacy of critical art interventions within an anti-essentialist framework. As noted already, this framework takes identities to result from processes of identification rather than being produced out of their social conditions.

In her critical engagement with Jaar's work, Mouffe consequently argues that the plurality of forms and sites that he uses enable the political force of aesthetics as a form of resistance through a strategic war of position. Thus, she observes that Jaar's practice of working through projects in institutional and public spaces, as well as in the field of art education, takes on a wide terrain of struggle which, in fostering a variety of agonistic public spaces, contributes to the development of a 'counter-hegemony' (Mouffe, 2012, p.276). Accordingly, Mouffe's engagement with Jaar as an artist of critical standing is channelled into how his counter-hegemonic interventions disarticulate the existing common sense to encourage agonistic discourse in a variety of institutional and public spaces.

Mouffe identifies Jaar's approach of asking questions in these spaces as the clearest way for an artist to position himself within a strategy of engagement. Chapter 5 of the thesis offers a detailed analysis of this strategy, which Jaar first used in Chile in *Studies on Happiness*, 1979 – 1981 where billboards along the highway into Santiago asked the question: '*¿Es usted feliz?* (Are you happy?). Mouffe references this artwork, in conjunction with *Questions Questions* (2008), where on Milan billboards, buses, subways, trams, posters and placards he placed questions that confronted everyone who read them with problems such as: 'Does politics need culture?' and 'Is the intellectual useless?' The strategy was both general and specific: it aimed at creating a network of resistance to restore the meaning of 'public space' that Berlusconi had sought to erase while simultaneously situating it as a concern within neo-liberalism and global capitalism. For Mouffe the force of *Questions Questions* was 'its mode of unsettling the common sense by posing apparently simple questions, albeit questions that, in the specific context of the intervention, are susceptible of triggering reflections that will arouse discontent with the current state of things' (Mouffe, 2012, p.277).

Likewise in her reading of Jaar's project for the *Skoghall Konsthall* (2000), Mouffe acknowledges the importance of its influence in opinion formation, where it demonstrated how art could intervene by contributing to the emergence of a need, in this instance a gallery for the local population. She thus observes that art as intervention has the capacity to both raise awareness in a community of something missing from its life whilst also stimulating the desire for change that precedes remedial action (for a different, more nuanced and balanced view, see Chapter 7). Jaar's project had proceeded through three stages: the first researched what the community felt it lacked; the second constructed a Konsthall from paper provided by the towns' chief source of employment — the paper industry. Finally, after an opening exhibition of work by young, Swedish artists, the building was burned down in a staged pyrotechnic drama. Mouffe thus evaluates the intervention in accordance with her view that art's role lies in challenging the common sense:

The project is emblematic on several counts. Besides testifying to Jaar's pedagogical strategy of never imposing his own vision but bringing people to articulate their own needs, this work is also an illustration of his ability to engage with institutions in a critical way. Not to mention...proof of his profound belief in the importance of culture (Mouffe, 2012, p.279).

While her observations clarify the influence of Gramsci, both in Jaar's art and, by implication, more widely in politicising art practices, Mouffe concludes her discussion of Jaar's work by returning to art's role in contributing, in a transformative way, to the flux of subjectivity. Moreover, in making the case for critical art as intervening through a war of position (Mouffe, 2012, pp.270-5), she identifies how Jaar works as an organic intellectual, again a Gramscian concept (Gramsci, 1971, pp.9-10). However, where Gramsci sees the organic intellectual as a facilitator of 'the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone' (Gramsci, 1971, p.9), Mouffe's emphasis is on the affective rather than the cognitive means by which the artist, as organic intellectual, forms relations with the viewer — logically so, since affect can feed into the flux of subjectivity that is at the heart of agonism. She therefore approaches Jaar's work as 'a form of conceptual art that mobilizes affects and passions' (Mouffe, 2012, p.281), and identifies the political force of art to lie in its 'great power and capacity in making us see things in a different way, in making us perceive new possibilities...works of art allow us to participate in new experiences through imagination and the emotions they evoke' (Mouffe, 2012, p.280).

It is clear that Mouffe's Gramsci-inspired identifications with Jaar's practices provide insights into some of the political dynamics of his work. Moreover, she is effective when considering how the affective impact of the contexts Jaar references and the strategies he uses could work positively for agonistic discourse. In contrast, I look for art's political traction through relational reform of the process of artistic production which logically exceeds the specific contexts of discursive representation. It is this, more than agonistic endeavours, which provides the tools for reversing the traditional functionalisms of art production. In addition, it means that Mouffe approaches Jaar's practice as potentially engaged and politicising in formalistic as opposed to relational terms. Chapters 5-7 propose a different approach to the study of Jaar's practice, which will be briefly outlined later in this chapter and in greater detail in Chapter 4.

1.2.5. Jacques Rancière's perspective on emancipating the spectator

In contrast to Mouffe, Jacques Rancière approaches the concerns of the agency of the spectator and the artist's pedagogy as related but separate areas. Whereas Mouffe argues for un-sutured viewing subjectivities, he understands the viewers as a bloc that is shaped by the hierarchical, social divisions separating the spectator from 'both the capacity to know and the power to act' (Rancière, 2009, p.2). Hence his concept of viewers' freedom calls for a network of regulative presuppositions to be contested. Therefore, in the following critical engagement with *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) I consider how he applies concerns with contesting a socially constructed and policed order (Rancière, 2004, p.89) to the reception of art.

In common with Mouffe, Rancière works from the traditional view that art's social functionalism occurs post-production. He therefore argues that establishing the principle of an equality of intelligence amongst viewers constitutes reformative social action because it undermines the regulative oppositions between viewing and knowing, and their associated distinctions between passivity and activity (Rancière, 2009, p.12). Notwithstanding the democratising importance of his argument against elitist divisions that separate viewers from one another in an art world-class structure, several problems present themselves. Foremost, Rancière's aim to emancipate viewers neglects reform of the regulative oppositions between the viewer and the artists. Thus the significance of what is proposed is contained in the discrete world of art production and separated from a full social context.

More fundamentally, though, whereas Rancière reasons that oppositions allot 'places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the *modes of perception* within which these are perceived' (Rancière, 2004, p.85; emphasis added), this thesis contends

that since inequalities and unfreedoms are enacted between *people* not between *ideas*, liberation from ‘modes of perception’ lacks the capacity to practically contest social structuring. For instance, reform in the relational field of artistic production has direct social consequence since it works *pre-production* as well as post-production. Hence the claim that emancipating the spectator from the *allegory* of social structuring enables a ‘shared power of the equality of intelligence’ (Rancière, 2009, p.17) between different viewers, which inhabits a discursive field that inevitably lacks practical social traction since it supports a position where the elitisms of spectatorship can be overcome only in isolation from the elitisms of production:

Why assimilate listening to passivity, unless through the prejudice that speech is the opposite of action? These oppositions — viewing/knowing appearance/reality, activity/passivity — are quite different from logical oppositions between clearly defined terms. They specifically define an *a priori* distribution of the positions and capacities and incapacities attached to these positions. They are embodied allegories of inequality (Rancière, 2009, p.12).

Counter to this, the thesis’ exposition over the following chapters elucidates how the regulation of the viewer occurs at the point of *production* from whence it has wider reaching social implications that affect all. Thus by arguing for a discursive parity between the wise and the ignorant viewer *The Emancipated Spectator* aims to establish the latter’s viewing-equality with those who already enjoy the position of privileged spectatorship and consequently neglects the full social significance of divisions in art’s production:

The collective power shared by the spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way...to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other (Rancière, 2009, pp.16-17).

1.2.6. The problem of art as dissensus

In the essay ‘The Paradoxes of Political Art’ (Rancière, 2010, pp.134-51), Rancière proposes a dissensual approach to combating the regulative social forces that prevent the emancipation of the spectator. He argues that when art is centred on denouncing its own participation in such forces (Rancière, 2010, p.135) its contestation only reinforces the problems of pedagogy that it seeks to subvert. From this premise he repudiates two established forms of political art: the first, ‘*representational mediation*’ (Rancière, 2010, p.137; emphasis in original), follows a traditional model that has its origins in theatre and

therefore works through the logic of mimesis. When transposed to art it operates from the assumption that displaying photographs, for example about ‘the way colonisers represent the colonised’ (Rancière, 2010, p.136), will work to undermine the fallacies of mainstream representations of identities. Equally he identifies pedagogy operating in the model of ‘*ethical immediacy*’ (Rancière, 2010, p.137; emphasis in original), where the artist takes up a temporary residence in a problematic social space to instigate new modes of community-based social interaction.

Rancière therefore proposes the ‘aesthetic regime of art’ (Rancière, 2010, pp.138-9); it operates a ‘paradoxical form of efficacy’ through art as dissensus. He argues that this regime achieves a non-pedagogical standing by effecting ‘aesthetic rupture...between the production of *artistic savoir-faire* and social destination, between sensory forms, the significations that can be read on them and their possible effects’ (Rancière, 2010, p.139; emphasis in original). Thus it eludes the stain of pedagogical authority that is part of a policed system of apprehension by rejecting values of aesthetic expertise on the part of the viewer and political agendas on the part of the artist.

For Rancière, political/dissensual art functions through interpellation by inserting itself between how we perceive things through the senses and how we are pinned down to making sense of them by ‘the distribution of the sensible’. In the process, it subverts the social logic of distributing hierarchical positions to different domains and groups and thereby exposes the interests of that distribution, finding both definition and purpose in a preoccupation that exploits and recreates what it is seeking to abolish:

Politics breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the ‘natural’ order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled...Politics can therefore be defined by way of contrast as the activity that breaks with the order of the police by inventing new subjects...Politics creates a new form, as it were, of dissensual ‘common sense’ (Rancière, 2010, p.139).

Rancière recognises that inherent problems exist in the ‘incalculable tension between political dissensuality and aesthetic indifference’ (Rancière, 2010, p.151). As an example, he cites Sophie Ristelhueber’s photographic images of Israeli blockades on Palestinian roads, part of her series WB (West Bank) (Fig. 1). They are of small blockades on minor roads taken from a bird’s eye perspective, and because the blockades are assembled from available roadside materials the images transform them into elements of the landscape.



Fig. 1: Sophie Ristelhueber: Israeli blockades on Palestinian road (1991)

Thus their effect on the viewer is to displace anger, which offers a form of self-fulfilment that can substitute action with curiosity. Even though curiosity has the potential to be more open-ended, Rancière nevertheless reasons that Ristelhueber's images 'cannot avoid the aesthetic cut that separates consequences from intentions and prevents there from being any direct passage to an "other side" of words and images' (Rancière, 2010, p.151). In part, he therefore acknowledges the problem of art object production that aspires to be reformative, but is rendered counter-reformative by the limitations of its art-based focus.

Chapters 5-7 critically engage with Jaar's work from the Gramscian/Benjaminite perspective developed in Chapter 4 and discussed briefly in the next section of this chapter. By expanding on the implicit pedagogy operating in traditional artistic relations of production, where social division is embedded in the separate roles of the author and the viewer, the thesis counters Rancière's position that art's emancipatory project is realised primarily through dissensus.

1.2.7. The problems of addressing the unfreedoms of viewing

Rancière's discussion of Jaar's installations addresses how we respond to the suffering of others, with particular emphasis on how, in an era of instant imaging of suffering, art can achieve moral traction outside simple curiosity and ephemeral feelings of horror. He argues that Jaar's work with images of sufferers succeeds through a dissensual approach to political and media regimes that render the viewer blind and deaf to a subject-sufferer's lack of voice and subsequent anonymity. Furthermore, he argues that since representation is necessarily an act of substitution, then the words of commentators, analysts and critics also function as images and therefore should be understood as complicit in the regime that Jaar seeks to

elucidate. Hence, Rancière proposes that while images and words are credited with being able to convey reality, neither is capable of doing so in practice (Rancière, 2007, p.72). He reasons that the pedagogical paradox manifests where the artist's or critic's aim is to instruct the viewer since, in exploiting traditional oppositions between knowledge and ignorance, the resulting act of viewing can enable neither understanding nor empathy:

what the protocol of knowledge transmission teaches...in the first instance, is that ignorance is not a lesser form of knowledge, but the opposite of knowledge; that knowledge is not a collection of fragments of knowledge, but a position (Rancière, 2009, p.9).

Thus, with particular reference to art, Rancière contributes to the ancient philosophical debate that introduced the dilemma of viewing a distant shipwreck from the safety of the shore in order to question how we respond to images of another's suffering (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura Bk. 2*, lines 1-6). Rancière argues that the functionalism of representation exploits a system of differences that separates the subject of the image from the viewer of the image so that it instructs opinion whilst simultaneously obstructing agency. Hence, he reasons that images cannot meet expectations that they can make a difference, since they are controlled by a regime that works for the stability derived from consensus (Rancière, 2009, p.103). Consequently, the political tensions embedded in the use of the image articulate two basic operations of the consensual vision of politics:

[The] first operation reduces the people as political subjects to the population: that is to a sociological category decomposable into its constituent empirical categories; and second, the transformation of politics into the affair of professional politicians...whose arrogated function is to arbitrate the residual and marginal possibilities that the objectivity of the situation permits (Rancière, 2010, p.5).

Rancière concludes that the tensions confronting art's use of images, particularly the image of suffering, arise from images being conflated with reality. They transfer the untenable suffering of another to the intolerability of the image:

The image is pronounced unsuitable for criticising reality because it pertains to the same regime of visibility as that reality, which by turns displays its aspect of brilliant appearance and its other side of sordid truth, constituting a single spectacle (Rancière, 2009, pp.83-4).

Accordingly, self-consciously ‘political’ art, which for Rancière means art as dissensus, affects both the image and our viewing of it by ‘redraw[ing] the frame within which common objects are determined’ (Rancière, 2010, p.139). By contesting ‘the ethical regime of images’ (Rancière, 2004, p.20) — his specific term for the ubiquitous assumption of an interface between images and reality — art can realise its counter-hegemonic force. In this way, Rancière’s grounds his understanding of critical/political art within his thesis of dissensus where, rather than revealing/declaring the contradictions of power and the policed sense of the common sense, it ‘questions its own limits and powers, [and] refuses to anticipate its own effects’ (Rancière, 2010, p.149). It is a thesis of art’s negating power rather than its productive potential.

Therefore, he concludes that the task for political artists is to address the truth content of the image and the uses to which the image is put in order to ‘frustrate these voyeuristic habits...to reduce the number of images that are anaesthetising us, or even suppress them altogether’ (Rancière, 2007, p.71). This is because:

the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed. The distribution of the sensible thus produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done (Rancière, 2004, p.85).

The following chapters elaborate an understanding that such post-production concerns with critiquing art are themselves implicitly shaped by the consensual view. They dispute the politicising value of dissensus and argue instead that art’s truth, for good or for bad, operates through relational, productive activity not simply in the reception of image-making. It is therefore inclusive of the photographer/artist, the viewer/critic and the viewed.

1.2.8. Rancière on Jaar’s theatre of images

In his discussion of Jaar’s photographic installations, Rancière focuses on how the strategies he uses contest the common sense view that we are submerged by the sensory power of too many images of suffering, which in turn produce indifference rather than anger and intervention (Rancière, 2007, pp.71-80). In an example of dissensual argumentation he thus defines the accepted wisdom of image fatigue as a ‘bogus controversy over images [that] conceals a matter of counting’ (Rancière, 2009, p.97), since it separates those who are capable of seeing and speaking from the faceless and voiceless who suffer. Hence his analyses of work in Jaar’s *Rwandan Project* – discussed in Chapter 6 – refute the doxa that

viewers are inundated with images of suffering to the point where their response is numbed, and the reality of the horrors they are called to witness are rendered banal (Jaar, 2005b, pp.71-9).

Rancière identifies the ‘political figure par excellence of metonymy which gives the effect for the cause or part of the whole’ (Rancière, 2009, p.97) as an important strategy in Jaar’s work. He observes its function in *Real Pictures* (1995), where Jaar substitutes words for images, and also in *The Eyes of Gutele Emerita* (1996), whose single gaze, multiplied in one million slides heaped on a huge table, is proxy for the eyes of the million massacred Tutsis and also those who survived, yet nevertheless withholds what Emerita thinks and feels. Rancière maintains that Jaar uses metonymy to address the ‘pivotal interface between the word, the visible, and the count’ (Jaar, 2005b, p.74) in the distribution of the sensible that conditions the viewers to accept the ubiquitous face and voice of the media presenter as the interposing reality between the themselves and the event (Jaar, 2005b, pp.73-4).

Real Pictures (1995) presents stacked and repeated black, linen portfolio boxes, each closed but concealing a photograph of a survivor of the Rwandan massacre; on the top surface of the box white text cites dates, sites, events, names and what the person, whose image is concealed, witnessed.



Fig. 2: Alfredo Jaar: *Real Pictures* (1995)

Rancière reasons that the strategy of withholding the image combined with the visual impact of how the text is presented disrupt the functionalisms serviced by media reportage and images. He explains that they repudiate the media’s policed interface with reality by

counterposing minimal, factual words to both the media's selection of images that show faceless and voiceless victims, and words that declare authoritative possession of the reality:

words to visible images...overturning the dominant logic that makes the visual the lot of multitudes and the verbal (that he asserts is) the privilege of a few. The words do not replace the images. They are images — that is to say, forms of redistribution of the elements of representation (Rancière, 2009, p.97).

Thus he argues that Jaar constructs a dissensual force by redistributing the relations through which the consensual vision of politics works: like memorials (which are limited to the dead) the installation also records names, but they are the names of survivors whose family and community have been slaughtered. Furthermore, Rancière reasons that by concealing the images and presenting text as the *real picture* Jaar ensures 'the reality they show is that of names that have a story' (Rancière, 2007, p.75), thereby disrupting the 'distribution of the sensible' that denies their identities by representing them as a distant bloc of suffering.

In the installation *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996), the viewer first follows a long, single line of white text that leads to the space where the million slides of Gutete's eyes are heaped on a huge, central table. In this instance, Rancière argues that metonymic displacement produces a form of reversal, first by using words to replace images and thereafter by disrupting the privilege of the voyeur with an unreadable, return gaze. Thus he contends that Jaar works against consensus, disrupting the traditional functionalisms of words and images and constructing space and time for the viewer to confront the inability of both to connect to reality:

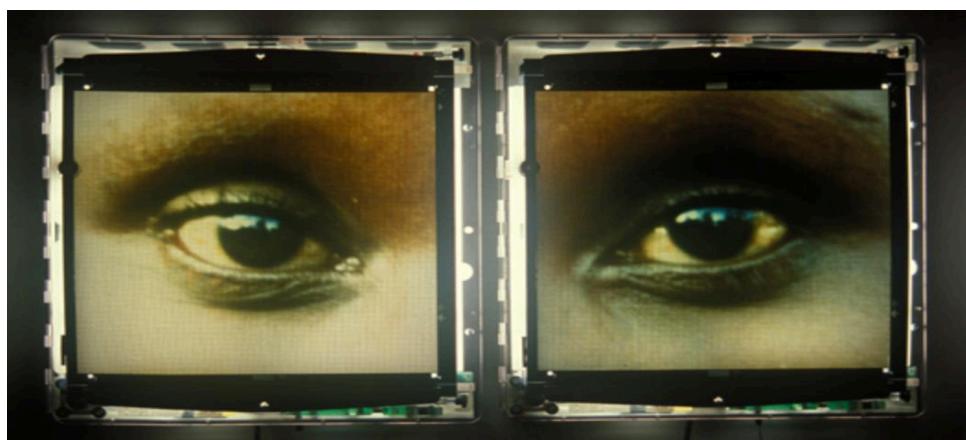


Fig. 3: Alfredo Jaar: *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996)

First and foremost it is this gaze, for all that it has seen the massacre, does not reconstitute its perception of it for us. We may know what she has seen. We do not know what she thinks. In other words we see what the massacre and the indifference deny, each in its own way: that she is not in fact a simple surface where events are inscribed and reflected, but a body that thinks (Rancière, 2007, p.76).

Rancière's analysis of Jaar's *The Sound of Silence* (2006) argues that its interface of words and images ruptures normal usage and thereby meets his definition of political art (see Chapter 6 for a different, more nuanced and balanced view). The installation, which takes the form of a viewing space enclosed from its surroundings, usually within a gallery but sometimes in a gallery courtyard, allows viewers to enter a darkened and enclosed space for an eight-minute viewing session. Inside, on a black screen, a silent, moving thread of white words narrates the personal and specific circumstances that led to activist-turned-photojournalist Kevin Carter taking the Pulitzer prize-winning photograph of a starving Sudanese child and a vulture.

The words narrate Carter's career from activist to award-winning photojournalist and finally to his suicide a year later, in 1994. However, Rancière's interest is not in the affective power of the image itself but rather in the failure of images to represent another's reality. It is not that he wants a more innovative way of representing suffering, but rather that he wants to disrupt preconceptions about how such images work. Consequently, he focuses on Jaar's strategy of constructing a viewing context that is analogous to that of taking the photograph. It does not seek to replicate the original circumstances of Carter's action, but to distinguish what the installation offers for viewing from the traditional physical spaces newspapers or art museums occupy in their traffic with mediatic images. Hence Jaar withholds Carter's image until the closing seconds, when it is flashed across the screen for the length of time it takes a camera shutter to open and close. This leads Rancière to observe that Jaar operates dissensually, rejecting the intolerable in the image to concentrate instead on the intolerable need for activism and the intolerable regime of voyeurism through which such images are usually consumed.

Rancière therefore analyses Jaar's installations as art forms that contest the established understanding of how images work, arguing that as examples of dissensus they emancipate the viewer from regulated acts of viewing. In doing so he grounds dissensual art practices in the visual, which in common with Mouffe signals an understanding of art that is anchored in object production. However, although it disrupts hierarchies by asserting an equality of viewing intelligence and moreover subverts the authority of the word and the image, it

nevertheless understands the viewer as viewer and the artist as artist, separated from each other in terms of artistic relations of production.

As such, although Rancière differs markedly in some respects from Mouffe, they both ultimately resort to the formalism that their understanding of society would apparently seek to overcome. Since they see current representations as the issues they want to refine and make work, they do not reconsider the representation *tout court* but instead seek innovation in representation. This, I contend, is the logical outcome of their shared interest in advocating a de-materialised framework which enables them to make some important points but in the end leads them into a representational dead end.

1.2.9. Conclusion

To summarise this section, the commonalities across seemingly different understandings that Mouffe and Rancière bring to art's social functioning present problems for conceptualising and appreciating socially engaged, politicising art practice. Essentially, they neglect the embedded elitism of traditional art production while simultaneously valuing art for discursively engaging the viewer with social issues. In accepting the naturalised, separate agencies for the artist and the viewer, they implicitly approve a hierarchical structure in art that reflects and reinforces divisions in the wider social field. Hence, while Mouffe identifies art's social agency in its ability to facilitate a discursive expansion of subjectivities free from the restrictions of existing orders and Rancière focuses on how art can contest naturalised attitudes, values and understandings, both locate art's social force in a post-production interface with the viewer. Mouffe looks to how art can provide spaces for agonistic discourse and Rancière tasks it to operate the political principles of dissensus.

In her discussion of Jaar's art, Mouffe commends his public interventions on the grounds that they function affectively and thereby enable new perceptions that refute conventional wisdom. She thus approaches them as opportunities constructed by the artist for the benefit of the viewer. Rancière's interest is in Jaar's photographic installations, where he also looks to how they emancipate the viewer from a position that is subservient to established wisdom and authority. Thus, although Mouffe's focus is on supporting the individual's unsutured subjectivity and Rancière's is on emancipating the policed cohort of viewers, both maintain that art's socially reformative action occurs via a discursive interface between the art object and the viewer.

In consequence, they argue that ideas rather than relations shape our material social experience. The changes they look for are therefore changes of representation rather than

function; for Mouffe they are grounded in agonistic discourses while for Rancière they are staged through dissensual practices. Notwithstanding these differences, they understand art's contribution to social change as happening after the point of production and at the point of reception. Thus their ostensible radicalism adheres to traditions of formalism where the viewer's function is to view the event or object that the artist's function produces or stage-manages at a prior stage.

I have detailed my reservations about the analyses of Rancière and Mouffe regarding art in general and Jaar's art specifically, as preparation for the thesis' position on art as a socially engaged, politicising force. It will contest views, such as those presented above, that art's political function lies in opposing the totalising logic of equivalence with the logic of difference. In contrast, the approach outlined below, and defended across the thesis, moves beyond an understanding of art defined by innovative formalism to an approach that centres on a materialist understanding of art and politics.

1.3. The Gramscian/Benjaminitive approach

The alternative offered, by combining writings on society, culture and the arts by Gramsci and Benjamin in one framework, advances our understanding of art's function and therefore clarifies how it could contribute to social and political change. Importantly, both identify how peoples' lives are materially shaped by ideologies that are so sedimented in the common experience that they *seem* natural rather than socially constructed. While this may appear similar to the approaches critiqued above, the framework outlined in this section (and more fully in Chapter 4) clarifies how the *appearance* of natural objectivity is the product of purposeful, productive human action and not just the ideas that inhere in that action.

Accordingly, the thesis works from Gramscian insights into the symbiosis between the base and the superstructure, which it enriches with insights from Benjamin's more specific work on the role of the arts in societal reform. In combination, they serve the thesis' aim of addressing how art as object production is irredeemably in tow to maintaining wider, traditional relations of production and their concomitant inequalities. From their analyses of the social functionalisms of elitism in society and the arts, the thesis advocates a reformed conception of the viewer, which is to be achieved through her inclusion in the relations of artistic production. In particular, enabling parity of agency between viewer and artist locates art's function in the relational field where it must acknowledge its own social accountability. Thus, overcoming conservative paradigms embedded in art object production through the division of artist from viewer enables art to function as a socially engaged, politicising force.

1.3.1. The Gramscian view of culture

Gramsci's theories have a central position in the thesis, as does the approach he takes to organic engagement with contemporary conditions. Through this he proposes practical measures to counter the elitist values that are so effectively cemented in the relations between traditional intellectuals and wider society. His analysis shows how these buttress hegemonic culture by regulating the people through, for example, the exercise of prestige (Gramsci, 1971, p.12). Furthermore, through his contribution of the concept of 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971, p.197), he accounts for why these values are so obdurate. He elucidates how the common sense functions to establish a 'relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given time and place' (Gramsci, 1971, p.326). Hence Gramsci not only identifies the challenge of politicising the masses to be one of rendering common sense 'ideologically coherent' (Gramsci, 1971, p.421), but also, in emphasising the importance of making an inventory (Gramsci, 1971, p.324) that critically elaborates the historical metanarrative governing traditional intellectuals, he proposes a practical course of action that is accessible to everyone. The thesis therefore inventories the specific assumptions and narratives at work in traditional art production and consumption in chapters 2 and 3.

In addition to overturning established faith in the intrinsic nature of traditional intellectual activity, Gramsci makes it imperative to address its controlling functionalism 'within the general complex of social relations' (Gramsci, 1971, pp.8-9). To this end, he urges the elaboration of organic intellectuals from the working class — hence the thesis' objective to establish a juncture in the artist/viewer relation that contributes to the reshaping of practical life (Gramsci, 1971, p.10) through a transformed conception of the viewer.

1.3.2. Benjamin and the politics of representation

Benjamin's writings enable a specific focus on how art can work as a socially engaged, politicising force. His analysis of the critical part that representation plays in a visual rhetoric of persuasion amplifies Gramsci's work in the social field, and thus renders the operative ground of Gramsci's 'common sense' relevant to the political force of art production. In particular, Benjamin clarifies how, under a fascistic orchestration of the people (Benjamin, 1999, p.234), representation can be cynically exploited through the use of moral metaphor (Benjamin, 2009, pp.157-8). Furthermore, he identifies and critiques the aestheticisation of politics, namely how the visual is fused with visualisation in order to peddle a specious optimism designed to alienate the people from self-defining action (Benjamin, 2009, pp.157-8).

As an intellectually based counter-measure to task artists and critics with reformatory initiative, Benjamin proposes ‘organizing pessimism’, which he explains as ‘expelling moral metaphor from politics and finding in the sphere of political action the “image sphere” in its entirety’ (Benjamin, 2009, p.157). His concept of the ‘image sphere’ contributes to the objectives of the thesis by extending understanding of the visual into a complex, material reality beyond the controlling limitations of image-as-metaphor. Benjamin thereby argues that ‘at significant points of that image sphere’ (Benjamin, 2009, p.159) creative contact between art and the people can disarticulate the key discourses and practices upheld by the traditions of art.

Thus the importance Benjamin gives to ‘creative contact’ extends the Gramscian principle that social change must come from the politicisation of the masses, making specific and explicit art’s contribution to the process. Hence ‘The Author as Producer’ (Benjamin, 2005, pp.768-81) understands art as a relational dynamic rather than the production of art objects, establishing both why and how reformed relational forces of art production can contribute to the enablement of the agency of the masses. Moreover, Benjamin identifies revolutionary praxis for art and culture in technological reproduction by arguing that dismantling the aura of the singular work of art will effectively countermand its controlling ideology of closure (Benjamin, 1999, pp.210-35). Thus by combining specifics relating to art and culture from Benjamin and Gramsci, I contribute a framework that clarifies how art might function as a socially engaged, politicising force, an approach which I then apply in analyses of the installations and social interventions of Alfredo Jaar. As such, the thesis seeks to argue that it is possible, in theory and in practice, to rethink substantively and significantly our understandings of art’s social and political potential.

1.4. Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in two main parts. The first establishes the position and criteria by which one can subsequently analyse and critically engage with art practice, especially practice which self-identifies as critical and/or political. From this basis the second part applies the approach to perform a critical analysis of Jaar’s installations and interventions, and his self-identified role as a political artist. It thereby produces a cumulative assessment of what enables or impedes art’s socially reformative politicising force that clarifies the thesis’ contrasting approach to those discussed earlier in this chapter and also in chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 2 develops the thesis’ concerns with arts potential social and political role through analyses of how, especially in the second half of the 20th century, it became analogous with avant-garde art production. It proceeds from a critical engagement with Clement Greenberg’s

position on modernism and its subsequent influence on art history of the period, working with Eva Cockcroft's arguments that identified abstract expressionism as a weapon in the Cold War. Its objective is to challenge the grounds upon which Greenberg, and those following in his wake, distinguished avant-garde art from kitsch. Thereafter the chapter charts the long-lasting Greenbergian influence through a discussion of the new formalist strategies inherent to later art practices which sought to account for and sometimes include marginalised subject positions. It thus shows how, in this period, avant-garde art and its art histories continued to reinforce a traditional view of art (intentionally or not).

Chapter 3 continues along this path, identifying ways in which Barthes' theory on the limitations of authorship resonated with movements in that historical period. Barthes was reacting to Greenberg's elitism and formalism, and while the Barthesian inheritance clearly offers more possibilities for what art *is* compared to the Greenbergian regime, its means of doing so neglect the fundamentals of an artwork's social functionalisms. It thus reiterates problems embedded in assuming that avant-garde art can confront elitism. Overall, then, the chapter deepens my argument that hegemony is embedded at the point of production more than reception.

Chapter 4 outlines the framework discussed briefly above, through my key conceptual contribution: of combining Benjamin's work on art's social production with Gramsci's wider concerns with the interface of culture, social institutions and economy. This, the conceptual heart of the thesis, makes possible insights into the problems of recognising the ideological forces embedded in traditional relations of art production and their negative impact on the social agencies of both artist and viewer. In the chapter, this elaboration follows a discussion of interventions by Marxist scholars in art history and theory – such as T. J. Clark, Janet Wolff, Gail Day, Steve Edwards, and Mark Hutchinson – on art's social function, in order to show how Gramsci's and Benjamin's insights can build on these contributions and subsequently interrogate art practice in a richer manner.

Using this framework, the thesis moves to the second main part. Here, chapters 5-7 critically discuss Jaar's work across a number of decades and a plurality of forms and categories. Chapter 5 uses two inter-related foci to highlight the overarching relevance of Chilean contexts to the formation of Jaar's approach and practice. The first summarises significant aspects of the USA's cultural colonisation of Chile, and the second overviews the brutalities of Allende's overthrow (1973) and the ensuing Pinochet-led junta (1973-90), both being backed by covert US support. The purpose of this overview is to define the challenges facing art's counter-hegemonic agency. It furthers the thesis' aim by locating them in a political and

relational field of cultural production that exceeds traditional art-specific concerns with object production. By working with a Gramscian understanding that such action is located at the nodal intersection of coercion and consent, I establish how Chilean contexts politicised Jaar's view of the social responsibilities of the artist and his art, while his early training in architecture encouraged his use of non-formalist methodologies. Through an analysis of Jaar's Chilean work, the chapter develops the thesis' position on art as relational production and prepares for its further development in chapters 6 and 7.

The work of Chapter 6 deepens the thesis' argument that a dynamic of social shaping is serviced by art object production, specifically here through the political controls directing our traditional relationship with images. Through a substantive discussion of Jaar's installation work, I interrogate the strategies he uses to contest the assumption that photojournalist images are mediators of truth. I argue that two inter-related problems are central to how the installations seek to enable the independent agency of artist and viewer. Critically, Jaar has to steer a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of authorship and pedagogy as he contests the concept of the image as truth-teller. Here the Gramscian analysis of the working of common sense as a key factor in social governance is enriched by Benjamin's contention that representation is embedded in a visual rhetoric of persuasion designed to navigate viewers towards the image's dramatic narrative and away from its political functionalisms. I thereby interrogate how Jaar's strategies of dramatic staging, shock, and affectivity confront embedded unfreedoms in conventional viewing. Thus, the chapter's contribution to the thesis concerns the question of counter-hegemonic agency through the attempt to counter ideological patronage (Benjamin, 2005, p.773) via the practices of organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971, p.10). This develops the thesis' position on art's relational function, whilst also preparing the ground for Chapter 7's work on Jaar's social interventions.

Whereas the preceding chapters relate to Jaar's early Chilean art and later gallery installations, Chapter 7 culminates my assessment of his work with discussions of his social interventions that include substantive analysis of his 'Gramsci Trilogy' (2005) and 'The Marx Lounge' (2010). I interrogate the extent to which they enable a socially enfranchising force, thus revisiting points made by Mouffe and Rancière in the present chapter. I discuss how Jaar deals with the problems created by pressures of the art market and the institutional authority of art. These flourish in commissioned practices of social intervention where the nomadic artists can come to 'approximate the "work" over and above the communities it involves' (Kwon, 2004, p.47), thus returning the core dynamic of the work to the traditional authority of the master artist. Hence, the chapter addresses how Jaar's social interventions make possible reflexive judgments of art as a socially engaged, politicising force by

examining their strategies for instating a commonality of experience regarding the artist and the viewer. The chapter completes the thesis' argument that this commonality enables art to counter the politics of elitism in the wider social field.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with a summary of the core claims it makes for art's potential social engagement as a politicising force, returning to the interlocking areas of where its contribution of a Gramscian/Benjaminite approach elucidates the close relationship between art history, art criticism and art production. I relate traditional values of aesthetic taste and artistic skill back to the Gramscian/Benjaminite need to understand them within wider political practices where elitism and pedagogy combine to constrain artists' and viewers' subjectivities under cover of art's putative autotelism. I summarise the conclusions to be drawn from its analyses of Jaar's installations and interventions, relating them to the thesis' aim of analysing how to work from new relations of artistic production in the name of a transformed society. The conclusion closes with a reflection on art's contributory role as an agent for societal change along with some considerations for further research.

Chapter 2

Greenbergian Values of Formalism

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I address the Greenbergian legacy that, in the first half of the 20th century, began complicating the question of elitism in art and related issues of authorship and art's social agency. Initially, this was via a focus on the antithesis between avant-garde modernism and popular art (Greenberg, 1939), but later by dovetailing the development of taste with art's self-critical, formalist sense of progression. It is therefore important to highlight the multi-faceted nature of the Greenbergian legacy, for it enables me to show – as I do in Chapter 3 regarding the Barthesian inheritance – how rhetorically transformative forms of art criticism and theory often remain within formalist and relatively conservative understandings of art's function and thus its potential political and social role.

In the 1939 essay 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' Greenberg stated his prime value for art, one which he went on to refine and reinforce in his later writings — that the work of art must eschew accessibility. Greenberg thus championed avant-garde art on two counts: he considered it to be inherently critical and therefore unsuited to government manipulation; additionally, in its abstract forms, he felt the people would pay it little attention, thus making it entirely unsuitable for propaganda purposes. At the time, Greenberg was concerned with how the increasingly repressive cultures of the Nazi and communist regimes in Europe were orchestrating kitsch-based propaganda as a means of getting close to the people compared to more traditional forms of art (cf. Greenberg, 1965, p.19). He was therefore interested in the agency of the avant-garde art and how it functioned differently to kitsch; hence his interrogation of the potential of this arrangement.

Concurrently, many artists in America were being supported by government patronage in the New Deal policies implemented by the Roosevelt administrations during the 1930s. This gave rise to Greenberg's concerns that the role of American art had become one of communicating specific messages to a public that was largely illiterate about art and would therefore fail to equate the artist's freedom to make art with the freedom to make abstract art. Against this background, his essay 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' (1939) argued for abstract art as a holding ground for the expression of freedom until such time as it no longer required sequestration in privileged bourgeois enclaves. The logic of an argument that abstraction's enterprise was therefore one of self-definition inevitably foregrounded an elitist aesthetic

appreciation, for an informed *a priori* understanding of art's function was necessary for a satisfactory self-definition to be offered. Subsequently, Greenberg stated that:

The Old Masters created an illusion of space in depth that one could imagine oneself walking into, but the analogous illusion created by the Modernist painter can only be seen into; can be traveled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye (Greenberg, 1960, in Harrison and Wood, 1994, p.758).

Therefore, although abstract expressionism presented a raw and credible alternative to more typical works of art in the context of the 1930s, in hindsight the ultimate legacy of the refined aesthetic taste played out at the expense of art's potential politicising role in wider society. This, in turn, became the focus of Art & Language's post-Greenbergian practices, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

This chapter therefore develops the concerns I identified in the critical approaches to art considered in the previous chapter. I proceed via analyses of how, in the 20th century, the political function of art came to be associated with avant-garde object production. This enables me to deepen the thesis' argument that formalist innovation came to be misconstrued as having a socially engaged, politicising dynamic, while its deeper, depoliticising sedimentations went unnoticed. Thereafter, I trace the Greenbergian influence in subsequent art history critiques of new formalist strategies, which sought to represent marginalised subject positions as opposed to celebrating informed self-knowledge. I maintain that, unwittingly, they ultimately adhered to a view of art that anchors it in the political and social elitisms of object production, thus leaving the relations between artists and viewers unreformed. In other words, while the socially productive potential of the avant-garde project was always there (as discussed in Chapter 4), this was radically diluted by an agenda which primarily stressed innovative formalism instead.

I conclude that in spite of ostensibly differing agendas, this later new formalist body of work remained within the parameters laid down by the Greenbergian legacy. My argument here is important for the wider thesis, because it lays the foundations for showing how more visibly radical forms of art theory, as discussed in Chapter 3, can also remain within a formalist understanding of art, thus necessitating the move to the social emphasis in the Gramscian-Benjaminian framework outlined in Chapter 4.

2.2. Greenberg's influence on 20th century art criticism

The importance for the thesis of Clement Greenberg's 20th century art criticism lies in the way his established discourse simultaneously appeared different from previous commentaries on art while also retaining their values of formalism and elitism, whence he established perspectives on art that still have traction today. Initially, Greenberg focused on abstraction, but after World War II he expanded the discussion to include wider themes such as formalism, expressionism and taste as non-contingent values. This shift in position can be traced through his influential essays 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939), 'Towards a Newer Laocoön' (1940), and 'Modernist Painting' (1960).

In the 1939 essay Greenberg stated his prime value for art, one that he went on to refine and reinforce in his later writings — that the work of art must eschew easy accessibility. At the time he argued for this from a Trotskyite position that looked towards a time when we would be able to devote ourselves to self-cultivation once problems of scarcity of time and material needs had been resolved. Thus an innovative trajectory with regard to the idea of the avant-garde can be traced from the 1939 essay, where he argued that the work of art must eschew the accessibility of kitsch, through its refinement in 'Towards a Newer Laocoön', where it must emphasise the 'opacity of the medium' (1940, p.142), to 'Modernist Painting', where he asserted the prime value of the 'ineluctable flatness' of the support' (1960, p.6). Ultimately, the trajectory supported, in its different guises, the notion that humans needed to raise themselves to a higher plane of thought and expression, central to which was art's relative inaccessibility.

Greenberg appears to argue for an initial response to art that is tantamount to Duchamp's 'retinal shudder' in the first instance, but he 'concludes with the reassertion of cognitive mastery as the work is situated in the pantheon of previous great works' (Kester, 2004, p.43). As Greenberg stated, 'some day it will have to be told how "anti-Stalinism," which started out more or less as "Trotskyism," turned into art for art's sake and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come' (Greenberg, 1961, p.230). Indeed, while Greenberg asserted that the aesthetic values of American abstraction were non-contingent, he simultaneously dismissed kitsch on the related grounds of its subject content and popular appeal, whereby he married the social to the aesthetic but on his own terms. Thus he argued that *vulgarity*, that is the taste of the masses, ought to act as a negative criterion of value against the aesthetic challenges of avant-gardism. The consequence of this dichotomising is to put the onus of art as a politicising force on how it is used rather than the social, relational conditions in which it is produced. This accounts for the paradox whereby he was able to

argue for the purity of American abstraction at the point of production, whilst also mediating it in the propaganda arena of the cultural cold war.

In practice, however, the professed apoliticism of Greenberg's elitist position, which set the values and contexts of the production of *good* art outside contingent values, has to be contextualised by how it was used to serve US interests that preceded the outbreak of World War II and continued in the post-war period. Indeed his dictums on American art were not only set against a European backdrop of totalitarianism, where Socialist Realism was appropriated as a propaganda tool, but also a home backdrop of cultural protectionism where the prevailing popular style of art worked as its US counterpart — American Regionalism. Furthermore, the CIA provided hidden support for important exhibitions of abstract art (Saunders, 2013). Hence his prime objective in dichotomising avant-garde art from kitsch was to distinguish what he saw as true, genuine culture from politically and aesthetically debased popular art. This he set about doing by examining 'the relationship between the specific — not the generalized — individual, and the social and historical contexts in which that experience takes place' (Greenberg, 1939, p.255). Consequently, while the 1939 essay focused on an elitist, individuated appreciation of American abstraction, counter to the prevailing exploitation of Socialist Realism in totalitarian regimes in Europe, its arguments were subsequently used to service the cultural phalanx of the accelerating Cold War (Cockcroft, 1985, pp.126-7).

Meanwhile, on the cultural home front Greenberg's argument for abstraction's purity was, in part, a defence of American abstract art from attack by the right wing. Thus later, as the cultural cold war ratcheted up, figures such as Michigan Representative George A. Dondero would demand that work by 'brainwashed artists in the uniform of the red brigade' be removed from foreign exhibitions (Cockcroft, 1985, p.130). Dondero thereby demonstrated how US protectionism was uncharacteristically being extended to art — hence his support for *wholesome* American Regionalism painting. Consequently, in the New York Times (June 18th 1956), a counterattack argued that unless the USIA (The United States Information Agency tasked with issues of public diplomacy) changed its policy of censorship 'it should not try to send any more exhibitions abroad' (Cockcroft, 1985, p.130).

As Cockcroft argues, American abstract expressionism's success was as much a result of politics as aesthetics, for it could only be fully understood in the light of the role played by The Museum of Modern Art (hereafter MOMA) and 'the ideological needs of its officers during a period of virulent anti-communism and an intensifying "cold war"' (Cockcroft, 1985, p.126). Therefore, where Greenberg's concerns were with the production of art Cockcroft

clarifies the ideological function of its standing and reception. The tensions served as a measure of the hostility that abstract art encountered on both aesthetic and political grounds. They originated from USIA demands that ten artists, to whom it objected on political grounds, should be barred from *10 American Painters*, a major exhibition of American art planned to be shown in Europe. The resulting impasse was eventually resolved by instituting the International Council of MOMA, which then took over the financing of US participation in major European exhibitions. Thus the enduring marriage between art and politics was openly demonstrated by commissioning a major art institution to specifically mediate American interests abroad. Eventually, MOMA launched an exhibition entitled *The New American Painting* (1958-9) to tour eight European countries, and moreover produced a catalogue with an introduction by Alfred J. Barr (1936), MOMA's first director. Here, Barr pitched into the cultural cold war by highlighting the painters' freedom as primarily concerning their work, while also noting 'their paintings have been praised and condemned as symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude' (Barr in Cockcroft, 1985, p.131).

Nevertheless, despite the clear entanglement between his understandings of art and his political commitments, Greenberg's 1939 assertion remained in place — that poets and artists had for the most part unconsciously responded to intellectual, political and cultural change, meaning that 'it was no accident...that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically — and geographically, too — with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe' (Greenberg, 1965, p.4). In this way, Greenberg mediated avant-garde art as a laudable force of cultural critique that had separated itself from bourgeois banality by developing the nascent argument for the purity of American abstraction as argued by Barr (1936). It put clear water between high Modernist abstraction and Socialist Realism in Europe and American Regionalism at home:

No culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income. And in the case of the avant-garde, this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold. The paradox is real. And now this elite is rapidly shrinking. Since the avant-garde forms the only living culture we now have, the survival in the near future of culture in general is thus threatened (Greenberg, 1939, p.260).

Greenberg further reinforced arguments on the aesthetic value of purity in avant-garde art by reasoning that abstraction's eschewal of representation approximated to an ideal form, unencumbered by external, material forces (Greenberg, 1939, p.6) (the consequences of this

for art are covered in Chapter 3's critical engagement with the work of Art & Language). He thereby aligned avant-garde art with a position that values art for its isolation from society rather than for its engagement as a force for social change, despite the fact that his critique of kitsch entails a clear awareness of art's social and political role. Indeed, he reasoned that the avant-garde artist 'in effect tries to imitate God by creating something valid, in the way a landscape — not its picture — is aesthetically valid' (Greenberg, 1939, p.258). The apparent contradiction that the force behind avant-garde art had been liberated through the Marxist analysis of social history (Greenberg, 1939, p.257) thus presented the Marxist position as a liberation of formalism (Greenberg, 1965, p.257), whereby artists avoided the fate of mechanically repeating variations from earlier art:

In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience...the artist turns it upon the medium of his own craft. The nonrepresentational or 'abstract', if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary...but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art...has already imitated the former. These, themselves become the subject matter of art (Greenberg, 1939, p.258).

Hence, the significance of Greenberg for the concerns of this thesis is that he supported autotelic values for art by asserting reasons for avant-garde art to withdraw from political involvement on the grounds that it interfered with 'precious axiomatic beliefs upon which culture thus far has had to rest' (Greenberg, 1939, p.257). Moreover in *Partisan Review*, (1940) he reinforced this stance, testifying to a belief in *good* art's universal truths when he wrote that 'the purist does not have to support his position with metaphysical pretensions' (Greenberg, 1940, p.1). Hence, Greenberg ultimately understood formalism, transcendence, elitism and other classical art tropes to be what comprised art's function, even as he distanced abstract expressionism from their embodiment in traditional forms of art.

Thus Greenberg's separation of avant-garde art from kitsch is relevant to the aims of the thesis, because it forewarns of the difficulties of recognising when art remains within more conservative, formalist parameters. Moreover, it sets pure aesthetic values on the one hand against the politically tainted entrapment of the masses in consumption of kitsch on the other (Greenberg, 1939, pp.262-3), thereby accrediting an autonomous function for the aesthetic in fine art but assuming a social and political contingency for kitsch. Indeed, Kester notes that Greenberg defined 'the elitism of fine art as a quasi-naturalised human condition' (Kester,

2004, p.203). Some six decades later, Greenberg could still defend an implicitly socially divisive function for art by stating that aesthetic sensibility requires:

dignified leisure in order to cultivate taste in any of the arts, not the leisure of an unemployed stevedore...that's why the rich acquire better taste than the poor. That's why the best art has been elitist ever since Giotto (Greenberg, 1994 in Frieze No. Issue 18, p. 35).

Consequently, I offer Greenberg's argument as a paradigm of how, by giving emphasis to formalism over social engagement, it overrides the political agency of both artists and viewers because it enhances the myth that the artist's function is 'to keep culture moving' (Greenberg, 1965, p.257). As argued in the 1939 essay:

In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience...the artist turns it upon the medium of his own craft. The nonrepresentational or 'abstract,' if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary...but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art...has already imitated the former. These, themselves become the subject matter of art (Greenberg, 1939, p.258).

As Cockcroft observed, it results in enabling artists to neglect their responsibilities over how their art was used (Cockcroft, 1985, p.125) or, as I submit, it privileges the notion of art as an object rather than as a politicising force. Hence, subscribing to formalist values, whose underlying purpose is to protect the integrity of a self-knowing understanding of artistic value, means that the legacy of Greenberg's influence privileges a deceptively disinterested credo. This credo understands advances in art as those which *appear* to represent a significant innovation on what has come before, yet such appearances enable the perpetuation of a conceptualisation of art that allows it implicit social influence yet denies its engagement as a reformative politicising force. Indeed, when Cockcroft identifies art's implicit politicisation in her analysis of how, in the name of civilised, western freedoms, both during World War II and in the aftermath of the Cold War, MOMA had served the US as a vital link between American diplomacy and American imperialism (Cockcroft, 1985, p.127), she demonstrates how arguments for the divorce between art and politics are ripe for colonisation by particular interests in specific political circumstances.

However, notwithstanding Cockcroft's conclusion that 'dissenting intellectuals who believe themselves to be acting freely could be useful tools in the international propaganda war'

(Cockcroft, 1985, p.132), I submit that, après Greenberg, she nevertheless locates art's political impact in how it is used by stating that 'the artist creates freely. But his work is promoted and used by others for their own purposes' (Cockcroft, 1985, p.132).

In the following part of this chapter, I analyse subsequent 20th century forms of artistic production and dominant modes of art history to develop my argument that naturalised elitisms in arts relations of production are relatively untouched by formalist developments and political positionings. This can be seen in art's trajectory since the emergence of Greenbergian modernist concerns, which has seen it increasingly engaged with the flux of ordinary life; for example, Robert Rauschenberg's combines, spanning the mid fifties to sixties, and Andy Warhol's sixties' pop art. Importantly, while both foregrounded mundane objects and everyday life in order to subvert the formalism of Modernism and elevate social experiences and popular culture to the level of fine art, they nevertheless continued to work within the naturalised framework of individual, creative master artists that unwittingly reflects and reinforces materially significant social divisions and elitisms through assuming unchanged conditions of consumption. I am therefore concerned with the need to recognise and respond to misleading assumptions that formalist innovation and socially/politically critical subject matter automatically enable art to work as a socially engaged, politicising force.

2.3. New art/history?

From the 1960s onwards, new artistic forms emerged from the impact of what later came to be identified as 'new social movements': the women's liberation movement, the gay liberation movement, and anti-imperialist and post-colonial movements. These occupied an explicitly political space (i.e. in contrast to Greenberg's understanding), and art history responded with new approaches to contest the exclusions and values that the Greenbergian legacy seemed to champion. Nevertheless, I argue that, despite the seeming break with the past, these contributions had in common with Greenberg the assumption that the structures of the canon are inherently neutral. This means that the more expansive, inclusive understanding of art still left key issues unproblematised, which Steve Edwards argues are 'constitutive of the canon rather than some superficial anomaly' (Edwards, 1999, p.8).

Therefore, my objective here is to evaluate how the new forms of art and art history broached the problems inherent in producing art as a political object without going beyond them. To this end, I address the following questions on the grounds that the problem is not what is included in the canon but rather the conditions of its production and consumption.

- i). How far do they reject formal, aesthetic codes of evaluation that tie art to object production?
- ii). At what level in the processes of art production do they contest the forces of elitism?
- iii). How far are reformed relations of artistic production understood in terms of the viewer?
- iv). Have they contested exclusions in order to achieve inclusion in a fundamentally unreformed, privileged canon?

Accordingly, I work with three differing approaches to Judy Chicago's seminal feminist art installation *The Dinner Party* (1979) as paradigmatic of the problems to be recognised:

Chicago's own account of her aims and objectives; Hilton Kramer's *New York Times* article 'Does Feminism Conflict with Artistic Standards?' (1980); and art historian Amelia Kester's critique of both in *The "Sexual Politics" of The Dinner Party: A Critical Context* (1996). My objective is to thereby identify the challenges confronting art if it seeks to be a socially engaged, politicising force.

The Dinner Party challenged the parameters of what constitutes 'good' (Greenbergian) art and the means and ways for feminist art to instigate discourse on social inequalities. It was a significant undertaking that involved extensive research into the history of major women figures, in addition to relevant cultural motives and styles of decoration stretching from pre-history to its own time. Chicago designed it in detail, down to the motifs that decorated the plates and napkins. Thereafter, it took five years in the making prior to its installation in 1979, Chicago having been joined after the first year by about four hundred volunteer ceramicists, china painters and embroiderers, mainly women, who realised her designs through their separate skills. Thus she expanded what collaborative production might entail and also introduced bespoke craft objects to multi-media art making.

The installation stages a ceremonial banquet, arranged on a triangular table comprising a total of thirty-nine place settings, presenting a structured 'narrative through Western civilisation...usually presented through the lives and accomplishments of various heroes. In the case of the Dinner Party that same civilization is presented through the lives of female heroes' (Chicago, 2017). The settings consist of embroidered runners, gold chalices and utensils, and china-painted porcelain plates with raised central motifs that are based on vulvic and butterfly forms and rendered in styles appropriate to the female hero being honoured (Chicago, 2012). The names of another 999 women are inscribed in gold on the white tile floor below the triangular table.



Fig. 4: Judy Chicago: *The Dinner Party* (1979)

Through *The Dinner Party*, Chicago contests Greenberg's legacy of aesthetic codes of evaluation on three fronts. Firstly, she challenges the modernist position with narrative and representation, which additionally have an explicitly feminist agenda. Thus she uses history, biography and text with the purpose of exposing and redressing art's complicity in omitting women from the canon. Secondly, she subverts the formalist values of modernist art by working through the female domain of embroidery, porcelain production and ceramic painting — all constituents of popular and domestic craft that Greenberg would categorise as debased kitsch sentimentality (Greenberg, 1965, pp.10-11). Thirdly, she destabilises the label 'kitsch' (when in the hands of the artist) as a dismissive term in art criticism that hitherto required little substantive justification beyond its application as a self-explanatory critique. In sum, the contextual and formalist expansions of the installation contested formal aesthetic codes tied to non-craft based production, and because the makers were mainly non-artist women gendered and professional elitisms in art production were significantly subverted as well.

Inevitably, *The Dinner Party* provoked strong, hostile responses. Hilton Kramer objected to its explicit theme and its means of production; he dismissed it as kitsch and criticised it for being 'so mired in the pieties of a cause that it quite fails to acquire an independent artistic life of its own' (Kramer, 1980a). Indeed, *The Dinner Party* continues to arouse controversy: for example, when UHCL (University of Houston Clear Lake) hosted it in 2010 for its 30th anniversary, many would not attend the reception and letters were written to local newspaper editors protesting about the event (UHCL The Signal, 2010). This was a vivid testimony to

the enduring relevance of Chicago's challenge to the internal prejudices of the canon and formalist aesthetic values.

Furthermore, through her use of craft skills and employment of women workers in *The Dinner Party*, Chicago not only exposed the prejudices of refined aesthetic sensibilities but also contributed to destabilise claims for their naturalised status. One of the ways she achieved this was to bring into fresh focus the point of transition where the anonymous skilled journeyman/woman and their craft skills were separated from the master artist and his artistic inspiration. At this point the un-reproducibility of a work accrued importance in tandem with its market value, whilst additionally confirming the privileged position and taste of its patrons. Through *The Dinner Party*, Chicago brings these naturalised pre-judgements into the open and clarifies how a combination of privilege and refined aesthetic sensibility exerts cultural leverage and force.

In terms of her social agenda, Chicago explained that her strategy of using craft skills was inspired by early medieval art's ability to teach 'history, myths and values to the populace through easily understandable visual symbols'. She thus identified her intention to introduce herself as an artist who was contributing to a 'meaningful transformation of consciousness' by reaching 'a broad audience' (Chicago, 1996, pp.3-4). In these ways, she successfully implemented a feminist agenda that contested the elitist dichotomy championed by Greenberg's hierarchy of avant-garde over kitsch, masculine over feminine practices, art inspiration over craft-skill, and the informed viewer of refined aesthetic sensibilities over the philistine – in short, the power of the male western canon.

Nevertheless, despite her expansion of the constituency of viewers beyond a privileged elite of Greenberg's contemplative onlooker, Chicago's focus was on making the cultural capital of high art and the 'master artist' (for want of an alternative term) inclusive of women and their particular skills. This ultimately placed her transformative agenda within the parameters of the Greenbergian legacy that she was seemingly challenging, by using women not trained as artists and associated domestic and craft skills. Indeed, Chicago made it clear that although she aimed to introduce craft into the realm of high art, she recognised a high-art/craft dichotomy by stating: 'I'm not willing to say a painting and a pot are the same thing. It has to do with intent. I want to make art' (Lippard, 1980, p.124).

I therefore contend that while the political radicalism of the installation tempers time-honoured elitisms in terms of art's function, in distinguishing herself from the volunteers who were 'primarily housewives interested in filling their spare time', on the basis that she herself

had been a serious art student from the time she was young (Chicago, 1979, pp.8-9), Chicago implicitly declared an ambition to be included in the canon of serious and significant artists. While this is an understandable move even in the process of challenging dominant, exclusive positions in art production, it nevertheless relies on traditional relations with viewers. Thus, while it advances a feminist art agenda and expands and modernises the art canon, it leaves privileged elitisms separating artist and viewer relatively unchallenged. Given that no individual work can overturn it all at once, Chicago nevertheless used a series of moves that pressurised the status quo while simultaneously upholding it in other ways.

Undoubtedly, Chicago's subversion of art's formalist parameters helped expand ways of making art for others working in the new social movements. In *The Dinner Party*, she realised a feminist agenda by using ceramics and embroidery in place of the traditional media of male art painting. Moreover, since these are craft skills employed in the production of mundane objects, she placed her installation outside the purist standards subscribed to by modernist art critics such as Alfred Barr, who in his 'Dialectic of Abstract Art' (1936, pp.13-14), defined art purity 'as independent painting, emancipated painting...[is] an end in itself with its own peculiar value' (Barr, 1936, p.12). However, her position that what distinguishes a pot from a painting is contingent upon the oppositions of mundane objects and art objects locates the emphasis of her innovations in formalist rather than politicising concerns. In fact, advancing the profile of feminist art in this way expands the canon in a way that is helpful for women artists, rather than undermines the social implications of its elitisms.

In other words, Chicago's *The Dinner Party* significantly challenges but ultimately does not transcend the Greenbergian legacy. It therefore serves as an illuminating articulation of the difficulties inherent to identifying *and* overcoming the dichotomy between art as a political object and art as a socially engaged, politicising force. Chicago's statements show that her aims in expanding formalist innovation and contesting women's marginalisation across a variety of domains were to disturb the underlying political force of exclusion. This generated many advances compared to the explicit elitism and self-knowing autonomy as per Greenberg, but ultimately sited her within established artist/critic values which valorise the authority of the artist. I thereby contend that artists producing art as a political object are unreliable critics of their own social production.

Nevertheless, it is worth restating that the hostility that women artists faced goes some way in explaining her mission to establish her significance as a woman artist within the canon. Indeed, in 'Does Feminism Conflict with Artistic Standards?', art critic Hilton Kramer opined on the problems of reconciling the claims of social justice with the need to distinguish artistic

quality (Kramer, 1980b, p.1), which he saw as inevitably involved with feminist art. He thus argued that when art is politicised:

hard-headed critical judgment must be suspended until that heavenly day yonder when men and women achieve — in art, as in everything else — some ideal parity of talent, power and opportunity...To suspend critical judgment in the case of...art produced by women...place(s) women artists in...a class of talents that needs to be shielded from the intellectual give-and-take of the real world (Kramer, 1980b, p.27).

These dominated Kramer's objections to *The Dinner Party*, which feminist art historian Amelia Jones critiqued for their reductive deployment of Greenberg's position on the autonomy of art. Jones viewed Kramer's response as 'paradigmatic of a modernist, and still masculinist, mode of critical evaluation' (Jones, 1999, p.149) that was concerned with formalist definitions of artistic quality. Greenberg had argued that modernism was about a self-critical tendency where the task 'became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art' (Greenberg, 1965, pp.5-6). Hence, Jones indicted Kramer's adherence to these values on the grounds that he was motivated by what she defined as a reactionary apoliticism that supported the status quo, excluding from the privileged domain of 'high art' elements of popular culture and work by women and other groups of people marginalised by elitist institutions of high art (Jones, 1996, p.148).

In Gramscian terms, reactionary apoliticism is a signifier of naturalised traditions that are no longer perceived as having been constructed in the interests of traditional hegemonies. Thus I contend that Jones specifically contested Kramer on his own terms, since her defence of the work was based on its contestation of the visual conservatism of high modernist values. Jones claimed that:

The Dinner Party is a blast in the face of modernist criticism: it is literary; it is aggressively handmade using 'feminine' crafts techniques; it is painting and embroidery made blatantly sculptural. Through its flamboyant activation of kitsch — the prohibited desire of modernism...(it) explodes the boundaries of aesthetic value so carefully policed by modernist criticism (Jones, 1996, p.149).

This response to Kramer's modernist elitism is evidence of how entrenched aesthetic values are in art since, in this instance, Jones' account of its feminist agenda is articulated through a valorisation of its formalist innovations. She notes that *The Dinner Party* transgresses modernist purity with its kitsch tropes, and thereby continues an approach that looks for an

artwork's social value in its formalist, innovative, avant-garde object-production. The embedded conception of formalist avant-garde innovation that is essentially additive not transformative works to limit our understanding of how art mediates 'the reproduction of society or in other words art's contribution to the way we live now' (Bruff and Jordan, 2015, p.7). By contrast, my Gramscian/Benjaminitie approach, outlined in Chapter 1 and detailed in Chapter 4, focuses on what art *does* rather than what it *is*, looking to how its specific competences can work through relational reform in art production to contest wider socially embedded elitisms.

Jones was not alone as an art historian in assuming a socially engaged, politicising agency for formalist art innovations on the grounds that they can contest social exclusions. For example, in *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (1975), feminist art historian Linda Nochlin also reasoned from an object-based understanding. Her account of the absence of women artists from the canon argued that the biased social conditions which produce master artists not only logically favoured men over women across the centuries but, as a consequence, reinforced that bias in art history since it too was mediated and determined by the same elements within the apparatus (Nochlin, 1975, p.161). She thus reasoned that:

The making of art involves a self-consistent language of form, more or less dependent upon, or free from, given temporally defined conventions, schemata, or systems of notation, which have to be learned or worked out, either through teaching, apprenticeship, or a long period of individual experimentation. The language of art is, more materially embodied in paint and line on canvas or paper, in stone or clay or plastic or metal — it is neither a sob story nor a confidential whisper (Nochlin, 1975, p.155).

Hence, by eschewing the 'sob story' and 'confidential whisper' as misconceptions that art is the visual expression of personal life, Nochlin sets art in a wider field of social purpose than subject-specific agendas can encompass. However, her argument that the canonical myth of 'the Great Artist — unique, godlike, — bearing within his person since birth a mysterious essence' (Nochlin, 1975, p.157) can be contested by freedom *of* and not *from* formalist language, challenges formalism by paradoxically remaining within formalism's parameters. As this chapter has argued, formalist innovation is inextricably implicated in the wider social elitisms that are accommodated implicitly (and often explicitly) in traditional relations of artistic production.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has developed the argument of Chapter 1, by contesting the view that formalist innovations and their representation of new social movements will automatically enable art to function as a socially engaged, politicising force. I have aimed to clarify that art's traditional agency is supported, explicitly or implicitly, in analyses of both critics and art historians of 20th century American abstraction as well as by new social movements in art production. This chapter has thus furthered the thesis' objective to clarify the social and political functionalisms inhering in traditional artistic relations of production.

Beginning with Greenberg's dichotomising of avant-garde art from kitsch and progressing to the art of new social movements and its attendant new art history, the chapter emphasises three key points, which are of immediate relevance to the specific focus of Chapter 3 and the wider aims of the thesis as a whole. The first refuted the view that art's political force lies in how it is used rather than in the relational field through which it is produced, thereby foregrounding the need to understand the social and political values embedded in traditional authorship. Secondly, it analysed how the close alliance between art, art history and art criticism makes it difficult to think about and engage with art in a socially productive way. Thirdly, it reasoned that the struggle for art's social engagement as a politicising force is unlikely to be achieved by expanding inclusion of formerly marginalised artists and techniques to the canon but must, instead, foreground the contestation of the canon.

The chapter's analysis of enduring Greenbergian values has demonstrated the disconnect between modernising formalist values and reforming the privileged status of the artist. It has developed this concern by critiquing responses to a seminal feminist installation, clarifying how both inhabit the common ground of understanding art's political force to be attached to the art object. It has thereby identified the role of formalist critique and innovation to be one that is ultimately self-limiting. Hence, it has demonstrated how the reason for this self-limitation lies in the inscription of art's history within the agenda of art history, whose evolutionary trajectory naturalises art's development along a 'biological paradigm that has effectively obscured its ideological function' (Foster, 1996, p.10).

The chapter has also analysed how art history and criticism have privileged an essentially discrete world of art concerns. It has argued that continuing to give precedence to art's formalist and social innovations neglects reform of relations of artistic production and thereby locks art into wider, socially divisive functionalisms. I pursue this problem in detail in Chapter 3, critically engaging with Roland Barthes' theoretical response to the functions of authorship and Art & Language's explicit attempt to transform our understanding of how authorship can

be released from those functions through sharing and democratising all aspects of artistic production. Chapter 3 completes my account of extant approaches which simultaneously advance our understanding of art's functions while remaining limited by how they engage with this question. It leads to Chapter 4's contribution that will combine Benjamin's specific concerns with art's place in the social world with Gramsci's broader view that understands the material impact of cultural forces in shaping our perceptions and experiences, which in turn prepares the ground for the critical engagement with Alfredo Jaar in chapters 5-7.

Chapter 3

The Death of the Author and the Barthesian Inheritance

3.1. Introduction

The preceding two chapters established how debates in social and cultural theory, and more specifically in classical forms of art criticism, take a largely formalistic approach to the question of art's function and social and political role. As one of the principal aims of this thesis is to illuminate the value of a specific perspective in addressing these shortfalls, the objective of the present chapter is to complete the thesis' groundwork prior to setting out a Gramscian/Benaminite approach to the problem in the next chapter. It thus presents two critical engagements, beginning with Roland Barthes' response to the problems of authorship before moving to consider this essay's subsequent resonances in participatory art practice, primarily with reference to the work of the Art & Language community. This is necessary, because these currents in art theory and practice explicitly sought to achieve the transformation in our understandings of art that this thesis advocates.

Hence this chapter is more specific than its predecessors but no less important, for it considers ideas about art that have had a significant influence on the emergence of, for instance, contemporary art and conceptual art. As such, the discussion below is of crucial importance for current debates about art. Accordingly, the chapter critiques Roland Barthes' theory that both expanded and circumscribed an understanding of art's social function. Barthes' post-structuralist approach announced the necessity of overthrowing the myth of the master artist as a unique and singular creator. While revolutionary in many respects, his focus remained on formalistic innovation rather than the substantively transformative, since Barthes analyses the way in which meaning is produced and understood primarily through the construction of a work of literature or an artifact. Thus he argues that since text is produced from a triangulation of viewer, context and object or artifact the reader is the producer of further text through the process of reading 'and the artwork is released from its responsibility of containing all the facets of content' (Bruff and Jordan, 2015, p.11). It led Barthes to remain within the Greenbergian parameters in some respects, in that he was concerned with what art *is* rather than what it *does*.

The chapter's second half engages with the post-Barthesian proliferation regarding the function of art through the emergence of new art forms, such as conceptual art, participatory art, site-specific installations and public interventions. Through a critical engagement with the working practices of the Art & Language community active from the late 1960s, it elucidates

the challenges involved in moving art production on from its modernist concerns. It clarifies how strategies used by Art & Language for contesting traditional assumptions about skill, authorship and formalist values, while advocating an essayistic competency to art production in the aftermath of Greenbergian formalism, ran into similar difficulties to those identified above regarding Barthes. Therefore, although Art & Language was radical in its aims, the irreducible logic of a strategy that located its practice within the field of contesting, exposing and thereby deposing Modernism's hegemony was that its concerns remained fundamentally those of Modernism.

This chapter completes the critical engagement put forward in the preceding chapters concerning art's traditional function. It clarifies how the symbiotic relationship between questions of authorship and forms of production unintentionally neglect a deeper engagement with art's wider social and political role. Overall, it establishes the need to consider alternative approaches which focus less on formalistic innovation and more on social transformation; hence the Gramscian/Benjaminitive framework offered in Chapter 4.

3.2. Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author'

The relevance of Barthes' *The Death of the Author* (originally published in 1967) for the thesis is that it offers a potentially liberating moment in the history of art production by destabilising traditional assumptions on the authority of authorship. Yet, on the other hand, it neglects more transformative possibilities, since its analysis of the way in which 'meaning is produced and understood through the construction of a work of literature or an artifact' (Bruff and Jordan, 2015, p.11) focuses on the medium rather than relational production.

Barthes' interventions were aimed at releasing the reader/viewer from the dominant view that an artwork embodies an *authorised* meaning in the literal sense, and they were grounded in principles of post-structuralism that understood language as an embedded system of signification for conventions and social ritual. Hence, after Barthes, 'we know...that text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (Barthes, 1984a, p.146). Through these means, Barthes contested the historical authority of literary criticism that mediated the meaning of a text. This had proceeded from an author-centric position and had tasked the reader with appreciating the formative importance of biographical contexts and the expressed or interpreted intentions of the author — a dynamic that had been reiterated in the painter/viewer divide between making and viewing. As a result, reading and viewing had been directed along prescribed pathways of analysis of skill in structure, new ways of contesting or remodelling tropes, and creative use of media.

Notably therefore, responses to systems of representation across the different disciplines had traditionally been channelled through decoding authorial intention and developing sensibilities to the aesthetics of a work's internal organisation. Inevitably, this had naturalised the elitisms that deny productive agency to readers and viewers, and had worked to reinforce the social divisions attendant upon Greenbergian cultivated taste.

The significance of Barthes' interventions lay in their elucidation of how the traditional view of authorship worked as a political tool that serviced strategies of domination and division. Therefore, the Barthesian rejection of a work having a single, stable meaning is relevant to the concerns of the thesis because it contests the functionalism embedded in the form of canonical ownership of truth that infects readers'/viewers' subjectivities since, in part, they are moulded through contact with it. Barthes thus undermined the hierarchies by which authors and readers, and artists and viewers, had known their roles and functions, distancing the author from the text, destabilising the authority of the critic and promoting the reader as 'the destination of the text's unity' (Barthes, 1984a, p.146). Consequently, the struggles that Barthes initiated recognise that liberation, within the microcosm of art production, has a political significance beyond the reform of a discrete art world for:

refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity...that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases — reason, science, law (Barthes, 1984a, p.147).

However, in designating text as the 'neutral, composite, oblique space where all our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing' (Barthes, 1984a, p. 142), Barthes' reader is likewise defined as a 'space' with no past history and no present agency — 'he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted (Barthes, 1984a, p.148). For sure, in the closely related essay *From Work to Text* (originally published in 1971) he went on to argue a semiological, democratising social function for 'the relativisation of the relations of writer, reader and observer', in which he differentiated Text 'over against the traditional notion of the *work*' (Barthes, 1984b, p.156; emphasis added). Here, he asserted that the combined action of social and linguistic theories had relativised the relations of writer, reader and critic to render Text as an *activity of production* that had come to displace the notion of the *work* as a product:

In particular, the tendency must be avoided to say that the work is classic, the text avant-garde...there may be text in very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature are in no way texts. The difference is this: the work is a fragment of a substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field...The text is held in language, [and] only exists in the movement of a discourse (Barthes, 1984b, pp.156-7).

Thus in differentiating Text from writing, Barthes' use of the term nominated a discursive activity that eludes the limits imposed by classification. He placed it beyond the limitations of doxa, so that 'taking the word literally, it may be said that the Text is always paradoxical' (Barthes, 1984b, p.158). Hence, his emphasis on an individuated consumption of Text established the reader's independence from the autocracy of the author and his mediator the critic. Indeed, Claire Bishop notes a trinity of socially based concerns emerging from Barthes' legacy that carries through into participatory art practices. First is activation, 'the desire to create an active subject...empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation'; second is authorship and 'the gesture of ceding some or all authorial control... in shared production that entails the aesthetic benefit of greater risk and unpredictability'; and third is the impetus of restoring 'the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning' (Bishop, 2006, p.12).

The Death of the Author breathed new life into the arts by arguing that the independent, intellectual, creative authority traditionally valued in the author figure services the politics of elitism through authorial ownership of the meaning of a text. It thereby initiated a reader-response critical theory by nominating the reader as 'the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (Barthes, 1984a, p.148). However, while Barthes' approach offers liberation in how art is *received* by validating the individuated responses of readers and viewers, once it is related to the thesis' concerns with art's *production*, the agency gained as a result of Barthes' interventions is simultaneously ceded because of its neglect of social traction. Ironically, then, the Barthesian agenda carries within it Greenbergian traces because it continues to understand art through consumption rather than production. As such, while Barthes stretches the parameters of art's autotelism his intrinsic formalism fails to fundamentally destabilise them. It therefore reinforces my concerns with the resilience of traditional understandings of art to relational reform, and my consequent argument that art can only work as a socially engaged, politicising force through reforming its own relations of artistic production.

In the following section, I map the influence of Barthes' theories in the work of the Art & Language community, where I argue that modernist concerns with the means of production implicitly dominated their attempts to leave these concerns behind. I critically analyse their strategies for contesting the 'tyrant reign' (Barthes, 1984a, p.143) of the author; how they questioned the 'black propaganda' (Harrison, 2011, p.204) embedded in traditional assumptions about art's production and aesthetic value, and the extent to which privileging an interrogative reading of art over traditional viewing made a difference to the relations between artist and viewer.

3.3. Art & Language: returning an essayistic competency to art

Post-Barthes, art responded to the crisis of Modernism with a considerably greater emphasis on conceptualism and on participatory practices. While the crisis had its origins in Modernism's initial critique of art's historic relationship to the academic, the literary and the mythological, it had evolved in ways that deprived art of certain possibilities of intellectual content, complication and depth, and it was these absences that conceptual and minimalist art set out to address.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Art & Language collective aimed to return to art the essayistic competency that had been eroded by Modernism's limitations. They therefore developed new ways of exposing and contesting the fetish of the artist/author, that Michel Foucault had defined as 'a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses...[an] ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning' (Foucault, 1969, in Harari, 1979, p.159). While their subsequent indexing work strategies set about radically altering the expectations traditionally brought to viewing art, they worked from a nominal, as opposed to relational, understanding of the viewer.

Specifically, Art & Language's aim was to generate 'an interpretive hiatus' (Art & Language, 1982, p.5) that would break from the discourses of Modern art. These they understood as having effected a 'categorical closure' consequent upon 'obdurate and heavily defended' presuppositions (Art & Language, 1982, p.4). Hence, they developed the strategy of Painting by Mouth (hereafter PBM) as a means of indexing how modernist art was understood. The initial aim of this section is therefore to clarify how the process of indexing contested the internal divisions in art and to subsequently analyse how far, in restoring along new lines what Modernism had relinquished, it enabled a subsequent, socially engaged role for art. Hence it completes my preparatory ground for Chapter 4's proposal for a combination of Gramsci and Benjamin in developing an alternative means of understanding and evaluating

art, which is then utilised in chapters 5-7 with regard to Alfredo Jaar's work and his understandings of his work.

Art & Language was formed in 1966 as a collaboration of UK conceptual artists – Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin and Harold Hurrell – who worked to bring together the separated practices of making art and to discourse about the significance of making art. They produced the journal *Art & Language* to support the theoretical concerns of artists and critics of mainstream modern art practices who wanted to return an essayistic competency to art that had diminished in the wake of Modernism and conceptual art. Charles Harrison, the art historian/critic member of the group, explains how Art & Language understood this task:

The point was not that theorisations of art...were being presented by Art & Language as...kinds of conversational ready-made. It was rather that, in the face of the possibility or necessity of abandoning for the time being the object as conceived in Modernist theory, the task which ensued was to puzzle at the consequences and implications...For the time being it seemed to be required that practice be made of the representing and misrepresenting discourse itself, and of its own fissures and discontinuities; that it be made of real materials, and of such theoretical materials as might be employed in their analysis, and not cobbled together from radical fictions which were but the remaining attenuations of the Modernist object in avant-garde disguise (Harrison, 2001b, p.53).

The focus was therefore on developing strategies to anatomise the presuppositions that attended the visual responses to Modernism in order to foreground the intellectual — such was the legacy of Modernism that the two were presented as inter-dependent. Consequently, they set about contesting what Duchamp labelled the 'retinal shudder' (Duchamp 1971 cited in Cabanne, 1971, p.142) that had distanced Modernism from art's traditional religious, philosophical and moral functions and had also dichotomised art's constituency of viewers on the grounds of their possession or lack of refined aesthetic sensibility. By indexing conventional art production and also turning to more theoretically text-based works, they contested the prevailing force of Greenbergian art criticism.

Importantly, by the mid-1970s Art & Language had substantively developed the use of text in art production beyond its deployment in the conceptual art of Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth. Although Kosuth, an early member of the collective, had positioned art outside materialisation to present the idea as the work of art (Lippard, 1980, p.25), his allegiance to individual authorship had remained a constant so that, as Harrison observed, he had wanted an individual career whilst maintaining his associations with Art & Language (Harrison, 2011,

p.196). By contrast, Weiner in his *Declaration of Intent* (1968) had initially aimed to contest the elitisms of Greenbergian aesthetics in both art's production and its consumption by foregrounding a different, more involved, role for the viewer as receiver. While Weiner had thus reformulated the meeting between art and the viewer into a less commodified understanding of their relationship, his strategy nevertheless remained locked in the problems that shadowed conceptual art practices. Indeed, Rancière, though not specifically naming Weiner, argues that the conceptual artists' assumptions that displacing the art object as a commodity ensures the disappearance of intellectual and artistic property, assumes an equation between dematerialisation and de-commodification.

Thirty years ago conceptual artists claimed to have broken with forms of commodified art by no longer creating solid objects available for private ownership, but instead specific forms for presentation or spatialisation of ideas...And yet...artists increasingly began to be viewed — and paid — as owners and sellers of ideas as such. This meant that intelligence itself came to take the place of its products...The immateriality of concepts and [objects], instead of doing away with private appropriation, turned out to be its best refuge, the place where reality is tantamount to its self-legitimation (Rancière, 2010, p.79).

Likewise, Art & Language member Charles Harrison noted that although Weiner's use of text was able to achieve some balance between the competing competences of text and image as 'a consequence of ambiguity in their ontological status' (Harrison, 2001, p.25), that very ambiguity constituted problems either as 'a central dilemma in what might be called the aesthetic ontology of Conceptual Art, or an aporetic complexity vital to its cultural functioning' (2001a, p.25). Hence, although Weiner equally nominated the written prescription and the actual fabrication as art, his directive formulation that stated all things 'being equal and consistent with *the intent of the artist* the decision as to condition rests with the receiver on the occasion of receivership' (Weiner in Harrison, 2001a, p.25; emphasis added) fundamentally preserved the traditional dynamic of production and reception that flows from artist to receiver. Harrison's final assessment of both Kosuth and Weiner's text-based work was that they became 'stuck with the idea that all you need to do is make bigger and bigger installations of texts, so that they [took] up more and more space on the wall' (Harrison, 2011, p.204), without radically altering the relations between artist and viewer/reader.

By contrast, the purpose of Art & Language's indexing strategies was to allow the reader/viewer access to the internal processes of the group's work in order to reinstate an awareness of the complex social conditions of art's production that the Greenbergian

injunction to concentrate of the picture's surface had concealed (Harrison, 2009, p.132). It thereby aimed to revive the social activity of assuming that a painting's 'illusion-bearing surface is the means to initiate enquiry and hence learning on the part of the spectator...[whence] it follows that we must be able to conceive of some representative spectator as a live and active presence in front of the work' (Harrison, 2001a, pp.173-4).

Thus their work has a twofold importance for my argument, for in establishing the need for artists to constantly review and revise their practices they demonstrated how art must engage with an ongoing critique of its own methods over and above its own products. Additionally, the sophisticated concept of indexing, in combination with their cooperative methods of production, challenges concepts and values in the authoring and reading of our cultural products. Hence, contrary to dematerialising art into an idea (Kosuth) or removing the elitism of production and appreciation (Weiner), their purpose was to reconnect to the tradition and ambition of fine art by:

working with the idea of the different uses that a picture might have as a kind of black propaganda, and looking back at the point when the academic tradition starts to collapse...Bringing modernism and Socialist Realism together with Portraits of V. I. Lenin in the Style of Jackson Pollock (1980) — continuing a conservative 'realist' practice on the one hand, and high Modernist abstraction on the other...Through that confrontation between Pollack and picture making...look(ing) further back again into the history of art, into Manet and Courbet...into the beginnings of that separation between Modernism and the academic tradition, to re-establish a kind of connection between essayistic text on the one hand and a painting as a thing that can have content and depth on the other (Harrison, 2011, p.204).

Their aim to restore the discursive function of art, however, did not extend to reforming the relational dynamics of its production, so that even though they widened the constituency of viewers they worked from a nominal, as opposed to relational, perception of the viewer. Hence, as Harrison retrospectively noted, Art & Language left the essentials of the artist/viewer divide of action/passivity fundamentally unchanged since 'the main effect of the work was on the people that were involved in it' (Harrison, 2011, p.193).

3.3.1. The strategy of indexing

Further to their objective of restoring art's essayistic competences, Art & Language produced a series of installations that organised and presented records of their conversations between 1972 and 1975. Their aim was to connect art to social truths whilst also preserving the Greenbergian 'critique of literariness, transparency and sentimentality, which is effectively a

critique of spurious realism' (Harrison, 2009, p.152). They thus set out to 'pursue and map a continuing critical conversation regarding the problems of definition entailed by the collapse of high Modernism' (Harrison, 2009, p.154) as a critical and theoretical authority. Hence *Indexes* were conceived to establish a set of ways of thinking about how art was made, thought about, and critiqued. They worked through fragmenting, circulating and reconnecting the written records of their discussions in ways that demonstrated how cooperative working shares and develops knowledge.

Indexing therefore demanded a comprehensive rethinking of traditional notions of authorship, since the conversations and the subsequent installations that mapped them were the product of undifferentiated forms of collective responsibility. Hence they encompassed all tasks, from the discursive and the logistical, through to the lesser aspects of the organisational. This presented a radically new understanding of collective responsibility; one that neither demanded nor implied an egalitarian distribution of tasks any more than it needed a unanimous agreement as to achievement. Inevitably, finding a means of presenting the work to artists and viewers outside the cohort of initial producers was problematic since all forms of visual presentation are vulnerable to being 'viewed' as art objects. Thus, the conversations were recorded in the impersonal forms of either printed or typed text and subsequently presented in installations that attempted to visually map that conversational world — 'to find a representation, however schematic, of a place where meaning could be made' (Harrison, 2001b, p.71). Importantly, the question of evaluative decisions concerning meaning, associated with either the intentions of the conversations, the individual texts or the viewer's response to the subsequent installation, did not form any part of the intentions of the *Indexes*. The objective of the work was to balance the discursive, relational and theoretical values of conversations so that none exceeded the other in value. Consequently *Index 01*, exhibited at Documenta 5, Kassel in 1972, was presented as an installation that took the form of:

eight metal filing cabinets placed on four grey painted stands, which raised them to a height convenient for reading in a standing position. Each cabinet contained six drawers. They contained typed and printed texts fixed page by page to the hinged leaves of the filing system so that they could be read in situ in their entirety. An initial theoretical assumption was made that allowed a given essay or paragraph-unit to be a discrete readable text. On this basis the component writings were ordered according to an alphabetical or numerical sequence, some being subdivided into discrete fragments and their subdivisions treated as separate items (Harrison, 2001b, pp.64-5).

The decision to present the installation in the bland style of a multi-national business office space aimed at deliberately encouraging the visitor to *read* instead of *behold*. Thus its purpose was twofold: to situate the social nature of thinking in opposition to the closed nature of individuality of thought, and to use visual presentation, not as a signifying form but as an index of its ‘intentional aspect’ (Harrison, 2001b, p.69). Nevertheless, this was not easily achieved, and Harrison records a well-rehearsed Art & Language analogy where ‘setting up a display is beginning to get like pointing your finger for a dog — the dog looks at the finger’ (Harrison, 2001b, p.69).



Fig. 5: Art & Language (Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden): *Index 01*, 1972

Importantly, the use and presentation of texts were in themselves self-consciously reflexive of the practices of the artists involved, rather than being deployed as alternative formalistic material; they deliberately pursued Modernism’s self-consciousness through to a logical point where ‘the purposive activity of Art & Language would be identified with the analysis of its own idiom, its language or languages’ (Harrison, 2001b, p.69), based on the evidence provided by the accumulation of co-authored discourse in the form of written material. Hence the decision to print typed texts, rather than present the original, hand-written scribbles, was a strategy to foreground knowledge and objectivity rather than authorship. It thereby signalled that the meanings being generated were what required attention, not the aesthetics of their presentation. Thus *Indexes* demanded to be understood as explorations of the social

conditions that modernity created, rather than a reaction to the formalist constraints of Modernism.

When *Index 01* was shown in *Documenta*, Kassel and the Hayward London (1972), what marked it as radically apart from the concerns and forms of conceptualism, understood through the type of work produced by Weiner, was that its suppression of individual authorship also included a suppression of Modernism's beholder onlooker (A), as the guarantor of the aesthetic performance of the work of art. As Harrison states:

A conventional concept of the individual artist as author serves to determine the expectations of viewers as readers, while the conventionalisation of the relations between viewer and artist in turn serve to fix and stabilise the technical categories of art (Harrison, 2001b, p.91).

Thus the fact that the assumed constituency of viewer/reader for the first showings of *Index 01* was unlikely to be found at *Documenta* or in the Hayward Gallery could be read not so much as a failure on the part of Art & Language to converse with the viewer, but rather as an elected strategy on their part to overcome the disjunctions between the work and the viewer. Nevertheless, while Art & Language was ambitious for *Index 01* not only to reveal itself as the outcome of collaborative conversation but also to engage the visitor in a different and more active form of art-centred discourse, Harrison notes that its main impact was confined to the people who were involved in it; as far as visitors were concerned it had 'very little effect' (Harrison, 2011, p.193). He summarised the aspirations of the *Index 01* as threefold: 'to assume the possibility of a place of work; to identify the place of work with a model of the social and to represent that model as a form of art' (Harrison, 2001b, p.75). Therefore, while acknowledging that *Index 01* could not accommodate every form of activity that was a form of work, for him its seminal contribution was to an understanding of the broadened horizons of art's competences:

other forms of work than the 'artistic' could be admitted into its intellectual and organisational margins, alongside other forms of text, without its autonomy having to be either compromised or defensively reasserted. In this sense — and in so far as the movement of Conceptual Art can be identified with the Benjaminite aspiration to admit and encourage spectators into the position of collaborators the '*Index*' was the summary work of Conceptual Art (Harrison, 2001b, p.75).

3.3.2. Enabling a wider constituency of viewers

With the division of viewers along the grounds of their aesthetic expertise, consequent upon Modernism, as one of the determining factors of Art & Language's practice, members Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden, working together as PBM (Painting by Mouth), set out to re-establish the connection between the depth and content of a work of art and its presence as an object. As noted in Chapter 2, Greenberg (1939) had argued that such a division was not only inevitable but also desirable, given the prevailing conditions of the time.

Furthermore, he had supported division as a means of defending and preserving the progressive, anti-materialistic tendencies of avant-garde art, even as he looked forward to the resolution of the social implications of such division in a yet to be realised, socialist future, when sufficient leisure and freedom from material constraints would bring about a democratised constituency of refined viewers. Greenberg had thereby drawn a Janus-faced dividend from class division in viewing, both defending and deplored it, whilst placing the responsibility and the remedy for it not with art, but with society.

Significantly therefore, Ramsden and Baldwin expanded the indexing strategy through the subversive action of painting by mouth to foreground embedded and contentious issues at stake concerning how contemporary modernist art was evaluated; their aim was to expose the contingencies of its presuppositions to destabilising criticism. They first produced detailed preparatory drawings for pictures that they then painted, holding the brushes in their teeth and working together with their heads close to the picture surface. Thereafter they theorised two opposite modes of attention that could be brought to the same painting; the first from an onlooker enjoying the cultural capital of the connoisseur of Modernism, and a later viewer who, by first reading and then looking, conformed to Seth Siegelaub's formula for attention to conceptual art's need to address discourse around art as a mechanism of it being in the world: 'When information is *primary*, the catalogue can become the exhibition *and* a catalogue auxiliary to it' (as quoted in Lippard, 1997, p.125; emphasis in original).

Subsequently, in an essay entitled 'Painting by Mouth' for the exhibition catalogue *Index: The Studio 3 Wesley Place Painted by Mouth* (1982), Baldwin and Ramsden examined how rival onlookers (A) and (B) exemplified two opposite modes of looking at a PBM painting: P).

Imagine two ideal onlookers: (A) and (B). (A) goes immediately to P, waits until he gets the proper feelings, etc., and then he just might look up the title of P, seek information and confirmation concerning P, etc. (B) goes immediately to the catalogue (or etc.) seeking to discover how to read the picture. (A) and (B) may correspond to some real or possible onlookers. Indeed, we may suggest that this relative ordering of 'reading' of

pictures and titles goes to different fragments of culture, social divisions and so on. (A) and (B) would be in different positions vis à vis hiatus. One would expect the hiatuses of (A) and (B) to be at different relative places or to be of different kinds or to occur at different stages of reading. PBM 1 shifts the advantage away from (A) towards (B). In Modernist (and etc.) culture the advantage would be supposed to be the other way round: the possibility of an authentic reading would tend to be favoured by the tendencies of (A). The sensitive (A's) search for unreflected content is more likely to be doomed to remain a convulsion or series of convulsions of his first-order discourse than is (B's) relatively more sober practice (*Art & Language*, 1982, p.6).

By indexing the painting as *PBM*, *Art & Language* generated the hiatus they sought because it confused established modernist considerations, so that the gestural and expressive character of the brushwork could no longer be approached for style, skill and competence. Moreover, the title *PBM1* functioned unconventionally in asserting a disregard for canonical conventions. The significant displacement of the competences of onlooker (A) generates its radical force through 'an absence of canons, canons which condition judgements of competence, of vulgarity, of accidentality, etc.' (*Art & Language*, 1982, p.1), and which PBM thereby showed to be unreliable witnesses of art's functionalisms.

Charles Harrison, who worked closely with Ramsden and Baldwin when they were producing PBM paintings, contextualised their method of interrogating the values of skill and expressiveness with reference to drawings made by Roger Hilton from 1972 to 1975, the last three years of his life, when he was suffering from the debilitating pain of peripheral nephritis. Controlling the pain required Hilton to lie on his left side and draw with his right hand, although he was left-handed. Hilton had maintained earlier in his *Remarks about Painting* for a 1961 exhibition catalogue, that the deciding factor of art's integrity is artistic intent: 'Art is an instrument of truth or it is nothing' (Harrison, 2009, p.158), thereby asserting artistic intent as a prime value and part of the dominant landscape of Modernism.

The concept of 'truth' in/as art both supports, and in a slippery way suggests that it transcends, the class-based determinism where the artist sees/perceives in a heightened, individuated way. This is then offered to the viewer through the media of expressive line and paint to be appreciated by the sophisticated visual sensibilities of onlooker (A), the perceptions of other onlookers being irrelevant to the evaluation of competences within art. Thus a PBM work confronts and collapses the historic system of aesthetic evaluation with its attendant evasions and assumptions, because the painting is not only a cooperative effort but additionally has been painted by mouth. In this way PBM turned the tables in favour of (B), since (A), disadvantaged by his cultural capital, could only entirely misread the painting.

(B), on the other hand, would learn from reading that the circumstances of the painting put it beyond categorisation in the conventional way. *PBM1* therefore functions as 'an indicator, a second-order symbol for standard presumptions concerning the mechanisms of the production of art' (*Art & Language*, 1982, p.4).

Thus PBM's attack on the internal tensions inhering within the legitimacy attached to onlooker (A)'s expertise and its concomitant exclusions strategically exposed what on face value presented as expressive gestural painting, the privileged preserve of the refined, disinterested producer and consumer, to an anti-hegemonic strategy of intentional bathos. It enacted an ironic critique of the traditional values and ideologies still holding sway within an historic concept of the painter, the painting and the viewer. These were undermined by the deliberate wrong-footing of associated assumptions about production and consumption, and through demonstrating that an understanding of competence cannot be confined to matters of technical skill, but critically must encompass matters of judgement concerning the ends for which that skill is practised, withheld or negated. PBM therefore subverted the relative stability of the criteria by which skill, in combination with aesthetic judgment, had been understood to produce authentic art and in doing so it exposed the false universal of art.

Overall, *Art & Language* demonstrated values in art can be neither immutable nor disinterested, since they are predicated upon the sedimentations of cultural interests. They not only subverted Greenberg's dominant approach, which places viewing as the true way of evaluating art, but also demonstrated that it is the agency of art, not society, that shifts the advantage from (A) to (B). The hiatus they thereby facilitated exposed the instabilities inherent in assuming art's truths are matters of formalist rather than relational issues.

3.3.3. The resilience of the allegory of the artist's studio

Having detailed the difficulties inherent to contesting the restrictions that Modernism imposed on our understanding of art, I conclude with a critique of *Art & Language*'s *Index: The Studio at 3 Wesley Place* (1982). A significant aspect of *Index 01* was that even as it presented a contestation of the traditional notions of the individual, self-regarding artist and his studio kingdom, it worked through investigations that paralleled the allegorical traditions of the artist's studio genre of painting. Thus, while it eschewed individual authorship, contested the values inherent in the production and consumption of expressive painting and redefined the inseparability of viewing from reading, it was nevertheless working on similar concerns to those that had engaged painters of the artist's studio genre: Johannes Vermeer in the 17th century, Georges Braques and Pablo Picasso in the 20th century, and significantly Gustave Courbet who produced *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory of a Seven Year Phase in my*

Artistic and Moral Life (1855). In these works the studio genre is, as Courbet's title nominates, a form of allegory that presents the viewer with references that resonate the world beyond the studio, but importantly are mediated through the putative autonomy of the artist within the studio enclosure.

Works in this genre have in common an investigation of the complexities of referencing, representing and viewing, which examines assumptions about the autonomy of studio practice. Accordingly, through these shared aspects, *Index 01* must be placed within the artist's studio genre. Significantly, Art & Language developed their concerns with indexing through a series of works (1982-3) specifically based on the artist studio genre, pursuing them through representational drawing and painting, whilst also resuming aspects of painting by mouth. Where initially the device of painting by mouth had been used to call into question the spectator's established systems of reading and evaluating the expressive components of painting, they subsequently utilised it to divorce the spectator further from 'those kinds of linguistic competence that are exercised in mere listing and naming, and to dislocate the conventions and conventional claims attached to the studio genre' (Harrison, 2001b, p.75). Thus they returned to painting as a form of index to demonstrate that the normal culture of painting could be displaced by thought.

Subsequently, in the 1982 *Index: The Studio at 3 Wesley Place*, Art & Language cited over sixty items in a 'list of some of the things represented' (Harrison, 2001b, p.166), the items themselves necessarily extending beyond any reaches of tabulation, as is the indexing nature of all cultural referents. The work started as a maquette deemed adequate as an index, but not as a compositional study, for the projected final painting that was to be on the same scale as Courbet's *Painter's Studio*: 330 x 780 cm.

A second drawing was made, by mouth that introduced distortion, accident and bathos into the composition, representing a first stage in the ruination of its referents. This by-mouth drawing was squared up and transferred exactly by hand to the full size paper on which the first 'Studio' painting was to be produced. This was then coloured by hand and finally painted over in black ink by mouth with reference to the original maquette. This last stage was intended to unify the overall composition in a manner suggestive of expressionistic abstract art (Harrison, 2001b, pp.168-9).



Fig. 6: Art & Language (Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden): *Index 1981 – 1982: The Studio at 3 Wesley Place*

What Art & Language's project of the *Artist's Studio* achieved was multi-faceted, sophisticated and innovative. When it appeared in *Documenta* 1982, Harrison noted its effect as 'highly illustrative and relatively classical' (Harrison, 2001b, p.169), but since the expressive aspect of the painting was a deliberate subterfuge it thereby interrogated the whole truth-value of this confirmation and found it to be wanting. Thus, through the *Artist's Studio* drawings and paintings, PBM introduced a discursive realism that instigated a new order to that traditionally associated with the correspondences between images and the world they are understood to represent. In this new order mimetic correspondences were reconfigured through a range of materials that included the cultural, the conceptual and the psychological, and were constantly interrogated and therefore hazarded through the trajectory of practice. As such, a significant contribution that Art & Language brought to the conditions of artistic practice was the understanding that aesthetic autonomy could only be purchased at the price of constantly exhausting its own resources of representation and expression.

Notwithstanding the radical nature of this contribution, however, the logic of Art & Language's strategy located its practice within the field of contesting, exposing and thereby deposing Modernism's hegemony, so that ultimately its concerns remained fundamentally those of a different sort of Modernism — a focus on the means and relations of (co)authored production that mapped the field of vision within modernist concerns. For sure, PBM indexing facilitated the viewers' understanding of how presuppositions shaped and informed the act of viewing, with specific reference to Modernist painting, but the benefits for the viewer took place *post-production*. Hence, the greater clarification and understanding by Art & Language stretched significantly, but ultimately remained within, the wider parameters laid down by the Greenbergian legacy and built upon by the Barthesian interventions. Thus the indexing hiatus achieved traction in a relatively discrete art world, implying in the process the continued wider unfreedoms embedded in the production and consumption of the art object.

While it destabilised traditional, author-centric ways of understanding art production it was not primarily concerned with democratising art's relations of production in order to involve the viewer as a co-producer in its work. Since this remains a problematic in the production of political, as opposed to politicising art, I therefore submit that the aims of the thesis to recognise and support art as a socially engaged, politicising force will be best served by combining Benjamin's theories on the arts' socially productive functions with those of Gramsci on the importance of having agency to influence the material and cultural conditions of existence.

3.4. Conclusion

The work of this chapter has been to conclude the thesis' exegesis of the functionalisms serviced by the art object, the art critic and the viewer, as shaped in the period of Modernism and its immediate aftermath. First it has assessed Barthes' approach to overcoming the controls of traditional authorship; thereafter it has reinforced the concerns raised concerning the Barthesian position with a related critical engagement with the work of Art & Language in the same period. The chapter has used these analyses to underline the challenges involved in meeting the thesis' wider concerns for art to function as a socially engaged, politicising force. It thus concludes the preparation for Chapter 4, which will detail the thesis' contribution of how an approach based on a coalition of Gramsci and Benjamin understands and promotes the potential politicising agency of the arts.

In particular, the chapter has emphasised how Barthes' contribution to destabilising the established cultural authority of author and critic, by according a socially isolated function for the reader, underlined the limited value of freedoms that lack engaged social agency. This has relevance for the wider aims of the thesis that centre on contesting a Barthesian trajectory which, while it problematises the traditional concept of authoring, nevertheless neglects the contingent rights and abilities of the reader/viewer and the contribution they can make to an enrichment of the social field through being active in the artistic relations of production.

The chapter's subsequent critical engagement with the work of Art & Language identified the several problems inherent in the Barthesian trajectory as they took shape in conceptual art. The first concerns how the strategy of allowing the viewer access to the group's internal processes nevertheless neglected the need to reform art's traditional functionalisms and left the historic divisions between artist and viewer largely unreformed. The second involves Art & Language's focus on the internal processes of discourse construction, which

dematerialised traditional production into the collective nature of social thinking and replaced the individual artist's decisions with collective responsibility, as manifest in the paintings by mouth of Ramsden and Baldwin. The objective of the chapter, therefore, has been to clarify how the attempt to reform art through moving it beyond modernist concerns and values neglected the need to reform its relations of artistic production, which remained naturalised in powerful ways.

To recall an argument made at various points over the first three chapters of the thesis, for art to work as a socially engaged, politicising force it must find its value through what it *does* rather than what it *is*. As Bruff and Jordan (2015, pp.2-3; emphasis in original) assert, to focus on the latter means that 'art's potential is viewed as limitless primarily through innovation in the form it takes, leading to a focus on (re)arrangements of the object...there needs to be a renewed focus on the *productive potential* of art'. The revised priorities that this entails situate art in a social field where its specific competences with cultural products and cultural spaces are used in the name of collapsing the historic divides that separate the art world, the artist and the materials of art from the social world and the agency of a democratising social bond. The thesis sets out alternative approaches to these problems in the following chapter by explicitly incorporating the insights of Benjamin and Gramsci into an understanding of art's function, before it shows their relevance when critically engaging with the installations and social interventions of Alfredo Jaar in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4

Enrichment through a Gramscian/Benjaminitive Framework

4.1. Introduction

As the aim of this thesis is to illuminate the value of enriching an understanding of art's social functionalisms through a Gramscian/Benjaminitive framework, the first part of this chapter outlines elements of Marxist art history and theory that inform my approach. This is necessary, because Marxist perspectives have been brought to bear on the themes addressed by this thesis, even if they do not advocate the more holistic approach to art's politicising potential that Gramsci and Benjamin offer. Hence I discuss work by T. J. Clark, Gail Day, Janet Wolff, Steve Edwards and Mark Hutchinson, and I build on these contributions in the subsequent sections on Gramsci and Benjamin.

More specifically, I overview T. J. Clark's foregrounding of the importance of practices of negation, something that Gail Day and Mark Hutchinson also address. Clark's argument for a reformative social traction in modernist artists' renunciation of certain traditional aesthetic practices (Clark, 1973, 1982, 1999) stresses the importance of detailed attention to social background for understanding art. It also dovetails with discussion found in the previous chapters, i.e. when critically engaging with different forms of art and cultural theory, and art practice, it is important to be clear about the merits as well as the limitations of various approaches. Gail Day's dialectic of negation in art production (1996, 2011) mediates further aspects of art's potential social impact by focusing on the flux between the real and the allegorical as a socially productive, dialectical dynamic in representation. Janet Wolff's socially centred, historical perspective (1993) further mediates art as a process of collective consciousness and thus beyond the control of a singular genius artist. Finally, the work of Steve Edwards on the social impact of photography (Edwards, 2006a, 2006b) informs my understanding of the mediatic image in relation to Jaar's installations, while Mark Hutchinson's heterodox understanding of avant-garde art as potentially transformative of art's social relations (Hutchinson, 2009, 2016 lecture) reminds us of the originary radicalism of movements which ultimately were co-opted into more traditional forms of art criticism and practice (and thus emphasises the need for nuanced critique).

In the second part of the chapter, I clarify how Gramsci and Benjamin make possible a trajectory from the ideas of these scholars towards a more holistic approach that enriches our understanding of art's capacity to contribute to a wider reconstruction of social relations. It combines Benjamin's engagement with Fascism's use of representation and the politics of

art production in the functionalisms serviced by artists and viewers (Benjamin, 2002), with Gramsci's concerns to practically contest embedded ideologies in civil society that enable rule with the consent of a sometimes unwitting people (Gramsci, 1971, 2012). In combination, they make possible the construction of a conceptual apparatus which can explore thoroughly whether the art practices in question are a potentially politicising force or not. As a result, the ground is cleared to critically study Alfredo Jaar's practices and his self-understanding of his own practices that are grounded in his commitment to art's potentially reformative force. For these reasons, this chapter is of central significance to the thesis in providing a critical background to the confluence of Jaar's practice with critical art theory and political and cultural theory that emerged in the formative years of his practice. Additionally, and in response to the issues identified in chapters 1-3, it clarifies how I understand art's potential reformative agency and thus prepares the thesis for its engagement with Jaar in chapters 5-7.

4.2. Marxist interventions in art history and theory

The interventions of T. J. Clark (1973, 1982, 1999), Gail Day (1996, 2011), Janet Wolff (1993), Steve Edwards (2006a, 2006b) and Mark Hutchinson (2009, 2017) all privilege art's potential social force over its formalist innovations. Hence, I have worked from their commitment to practices of negation as a means to destabilise art's traditional authorities and embedded social functionalisms. The following overview of their interventions thus clarifies the background of the trajectory towards Gramsci's analysis of cultural hegemony with Benjamin's work on art and the producer.

An important contribution to Marxist art history is made through T. J. Clark's focus on modernist painting's relationship to radical changes in society, where he argues that its turn from traditional narrative and illusionism leads critics and viewers towards 'the social reality of the sign' (Clark, 1999, p.9). Clark thereby broaches the political ground of Benjamin and Gramsci in his concerns with a social functionalism in cultural products, although he argues for formalist change as the engine house of art's social traction, while Benjamin and Gramsci push for reform of the traditional, relational dynamic in cultural production that underpins established hegemony. This distinction between Marxist art critics and Gramsci and Benjamin is the key reason why, in order to analyse most effectively Jaar's practices and self-understandings, Marxist criticism can be only the (important) beginning and not the core of my approach.

I thus build from Clark's position in 'Practices of Negation' (1982, p.153), which contests the perceived formalist logic of closure attending the Greenbergian account of modernist painting

(as discussed in Chapter 2). Since Clark understands Modernism to have resulted from the absence of a recognition of the essential social base for art production, he understands negation as ‘the sign inside art of this wider decomposition: it is an attempt to *capture* the lack of consistent and repeatable meanings in the culture – to capture the lack and make it over into form’ (Clark, 1982, p.154; emphasis in original). He thus directs us towards an understanding of ‘lack’ in terms of embedded social values in formalism, from which I develop an understanding of negation that refutes art’s traditional relational structures.

Clark’s negation is nonetheless central to his contribution to a political understanding of art, since it argues for art’s potential socially reformative agency (albeit through the avant-garde renunciation of certain embedded aesthetic practices) and thus the concomitant subversions of the ideological governances that operate through them. For Clark, it offers a means of resisting the oppressions of Modernism carried over from Greenberg. In *Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art* (1982) he argues that a force of a passive/active duality is internal to modernist practice: ‘a work of interminable and absolute decomposition’ (Clark, 1982, p.59). Thus Clark supports sloughing off the formalist concerns imposed through Greenberg’s encomium by reasoning that Modernism’s social traction lies in:

the absence of a solid social base, with practices of negation being predicated on a condition of lack...the decline of ruling class elites, the absence of a ‘social base’ for artistic production, the paradox of making bourgeois art in the absence of a bourgeoisie (Clark, 1982, pp.153-4).

Accordingly, he excavates and explicates the contexts within which the work exists, in both its production and in its consumption, to alert us to how formalist art innovation is always socially mediated.

In contrast to Clark, who focuses on how art works with its inherited material (i.e. the context), Janet Wolff argues that the motor of art’s subversive potential is detailed attention to the history of aesthetic conventions. She contends that, while Clark’s contribution is significant, he pays insufficient attention to Marxist concerns with social divisions and their economic drivers, which leads to problems regarding his overall ambition to argue for a reformative social agency for certain moments in modernist art because, paradoxically, it accommodates a lack of ‘interest in the institutional factors involved in the production of art...and the actual processes through which art and its ideology — are constructed’ (Wolff, 1993, p.29).

While this is a significant criticism, and something which is returned to later when discussing Gramsci and Benjamin, I nevertheless find a useful starting point in Clark's project because he eschews influential, entrenched art history approaches and therefore foregrounds difficulties that divide academia and action, or art and reformative agency. Indeed, Jonathan Harris (Harris, 2001) accounts for Clark's unapologetically academic stance as a response to the failure of 1968's street actions to bring about change, explaining how Clark's disappointed hopes led him to take refuge in study and reflection. Additionally, he notes that in the preface to the revised edition of *Image of the People* (1982) Clark had anticipated that splitting radical art history from action outside the university would result in its recuperation by the reactionary thrust of institutionally dominant art history, and that the Right would thereby be able to reduce and contain it into a 'contribution to some dismal methodological change of gear' (Clark, 1982, p.6) — a system of 'academic contributions rather than political "arguments and perspectives"' (Harris, 2001, pp.64-5).

Presciently, Clark's final concerns about the failure of art history and art to realise a role in a Marxist grand narrative warn of the recuperation of reformative art projects within the micro-narratives of the new art history (see the previous chapters of this thesis for the articulation of similar concerns). Above all, therefore, Clark establishes an important rejection of using history as the 'neutral' yet all-determining background to the work of art — 'something never actually *there* when the painter stands in front of the canvas' (1973, p.12; emphasis in original), but which occasionally puts in an appearance. The significance of this destabilisation of traditional art history's standing is that it dismisses the notion that an artist's location, as a social being, is contained within the artistic community, and furthermore repudiates 'intuitive analogies between form and ideological content' (Clark, 1973, p.10). These are productive refusals, because they liberate how we understand art and the aspirations we have for it. Hence, in stating that 'the making of a work of art is one historical process among other acts, events, and structures — it is a series of actions in but also *on* history' (Clark, 1973, p.13; emphasis added), Clark clears a space to work with art as a potentially positive force for social reform.

Nevertheless, as implied already, there is a need to develop further my position on how art can realise a socially engaged, reformative force with reference to other Marxist critics. One key example is Janet Wolff's historical perspective on art's social functionalism (Wolff, 1993). In particular, her argument for the artist/author and the viewer/reader as equal subjects of art's material and social mediations clarifies artistic production as the result of a collective consciousness rather than the product of the artist. Wolff's position that art is both a social process and a social product efficiently demystifies the ideal of socially isolated artistic

creativity and genius. She thus seeks to release artists and viewers from the elitisms that have been traditionally underpinned by art object production. For example, her critique of art production forefronts a collective consciousness that underpins my conviction that art plays a part, either negatively or positively, in people's relational and material experiences. Hence, through the Gramscian/Benaminitie approach discussed later in the chapter I develop a trajectory from Wolff's basic principle of the social nature of production that clarifies how, at the point of production, the relational aspect of art is the engine house of art's social agency.

By foregrounding the pedagogical transformation of the popular consciousness as the chief site for art's reformative work, Wolff argues for a relative autonomy for art from capitalist society on the basis of its potential to effect change and transformation in society; her focus is therefore on the viewer as first of all a consumer, and thereafter a producer (Wolff, 1993, pp.95-116). Her concern with art's potentially transformative role therefore sets out to contest the exclusion of the dominated classes from the traditional elitisms of high art. This, of course, importantly expands modes of *representation* from aesthetic forms into relational ones, with the emphasis on reception as the chief force in the final social construction of the work — a position she identifies via Marx's analysis in *Grundrisse* that it is only through consumption that a product becomes a real product:

Not only is production immediately consumption and consumption immediately production, not only is production a means for consumption and consumption the aim of production...but also, each of them apart from being immediately the other, and apart from mediating the other, in addition creates the other in creating itself, and creates itself as the other (Marx, 1973, p.93).

This allows Wolff to clarify how the relationship between social structures and the individual response result from a nexus of determinations that logically must undermine concepts of independent artistic freedom (Wolff, 1993, pp.32-4). I consequently work with her radical subversion of elitisms in art production and criticism since, in reasoning that 'artistic creativity is not different in any relevant way from other forms of creative action' (Wolff, 1993, p.9), she widens the boundaries of how we can understand creativity into a social field of reformative action.

While Wolff's approach is grounded in Marx's position that the nature of human labour, in general, is essentially creative (Marx and Engels, 1973, pp.53-4), I place specific emphasis on the importance of the conscious engagement of artists and viewers with reforming their societal role from within the arts. I therefore map a path from Wolff's concerns to those of

Benjamin and Gramsci on the responsibilities of intellectuals, *qua* artists, to facilitate and employ the agencies of the viewers. Hence, where Wolff foregrounds the role of the ordinary viewer in harnessing the transformative power of the art product (Wolff, 1993, pp.95-7), I argue for the transformative agency of *all* upon the general complex of social relations, within which I situate the specifics of art production (Gramsci, 1971, p.8; Benjamin, 2005, pp.769-70).

Above all, Gramsci and Benjamin call for intellectual work at a non-elitist level as the initial stage in practical action, meaning that they propose a constructive autonomy for art — in contrast to Wolff's relative autonomy for art in its subversive potential to expose the reality of a bourgeois worldview (Wolff, 1993, p.91). Thus, where Wolff maintains that art's political potential 'centre[s] on the question of audiences. It is a question of which technique of cultural intervention will, somehow affect audiences, and it also a question of who those audiences are' (Wolff, 1993, p. 91), I work from a view of action that:

contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world...and not only that but everything that is needed to give life to an integral, practical organisation, that is, to become a total integral civilisation (Gramsci 1971, p.462).

On this point, Gail Day's writings (1996, 2011) are significant, because she develops an understanding of negative thought that argues for it as the means by which art connects with its 'pulse of freedom' (Bhaskar, 1993) — a position that is particularly relevant to the cultural repressions of the Pinochet regime that shaped Jaar's method of working (as discussed in Chapter 5). Thus, Day approaches art's social engagement through contextualising production within the sedimented values that it seeks to contest but to which, importantly, it is also vulnerable. For Day, therefore, art's critical encounters are formed against prevailing forces and fields in production — a Marxist rationale that understands dialectical negation as a means of confronting culturally embedded problems of representation:

In its rational form it is a scandal to...doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well...being in its very essence critical and revolutionary (Marx, 1990, p.103).

Importantly therefore, Day rejects Greenberg's position on a 'dialectical tension' between representation as illusion and Modernism's 'integrity of the picture plane' (Greenberg in Day,

1996, p.63), since it asserts that art's values lie in its self-containment and self-legitimation. Rather, she aligns with T. J. Clark's Hegelian perspective, looking for social value through art history's attention to processes of mediation in the relation between things. However, where Clark focuses on the 'concrete transactions [that] are hidden behind the mechanical image of "reflection", to know how "background" becomes "foreground"' (Clark, 1973, p.12), Day argues that practices of negation are the engine house of art's social dynamic because they offer a resistance that is less than appropriable and more than marketable:

My point here is stronger than the long-habitual claims that resistance has become appropriable, indeed marketable, by capitalist society (late capitalist, post-industrial, post-Fordist, post-etc.). We seem to be presented with an inversion of Walter Benjamin's reclamations of the past for the present, the traces of the long-gone for now time, and instead face the prospect of the just-gone receding rapidly into the far past (Day, 1996, p.1).

She therefore aims to restore a dynamic to 'radical thought and its horizons, so that we might better understand our own situation and revive our critical agency' (Day, 2011, pp.23-4).

Again, though, and as with Wolff, by opening up this discussion it is necessary to use Gramsci and Benjamin directly in order to establish a stronger position from which to engage with Jaar's practices and self-understandings. To this end, my incorporation of insights from Gramsci and Benjamin establishes a practical, as opposed to a discursive, course of action that understands art as a force of social intervention, rather than social intervention as a force in art. The change in emphasis is important to my clarification of art's agency, and thus what artists undertake in wanting art to make a difference rather than wanting to make different forms of art.

The work of Chapter 6 further clarifies the potentials and problems embedded in mediatic images of suffering and their function in Jaar's photographic intervention. It builds on Steve Edwards' analyses of 19th century photography as a new form in capitalist relations of production (2006a and 2006b). Marx listed photography as one form of mechanical labour created by 'new fields of production' (Marx, 1990, pp.573-4), while Benjamin argued its 'claim to be an art was contemporaneous with its emergence as a commodity' (Benjamin, 2002, p.240). Hence the relevance of Edwards' research on the writing of the Victorian theorist and critic Alfred H. Wall, whose concerns to separate photography's commercial form from its aesthetic form foregrounded the ambivalent place of photography across manufacture and the arts (Edwards, 2006a, pp.119-22). Edwards identifies a Victorian anxiety with photography's disruptive presence that connects to Benjamin's call for a theory of art that is

'useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art' (Benjamin, 1999, p.212).

Edwards' analysis of portrait photography identifies the disruptive potential of the photographic image as the 'perverse democracy of the commodity form which displays little regard for propriety' (Edwards, 2006a, p.81) that thereby fuels class-based anxieties. He clarifies how problems were caused, in part at least, through the indiscriminate window displays of *cartes de visites* that mixed people from all walks of life: royalty, aristocrats, bourgeoisie and the labouring class. Importantly, such social juxtapositioning threatened an emerging social chaos by foregrounding the faces and occupations of those who previously had formed a faceless background (Edwards, 2006a, p.81). Furthermore, in observing how Wall, who argued for the aesthetic art of photography, demonised the inconsistencies of the photographic studios' use of backgrounds as a threat to aesthetic proprieties, Edwards identifies such fears as the terror of an internal as opposed to external cause, whereby 'the normal, necessary productive processes of objectification and externalisation of labour power become potentiated to such an extent that they develop into alienation' (Edwards, 2006, p.287). As Marx notes, as soon as the commodity emerges 'it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas' (Marx, 1990, p.163).

Thus Edwards clarifies how photographic images, to which we are frequently exposed, can produce 'new grotesque conjunctures' (Edwards, 2006, p.288) of class that irrupt as a levelling force ensuring that 'all that is holy is profaned' (Marx and Engels, 2010, p.25). He also argues that the distinction between art and documentary, that so vexed the early history of photography, remains crucial. This is because it emphasises that outside debates on how far photographs can be taken as a neutral witnesses to events or persons, depend for their meaning on networks of authority that have the power to fix the particular interpretation of an event and the use that is made thereof. Importantly, therefore, the challenge facing a critique of photography is not concerned with the image so much as the uses to which its consumption is put (Edwards, 2006b, pp.21-36):

Pictures (in particular instances, some photographs) bear the imprints of their makers. This family of images attests to intention, subjectivity, and affect; it follows the rules of art theory; it lays claim to moral import...Pictures simultaneously elude words and inhabit the high-flown discourse of the connoisseur, philosopher, and art-maker. Documents, in contrast, appear to be generated automatically without a maker. They are typically

thought of as written records, but they also have their image form...Documents are lowly, workaday carriers of information. Like the 'figured' and the 'proper', pictures and documents are relational terms. Their effects and functions are at least in part, secured negatively through the alternate position (Edwards, 2006a, p.13).

Hence, Edwards' historical perspective on the image/document dichotomy can be situated within Gramsci's concerns with understanding how socio-historical processes work to create and categorise cultural difference, making possible otherness of the masses from the dominant culture (Gramsci, 2012, p.194), and also Benjamin's focus on the need to put 'an improved apparatus' at the disposal of a greater number of producers (Benjamin, 2005 p.777).

Finally, my arguments for understanding art as a social force that either works for or against the established hegemony are informed by Mark Hutchinson's argument (2017) for a heterodox understanding of the avant-garde that dismisses the traditional view that was discussed in Chapter 2. Hutchinson argues for it to be understood as a revolutionary-inspired political dynamic that works to transform art's social relations. Hence, rather than mediating Dada and Surrealism as historical projects seeking to merge 'life as it is with art as it is', (Hutchinson, 2017, p.15) he contends that then, as now, their aim was to negate the prevailing organisation of art and life. Hence Hutchinson brings a new perspective to the importance of practices of negation by rethinking previous dominant understandings and asking how things could have been otherwise.

While there is some overlap here with Clark's discussions of Modernism, Hutchinson argues that the social ambitions of a political revolution can only be realised by changing modes of production and consequently the relations of society, since from these centres society not only produces things but also reproduces itself (Hutchinson, 2017, p.1). Hence his emphasis is on how avant-garde art has historically functioned at junctures with political revolution to negate art's role in established social structures, a negation that *per se* logically contributes to reshaping the structures themselves. Specifically, Hutchinson argues for this position through a detailed account of the prolonged, unique avant-garde activity of Dada and Surrealism, which took place amidst the reverberations of the Soviet revolution and the aftermath of the First World War in Western Europe, i.e. work that was immersed in a highly politicised and hostile cultural climate. At the heart of his argument, therefore, is the fundamental assertion that it is only through radical practices of negation that art can become a socially reformative, politicising force.

Thus Hutchinson reasons that Dada contributed to the artistic revolution by overthrowing the existing regime of art, while Surrealism negated the values embedded in unquestioned art habits and practices. Importantly, then, he understands avant-garde art as a process not a product, one that overthrows positive precedents and resources in addition to accumulated techniques, genres and histories to enable itself as a site of conflict since ‘art that lays claim to being universal is founded on the repression of antagonism as such’ (Hutchinson, 2017, p.5). Hutchinson cites the 1918 Dada manifesto, where Tristan Tzara wrote: ‘Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean’, identifying an equal tenet of total revolt in André Breton’s second manifesto of Surrealism (Breton, 1934). Hutchinson thereby argues for an alternative understanding of the *positive force of negativity* in avant-garde art practices. This is where negative art actually prospers:

As Picabia said, art is in need of an operation. From this point of view, the negativity of Dada is about a process of cleansing or freeing rather than a static opposition. Destroying the prison walls of the unjustly interred is an act of violent destruction, of negation; it is also an act of liberation. In this case, prison walls are negative: a bar on action. Dada saw the most cherished beliefs of art as, in fact, its prison walls (Hutchinson, 2009).

With Dada having delivered the first strike, the second strike, in the hands of Surrealism, set out to ‘build new structures for art against art’ (Hutchinson, 2017, p.12). For Hutchinson, Surrealism’s negations of traditional products and production acted as the unifying force of its diverse activities. Thus he posits the different techniques of painting used by Ernst, Magritte and Tanguy as forming an effective body for negating technical proficiency and its contingent expectations:

Not only do they avoid the classical schema of painting, based on a hierarchy of genres and subject matter, they also have no truck with the modernist liberation of painting...It is only subsequently, with their absorption into an undifferentiated modernist history of art, that these procedures come to be used as additional techniques within the conventional repertoire of art (Hutchinson, 2017, p.14).

Within Breton’s Surrealist Manifestos (1924 and 1929) he emphasises the turn from psychic automatism to Marxism — from a Freudian liberation of the mind to the liberation of man. There is a parallel with the double strike of revolution in Breton’s account of this development (1934), where Surrealism responded to the necessity of bridging the gap between absolute idealism and dialectical materialism.

This necessity made its appearance in so urgent a manner that we had to consider the problem in the clearest possible light, with the result that for some months we devoted our entire attention to the means of bringing about this change of front once and for all. If I do not today feel any retrospective embarrassment in explaining this change, that is because it seems to me quite natural that surrealist thought, before coming to rest in dialectical materialism and insisting, as today, on the supremacy of matter over mind, should have been condemned to pass, in a few years, through the whole historic development of modern thought (Breton, 1934).

Thus Hutchinson concludes that although Surrealism suffered eventually from a total recuperation into formalist practice, at its outset it aimed to negate the naturalised patterns of art and life that he understands as the true face of the avant-garde. He argues that the avant-garde operates through a historical dimension in art that confronts its own limitations in order to become a practice of radical negation and thus transformation (Hutchinson, 2017, p. 16). Hutchinson's focus is on what became swiftly marginalised, leaving the Greenbergian perspective discussed in Chapter 2 as the dominant perspective, but his recuperation of earlier art movements for radical ends has parallels with Gramsci's discussions of common sense becoming critical and organic intellectuals acting as permanent persuaders. Therefore, in a similar way to the above Marxist critics, he advocates a method of enquiry that takes art on its own terms and seeks to emancipate it from itself. The key difference for this thesis is that we need to build on these contributions while also moving beyond art in and of itself, in favour of a broader form of social enquiry. That is the task of the rest of this chapter.

In summary, from the work of these Marxist scholars I have developed the beginnings of a critical framework that clarifies how art can function as a socially engaged, politicising force. It claims that art's potential agency for social change lies in reforming the relations of artistic production — an emphasis that involves a relational focus for practices (i.e. a plurality) of negation. Nevertheless, in order to exploit fully the potential of this understanding, it is necessary to connect these Marxist critics with broader currents in Marxist thought. The subsequent part of this chapter therefore explains the rationale for a Gramscian/Benjaminite framework that is used in the thesis' subsequent chapters to understand and critically engage with Alfredo Jaar's work.

4.3. Why Gramsci?

The answer to this question is twofold: in specific relation to Jaar's Chilean background, Gramsci was a major influence on critical intellectuals in Chile during the Pinochet regime. In particular, as Matt Davies observes (1999, p.126), their investigation of the ideological

functions of the Chilean press needed an analysis of the productive role of ideologies in articulating class interests that was not available in earlier, structural analyses of particular Chilean class interests. Gramsci facilitates such an approach through his focus on how the superstructure shapes and mediates directly our material experience.

Moreover, in relation to art, Gramsci makes an original contribution to our understanding of how power operates, that specifically enables us to identify traditional art as a player in the support and defence of social oppression. Initially, this may seem an excessively militant approach to take because it seems to indict those involved in the making, historicising and viewing of art, as knowingly contributing to oppression. However, Gramsci's understanding of social power is more nuanced than a simple face-to-face confrontation between domination on the one hand and subordination on the other. Because his writings deal extensively with how we conspire unknowingly with our oppression he enables us to investigate, in detail, how we not only render the rigours of coercion unnecessary but also take for granted that we act as free agents.

So, although Gramsci may have little to say specifically about art, the insight he gives us into how the superstructure — all the elements of civil society — shares a relationship of mutual exchange with economic and political relationships, identifies all its parts as implicit in the question of agency and social reform. This is the process he defines as 'hegemony', (cf. Showstack Sassoon, 1982, pp.13-14) and the nuanced understanding he establishes of it as a complex of relationships enables us to recognise it not only as a dynamic force in a state of continuous formation (Gramsci, 1995, p.312), but also as one that exploits the pervasive and persuasive effects inherent in the cultural apparatus. Thus a Gramscian approach brings the traditional understanding of the artist, the art object and the viewer into focus as one of culture's constituent parts and importantly rejects an understanding of art being isolated from other aspects of the social world.

4.3.1. Hegemony: consent and coercion

Gramsci developed his concept of hegemony as both a tool of political strategy but also one of historical and cultural analysis that enables us to evaluate the strategies groups use in attempting to attain societal ascendancy (Jones, 2010, p.44). Thus Gramsci's interest in hegemony is in how it relies upon alliances between bourgeois intellectuals and the masses, which is of particular relevance to the arts. On the social function of writers, he says:

A literature cannot be national unless it is popular; for, although its creation is the work of a few, its use...must be universal...Its practitioners must not only aim for the good of the

people but must also depict their spirit, such that this becomes not only the end but in a way also the beginning of civil literature (Gramsci, 2012, p.248).

Gramsci's theorising of hegemony therefore offers a useful way to offer a historical and cultural analysis of art that makes it possible to avoid blunt, dualist distinctions between hegemony, traditionally understood as mastery, and control and ideology. This is of particular relevance in the task of elucidating how the making and viewing of art contribute to a consensual acceptance of the social governances sedimented within various political and social agencies, since it enables us to map a clearer frame of the conceptions and misconceptions that concern art as a political object as opposed to art as a politicising force (Gramsci, 2012, p.107).

In particular, a Gramscian approach elucidates the important distinction between ideology and hegemony in the struggle for domination. While the articulation of the former is a crucial part of the social group's hegemonic project in presenting a particular worldview as universal, Gramsci argues that hegemony results from a complex of dynamics that make it possible for governing powers to have the consent of those whom they subjugate (even if this consent is not spontaneously offered and is more reluctant in character). For sure, within this complex, ideologies operate, but the hegemonic bloc is never reducible to them. Thus an exemplar model of Gramscian 'soft', hegemonic governance is experienced in Western democracies where, as Eagleton argues, a crucial aspect of its power lies in fostering the illusion of self-government on the part of the populace: 'What uniquely distinguishes the political form of such societies is that the people are supposed to believe that they govern themselves, a belief which no slave of antiquity or medieval serf was expected to entertain' (Eagleton, 1991, p.112).

Thus, when related to art, working with the Gramscian model of hegemony places at our disposal a nuanced understanding of how power is embedded in art production and consumption, enabling us to study them within an all-inclusive dynamic whose nexus is sedimented within a complex of relational forces, rather than the direct result of an unmediated, top-down diktat by the intellectuals of the art world. This sets us the clear task of excavating, and thereby beginning to undermine, the omnipresent mechanisms of de-historicising and universalising that traditionally enable the arbitrary workings of power to continue:

The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion [intellectual] of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the

ensembles of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations. (Gramsci, 1971, p.8)

Therefore, through a Gramscian understanding of art as a social dynamic that involves everyone, we can interrogate its functions within the contemporary cultural apparatus. On the one side, universal cultural consumption, which is inseparable from technological practices, is embedded within neo-liberal market relations where choice and control work in a close affiliation. In offering an availability of experience that includes everyone, it simultaneously obfuscates our exclusion from the means of cultural production. But on the other side, as Benjamin argues, it also has the potential for empowering alternative social formations where: 'The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception' (Benjamin, 1999, p.217).

4.3.2. Hegemony and common sense

Accordingly, a Gramscian understanding of art hegemony directs us to shun the elitisms whereby high and popular art are separated, since it neither accommodates popular culture as an exploitative site of people's subjugation, nor as the site of their self-affirmation. Rather, it recognises popular culture as a force in the field of cultural and social relations that is shaped by the push and pull of both sides. Such an understanding of the hegemonic order thereby insists on its shifting and conditional nature that is a formation from, and accommodation of, past and present influences. Consequently, it arises as much from our pre-disposition to conformity as from the coercions of imposed ideologies:

In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting. We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man. (Gramsci, 1971, p.324).

Following Gramsci, therefore, we can work from a multi-layered understanding of the web of power that enables us to recognise the ways in which ideology is embedded in art production — what he terms the 'common sense' — that shapes the social field. This understanding of common sense as 'spontaneous philosophy' (Gramsci, 1971, p.323), distinguishes it from its normal definition as a descriptor of sensible, practical, time-tested wisdoms. By contrast, in Gramscian terminology, it is an evolved amalgam of scientific and philosophical wisdom that underpins and shapes the hegemonic force:

Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life. 'Common sense' is the folklore of philosophy, and is always half way between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science and economics of the specialists. Common sense creates the folklore of the future and is a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time (Gramsci, 1971, p.326ff).

Thus, in society at large, it is 'common sense' that disposes social groups to 'consent' spontaneously or reluctantly, to their subordinated status and inadvertently to the appropriation of their potential for independent agency. Working with Gramscian 'common sense' thereby complicates our understanding of how ideology functions, enabling us to see it not simply as ideas imposed upon people but rather as a social cement that binds disparate elements together into a coherent ensemble that appears natural and objective (Gramsci, 1971, p.328). As such, it appears as the free expression of independently elected values and thus works under cover as the practical reality of social experience. It is, of course, directly and specifically relatable to specialist areas such as art, where it ensures that we accept their evolved, subject-specific systems of evaluation as independent of the wider field that they actually service.

Hence, the hegemonic order, in keeping a distance between itself and formal articulations of ideology, is inevitably a form of struggle in which the meanings of a dominant class constantly have to accommodate revisions from those it 'rules' in order to neutralise the threat of counter-hegemonic blocs establishing themselves via the same methods. Since no single mode of hegemony can ever encompass the totality of social and cultural experience, the ruling bloc is in a continual process of assimilating and accommodating counter-hegemonic forces to its own interests. Hegemony is therefore not an imposed force of domination but a relational complex that, as noted by Williams, saturates:

The whole process of living — not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seems to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense (Williams, 1977, p.110).

4.3.3. Good sense and the organic intellectual

Gramsci elaborates a form of action through his concept of 'good sense', that is a practical counter-measure to hegemony's rootedness in common sense. It is as much a form of action as deeds, and results from subjecting common sense to the rigours of organic, intellectual

interrogation. Hence, because his concerns are with the intellectuals' socially reformatory potential, he importantly broadens the category of who must be recognised as an intellectual, expanding the compass outwards from the professional scholar to the person whose expertise is manifest through practical skill. Moreover, rather than dichotomising intellectual function between the privileges of the traditional intellectual and the practical credentials of the organic intellectual, Gramsci takes a holistic approach to confronting the significant problem of intellectuals and their social functions. Accordingly, working with his dictum that: 'all men are intellectuals, one could say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971, p.9), we have to recognise an equality of intellectual potential from all who contribute to, sustain, or more importantly, modify a conception of the world. In art the task thus becomes one of enabling the viewer's intellectual function, which in its turn depends upon challenging the entrenched elitist interests serviced by the established order of the art-world hierarchy of artist, critic/art historian and viewer.

Using Gramsci, therefore, we can map a route to socially reformatory change via a coalition of activity between intellectuals and those whose knowledge and experience in the field of work grounds them in material as well as cultural needs. He argues that such a cohort of practical and intellectual activists will have reformative social force from the outset because, through their combined practices, they will bring 'into being new modes of thought' (Gramsci, 1971, p.9). Importantly, therefore, he not only extends our recognition of intellectual activity beyond the circumscription of traditional, academic expertise, but he also insists that the compass of activities in which we are all involved manifests the intellectual participation of the individual as a 'philosopher'.

Such a radical attack upon intellectual elitism proposes an on-going dynamic in social processes, driven not by traditional hegemonic blocs, where the old-style intellectuals enjoy authority, but by an all-inclusive social constituency. At a sweep, this sets out to dissolve the old dichotomies between 'pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other' (Gramsci, 1971, p.418). As a new mode of thought and practice, it establishes a new social ground from which more can evolve, where the traditional intellectual has knowledge but often lacks social understanding and more often feeling, and 'the popular element "feels" but does not always know or understand' (Gramsci, 1971, p.418). Gramsci thus proposes the 'organic intellectual' as an agent who can articulate a productive, relational cohesion between these dichotomised elements within the traditional structures of class.

The problem then arises of how, when all humans are recognised as philosophers and

intellectuals, we supersede the existing mode of thinking that is embedded in the ‘common sense’? Gramsci sees the crux of this problem as stemming from the disarticulation of the intellectuals from the social body, that is to say the absence of organic intellectuals. Under such conditions, he argues that a ‘philosophy of praxis’ is unachievable since there is no practical basis upon which one can communicate with the other. This means that existing modes of thinking, and existing concrete thoughts, need to be modified through criticisms of the ‘common sense’. Necessarily, this is a matter for a conjoined practice where entrenched elitist and popular ideas are subjected to internal, critical revisions rather than operate as externally imposed reform. Although the cohort involved in traditional art production and reception is not readily identifiable with ‘the masses’, nevertheless it is the *refined* artistic common sense upon which they rely, lodged as it is within the popular, larger common sense, that needs to be subjected to deconstructive, socially sensitive evaluation:

First of all it [a philosophy of praxis] must be a criticism of ‘common sense’, basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that ‘everyone’ is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone’s individual life, but of renovating and making ‘critical’ an already existing activity. It must then be a criticism of the philosophy of the intellectuals...that can be considered as marking the ‘high points’ of the progress made by common sense, or at least the common sense of the more educated strata of society but through them also of the people...the purpose...must be to criticise the problems, to demonstrate their real value, if any, and the significance they have had as superseded links of an intellectual chain, and to determine what the new problems are and how the old problems should be analysed (Gramsci, 1971, pp.330-1).

Aligning Gramsci’s understanding of the labouring masses with 21st century conditions and perceptions of labour does not present fundamental difficulties, since his concerns are with reforming the underlying tendencies of, and inequalities inherent to, production which are still with us. He followed Marx in viewing the operative class as having forged a sense of identity that would potentially bring about a social revolution. Nevertheless, although Gramsci’s work involved reforming members’ representation in the administration of trade unions in Turin over a period that spanned the years from 1914 to his imprisonment in 1926, his core concerns are not with occupational divisions; rather, what he targets for reform are the relational conditions of production across divisions. In the *L’Ordine Nuovo (The New Order)* October 1919 publication he writes that: ‘the organic unification of the labouring class’ rests on a ‘homogenous and solid foundation’ — a specific body politic supported by — ‘the trade and industry unions [that] are the solid vertebrae of the great proletarian body’ (Gramsci, 1919).

The continuing presence of such relations of production today means that our task is to accommodate Gramsci's *vocabulary* to modern workers. Despite considerable differences in capitalism, both globally and in its localised forms, compared to Gramsci's time people still labour under the same conditions as their predecessors. These evolutions in perceptions of class structuring strengthen, rather than diminish, the significance that Gramsci accords to cultural organisations in hegemonic rule, for they bear witness to an evolved hegemony that, while it is always 'protected by the armour of coercion', could finally evolve to a logical point where force is rendered unnecessary (Gramsci, 1971, p.263). This insight, therefore, only reinforces the argument that the politicising force of socially reformative art has to be realised in a democratised, *relational* field.

Thus counter-hegemonic strategy, realised through culturally based intervention, takes on a significance that works in tandem with more traditional, economic concerns. As Hall notes, cultural institutions such as schools and universities, and therefore we may include art institutions, are recognised as constituting specific and strategic centres of hegemonic struggle involving differentiated kinds of social antagonisms (Hall, 1996b, p.430).

Consequently Gramsci brings civil society up to the front line, as a force in what he terms 'a war of position' where meanings and values are the object of protracted struggle.

Additionally, he insists that what is paramount in this field of struggle is the undertaking of an 'in depth study' to recognise which elements of civil society correspond to the defensive systems of a war of position where common sense is defended (Gramsci, 1971, p.235).

Accordingly, Gramsci insists that we have to pay attention to the structures of popular thought, noting that within a philosophy of praxis 'popular beliefs...are themselves material forces' (Gramsci, 1971, p.165). Since common sense is not simply folklore but, as previously mentioned, is transformed and enriched with new knowledge and ideas, he argues that resistance to the sway of common sense springs from two sources: 'a conception of necessity that gives a conscious direction to one's activities' and a 'healthy nucleus that exists in "common sense" the part of which can be called "good sense"...which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent' (Gramsci, 1971, p.328). Thus, regardless of the fact that the material experiences of the basic conditions of life are felt to be exploitative and constraining there also needs to be 'a conception of necessity that gives a conscious direction to one's activities' (Gramsci, 1971, p.328). In relation to this need, Hall (1996b, p.432) directs attention to the practical way Gramsci addresses what further work of political education and cultural politics is required if the nucleus of good sense is to raise common sense into a coherent political worldview. Thus a Gramscian strategy insists on an active

unity, 'a master-pupil relationship...between the philosopher and the cultural environment' in which liberty of thought alone can be realised (Gramsci, 1971, pp.350-1). Here, the ambitions of socially reformative art have to confront the alliance between traditional aesthetic values and the class system that is enshrined in the divide between the artist and the viewer.

Art's social history of elitism means, of course, that internal reforms will give rise to agencies that have a part to play in the important processes of transformation between the popular, as experienced through common sense, and the upper level of philosophical and political practice that nourishes the intellectual vigour of good sense. In his work on the intellectual Gramsci notes that there are specialised categories where the intellectual function is exercised, and that these categories are more highly developed in connection with the dominant social groups. It is important, therefore, that more subordinate groups learn how to first assimilate and then ideologically conquer them — a task that is made more possible by them elaborating their own organic intellectuals.

4.3.4. Making an inventory as the starting point for reform

Counter-hegemonic resistance consequently requires us to recognise what we already know, what we live out in practice on a daily basis: 'so often knowledge for Marxism is pure recognition — the production again of what we have always known!' (Hall, 1996a, p.268). So, when Gramsci calls us to 'work out consciously and critically our own conception of the world...to take an active part in the creation of the history of the world' he identifies the 'starting point of critical elaboration' — 'to make an inventory' that acknowledges what we really are: 'the product of the historical process to date that has deposited in us an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory' (Gramsci, 1971, p.324):

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer exist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader'...from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic concept of history, without which one remains 'specialised' and does not become 'directive' (specialised and political) (Gramsci, 1971, p.10).

Following Gramsci, therefore, we can set out a form of practical action for art that involves re-evaluation rather than (for example) avant-garde object production. It will impact on several levels, since the making of the inventory entails interrogating aspects of our cultural present through examination of our past. As such, it has the potential to make the cultural/social dynamics of our present conditions visible, where they have previously been taken for

granted as natural. The result is that it produces fresh insights that can actually make emancipatory, material differences to and within the present:

For a mass of the people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a ‘philosophical’ event far more important and ‘original’ than the discovery by some philosophical ‘genius’ of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971, p.325).

Gramsci’s work on the formation of intellectuals begins by noting that they originate through their specific expertise in separate fields, and that it is via these strata of organically created intellectuals that the separate fields are given ‘homogeneity and awareness of [their] own function, not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields’ (Gramsci, 1971, p.5). Thus, relating this position to art forefronts an understanding that specialisation in knowledge and production is not in itself sufficient to ensure that the art is also *directive*, i.e. that it enables artist and viewer to participate in the hegemonic struggle. In order to facilitate this, specialised art production must be elaborated into socially reformative production. Accordingly, building on Hall, the artist not only needs to know the traditions of art ‘deeply and profoundly’ but also to be at the forefront of theoretical work because ‘if you are in the game of hegemony you have to be smarter than “them”’ (Hall, 1996a, p.268).

The intellectual responsibility and function of the *directive* artist is to enable an understanding of art’s functionalisms amongst those who do not belong professionally to the art ‘class’ and have therefore come to view themselves as excluded from it. This establishes the first step in a series of practical measures, whereby previously separate/separated constituencies conjoin in the same, shared ambitions. Therefore, the distinction that Gramsci draws between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971, pp.8-9) gives us a helpful focus on the essential porosity between them, one that demands that we attend to how knowledge is produced and linked to social groups. Consequently, the nexus of social reform lies in dialogue, which has as its goal the undoing of the naturalisation of the social power relations within which art production has historically been involved. When related beyond art, to the full social field, a top-down reorganisation of legal and organisational practices has to be rejected in favour of a process of reform via education that is embedded in the concerns and views of the popular classes where:

Every leap forwards...of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous concern on the part of the mass of the simple, who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and...extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialized intellectuals

(Gramsci, 1971, p.334).

Hence Gramsci mediates counter-hegemonic agency as a force that can only be enabled through various educative processes. As Davies states: 'the subordinate position of the popular classes in society deprives them of both the means of cultural self-defence and self-definition and the media of cultural expression available to the hegemonic classes' (Davies, 1999, pp.118-19). Thus, Gramsci's practical experience of how the mass movement of Turin workers, where men and women 'could be seen to make and remake themselves, and in so doing begin the process of remaking humanity under socialism' elucidates that 'it is the active and conscious participation of the people which is the key to social transformation' (Sassoon, 1982, p.35).

The counter-hegemonic process is thereby a work in constant progress, in which Gramsci traces the importance of the smallest elements in 'creating the terrain for a subsequent development...towards the realization of a superior, total form of modern civilization' (Gramsci, 1971, p.133). Above all, Gramsci is clear that the criterion of distinction for intellectual activities involved should not be looked for in their intrinsic nature but in 'the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations' (Gramsci, 1971, p.8). Thus, as Davies notes, the problem confronting counter-hegemonic resistance is that of involving subaltern cultures (Davies, 1999, p.27). Since stability in civil society is shaped by its cultural institutions and the values they prescribe, reformatory action must take place relationally and not via vanguardian diktat.

4.3.5. The war of position against taste

Art is therefore a potentially crucial site of action, where recognising the concealed power relations operating through taste and expertise reveals them to be effective forces in policing the boundaries between classes by universalising and naturalising the production and consumption of art outside the material concerns of social construction. Consequently, in making an inventory, we have to confront the norms of production and taste in the field of art as part of a cohort of historically embedded practices whereby the discourse of the dominant has internalised unjust conditions of social organisation as both acceptable and natural. By recognising the formation of taste in the privileges of background and education, we can therefore dismiss the old idea that it is, at least partially, a gift of nature enjoyed by innately refined sensibilities, to insist instead on its reactionary social functionalism.

The task of the inventory, therefore, is to unpick the layers of expertise and taste in art that work like a set of Russian dolls where genres, schools, master artists and periods all fit together in a system that forms and sustains an overarching social hierarchy. Thus we have to highlight and then demonstrate how this form of authority within art production protects and perpetuates structures in the larger social field, rather than just standards within art. Because it has been historically promoted and protected within a complex of aesthetically justified positions it has always been approached on its own terms, as an autonomous field of production. Of course, accepting any field as autonomous is irreconcilable with the fact that it is *social relations* rather than *things* that constitute the reality whereby objects/things have force and value — hence Marx's dictum, originally concerning intellectual problems but equally apposite to the problem of taste — 'capital is not a thing, but a social relation' (Marx, 1990, p.932).

Thus, the connoisseur gaze of the viewer, developed over time to the point of rupture with ordinary attitudes towards the world, has devalued popular responses to culture. In particular, the aesthetic critique of modernist art cemented a social separation that superficially appears not to concern the experiences, needs and rights of the culturally 'inferior'. However, Gramsci offers us a practical base for understanding and addressing how cultural consumption functions to legitimate social differences. From this insight the overarching need for critical, intellectual activity across the classes emerges, and here Benjamin contributes an art-specific approach to the significant role that art can play when it contests the commonplaces of its traditions of taste and production to address its involvement in the perpetuation of arbitrary workings of power. In other words, while it is Gramsci who forms the primary part of the approach advocated in this thesis, the contributions of Benjamin's insights are essential for realising the full potential of Gramsci's writings on culture, common sense and hegemony when considering art's politicising potential.

4.4. Why Benjamin?

I find that a combined approach of Gramsci and Benjamin's concerns with understanding how representation, in its various forms, can be used to disable/enable people's agencies, offers a practical and theoretical toolkit for enabling art's socially engaged, politicising potential. In this section, I discuss how Walter Benjamin's legacy offers further enlightenment, particularly as the changes he sought in art production were formed in response to an exceptionally destructive force of cultural and political upheaval in Europe that exploited art's social functionalisms. Thus I propose that Benjamin's concerns with the

production of art and the significance of new technological production and dissemination enrich Gramsci's broader agenda for reformative action in the cultural field.

Significantly, it is at the intersection of rising fascism, the presence of the world's first socialist state, and technological innovation that Benjamin proselytises art's potential to work effectively in emancipating people from values that exploit rather than protect their rights to freedom and agency. What is revolutionary about his views is that they demand we understand art production within the wider, established parameters of general production and consumption, and in so doing they support the view that the traditional art object operates an agency steered by, and geared towards, political conformism. From this position he dismantles traditional views that art exists in a discrete cultural world, and that avant-garde art consists in innovative formalist production; instead Benjamin overturns these shibboleths, insisting that advances in art practices can only be achieved through reforming the specific social conditions of their production. Thus, through arguing that art object production is reactionary in both its concepts and its consequences, he brings us face to face with the need to address the relations between the artist and the viewer as the site where art reform needs to take place. Following Benjamin, therefore, we can map a route to animating a reformative social agency for art.

Moreover, Benjamin not only rationalises the need to disarticulate the traditional values embedded in the aura of the art object, as produced by the hand of the master artist, (Benjamin, 1999, pp.211-44), but he also argues for a socially based re-interpretation of mimesis in art. Through his concerns with the social conditions of artistic production, he directs us to an informed rejection of traditional image-representation for a revolutionary political aesthetic; one that importantly insists on understanding the established relations of production in art as part of the totality of social relations, rather than a separate, art-based concern. Hence, by countering formalist conceptions of art, Benjamin maps how art can contribute to wider processes of social change, once its producers have understood the unfreedoms involved in their traditional practices. In confronting the embedded, symbiotic relationship between aesthetics and politics he thus grounds the functionalisms embedded within art object production and consumption as a key point of praxis. Benjamin accordingly enables us to assemble a toolkit, not only for perceiving the reactionary agency of the historical art object as supportive of social stasis, but also for apprehending that an emancipatory function for art can only be realised through its own social reform.

4.4.1. Imaging as a political tool

For Benjamin, the absolute urgency of this argument was fuelled by the toxic coalition of capitalism and fascism in the Europe of the 1930s, and more specifically the use of technical developments in image-making and weaponry that were co-determinately developing and exploiting the *visual*/representation of the people. In particular, they were providing a compelling demonstration of how visual representation, through advanced technology, can be used as a means of withholding the right to political representation and political agency. In response, Benjamin constructs an approach that is predicated on the *liberating* agency of technical advances in film and photography, which, he argues, can be used to bring about freedom and equality in the processes of cultural production through reformative social agency. Thus he promotes an understanding of how art can work as a counter-measure to European fascism's exploitation of technological developments that exploit 'a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery — concepts whose uncontrolled (and at present almost uncontrollable) application would lead to the processing of data in the fascist sense' (Benjamin, 1999, p.212).

Benjamin's analysis of imaging as a political tool is presented as a major concern in: '*Brief History of Photography*' (1931), '*On the Mimetic Faculty*' (1933), '*Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*' (1934), and '*The Author as Producer*' (1934). Through these writings, he demonstrates how the self-reflexive 'historical materialist' could 'blast open the continuum of history' (Benjamin, 1999, p.253) from the dominating view of history as 'homogenous, empty time' (Benjamin, 1999, p.252), one that fascism was colonising with sophisticated barbarism. These writings, therefore, make a unique case for the decisive function of critical intervention in the reformation of the relations of production in the art world. Esther Leslie identifies this as a Benjaminite precondition for protecting 'emancipated' art from being re-enveloped by art's commodity status, and its 'shrinking aura' from being subsumed by 'fetishized notions of its conditions of production and disempowering modes of reception' (Leslie, 2000, p.136). In particular, Benjamin's arguments inflect 'emancipated' art into the position of *emancipating* art, where it can destabilise sedimented unfreedoms in social aesthetic composition. This marks him out as distinctive from the arguments of Barthes that were discussed in the previous chapter, which remain at the 'emancipated' stage.

Hence, with the European political stage of the 1930s transfixed by the cult of personality, in both the industry of politics and the industry of film, Benjamin's focus on contesting their combined force specifically directs attention to the way in which their fixing of capitalist relations of production repudiates revolutionary art's efforts to obliterate bourgeois art. As an

example, he argues that 'star cult' in the film industry is complemented by the damaging cult of the public — 'a corrupt concept of mass or "Volk" [that] attempts to substitute for class' (Leslie, 2000, p.136). This is a matter of significance because, in so doing, it obfuscates the real need for radical reform in the right to self-defining agency. Accordingly, Benjamin makes clear that the task of understanding and contesting accepted notions of the role of the viewer is of central importance to the question of representation in and through art. The viewer can only be enfranchised through self-representation which, in turn, demands agency not imaging, since imaging operates a restrictive control in the fascist sense — hence the cynical, organising, social aesthetic of kitsch that was colonising the embedded controls of viewing in 1930s Europe:

The feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind that the multitude can share. Kitsch...must derive from the basic images people have engraved in their memories...Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see the children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch. The brotherhood of man on earth will only be possible on a base of kitsch (Kundera, 1985, p.251).

Thus, Benjamin's direction of representation and imaging, away from art as object towards art as a reformative politicising force, centres action on '*technik*' — his personal inflection of this term is summarised by Leslie as a specific 'category of experience' within 'a complex of ownership and control' (Leslie, 2000, p.xii). Benjamin's '*technik*' thus embraces a combination of machinery and the means of production *within* the framework of the relations of production. Crucially, it foregrounds the importance of social and political relations between producers and the means of production: 'making literary products directly accessible to a social and therefore materialist analysis' (Benjamin, 2007, p.222). Consequently, understanding the underlying reasons for the mismatch between the potential of technological advance in the arts for social reform, and its misappropriation by capitalism and the fascist version of capitalism, together constitute a central concern and focus for reformative action. Hence Benjamin warns that when the natural utilisation of productive forces is impeded by the property system, then technological advances will be utilised to destructive ends in terms of social relations. Additionally, as was later proved by its consequent manifestation in 20th century imperialistic war, it will socially cleanse the excess of humanity to whom it denies the positive outcomes of a balanced '*technik*'. Thus Benjamin recognises the symbiosis of the aesthetic and the political in an extreme 'situation of politics'

which Fascism is rendering aesthetic' and to which, he argues, 'Communism responds by politicizing art' (Benjamin, 1999, p.235).

Accordingly, '*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*' anticipates a balance of technical progress with reformed relations of production between artist and viewer, which Benjamin argues becomes achievable as technological means of reproduction counter the reactionary functionalism of the aura, and the viewer is disabused of the 'semblance' of art's autonomy (Benjamin, 1999, p.220). Where the 'aura' of a work of art is traditionally understood as an intangible property that strikes the contemplative viewer — something that accrues the work significant value on the art market because it is an un-reproducible quality — Benjamin's critical use of the term 'aura' re-evaluates it as a complex, socially regulative force that is inextricable from a historical sense of time as a unidirectional continuum organised around the polarities of an unrepeatable moment. The significance of this for any socially reformative function in art is that it is dislocated from the dynamic here and now of praxis. Thus 'contemplation', the esteemed default mode for the act of viewing is recast as a powerful impediment to rational, critical thought. Benjamin explains this temporal dislocation by paralleling the aura of historical objects with natural ones, which he defines as:

The unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eye a mountain range on the horizon or a branch, which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of the mountains, of that branch (Benjamin, 1999, p.216).

Hence the destruction of aura (through mechanical reproduction), because it is driven by a sense of 'the universal equality of things', is indispensable to social reform. It instates a politically enfranchising dynamic where the unique art object is displaced through reproducibility and general accessibility — an 'adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality [in] a process of unlimited scope, as much as for thinking as for perception' (Benjamin, 1999, p.217). In this way, Benjamin maps how the totalising function of art can be reversed and the act of viewing move from ritual observation to political practice. As he indexes aura within 'experiential perceptual relations' (Leslie, 2000, p.51), he not only locates it as a force that services the politico-economic interests of fetishism, but most importantly, he also forges a productive, perceptual link that establishes parity between general production and artistic production. This displaces art from the outmoded world of creativity and genius to plant it firmly in the social sphere of reformatory politicising agency.

Within the specific realm of photography, Benjamin's understanding of 'technik' (Benjamin, 2009, pp.172-92) identifies the traditional force of aura as one that distances the viewer from the pressing social reality of the moment. For example, the Associated Press image of Aylan, a drowned, three year old Syrian child, released to the media in September 2015, initially has a force that aura, 'a gossamer fabric woven of space and time: a unique manifestation of remoteness, however close at hand' (Benjamin, 2009, p.184), sets out to deny. In contrast, a painting of the child in place of the photograph would clearly operate this distancing, and would therefore demonstrate the anti-social force of aura, as indeed would the recuperation of the photographic image into an icon, in this instance of the inhumanity of people smuggling. Therefore, although Benjamin, in common with Adorno (2001, pp.29-60), does recognise that the increasing deployment of mechanical reproduction is a powerful tool of mass communication in naturalising the repressive social forces of capitalism and fascism, he contrastingly has faith in its positive potential to bring about a non-elitist, engaged, and productive form of cultural critique (Benjamin, 1999, pp.211-21).

Accordingly, while art's established practices of mimesis service political control through the distancing agency of aura, Benjamin's redemptive vision of mimesis conversely argues for a revolutionary realism in art to be initiated through the socially informed use of available techniques — in this instance photography and film. In particular, his focus on Dada's use of montage situates mimesis within the reformative social force of a 'technik', where its allegorical function (Buchloh, 1982, p.45) succeeds in over-riding censorship through an initially *visual* form of public speech. Hence, when Benjamin insists that the revolutionary strength of Dada tests art for 'its authenticity' by including fragments of the detritus of ordinary life — tickets, cigarette butts (etc.) — within the frame of a painting, where they work to 'rupture time' (Benjamin, 2005, p.774), he maps a way forward for mimesis to bridge the politically reactionary gap between history and now. He argues that '[a] historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a messianic cessation of happening...a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past' (Benjamin, 1999, p.254).

In this way mimesis, through montage, takes on a reformative function, and traditional values in art undergo another evaluative reassessment where 'the tiniest authentic fragment of daily life says more than painting' (Benjamin, 2005, p.774). Indeed, Benjamin argues that the mimetic faculty plays a decisive role in all man's higher functions, because its ontogenetic sense, which originates in children's play, is 'by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another...the child plays not only at being a shop keeper...but also a train' (Benjamin, 2007, p.333). Thus he establishes an enfranchised understanding of mimesis,

proselytising its potentially constructive and creative political function.

The mimetic faculty, as theorised by Benjamin, therefore exceeds the limits traditionally understood by art and is a consistent concern in his writing. In '*Brief History of Photography*' (1931), he identifies the potential of photography to accord with every-man's desire to bring 'things closer...to the masses [by] overcoming the uniqueness in every situation by reproducing it' (Benjamin, 2009, p.184). In this way, Benjamin redefines creative art as an art of mechanical reproduction, for in overcoming aura it frees the viewer from the surrounding imaging by which her apprehension of the world has been constructed, 'clearing the field for the politically schooled eye to which all intimacy falls away in favour of the illumination of detail' (Benjamin, 2009, p.185). Additionally, aligning himself with Brecht, he dismisses the traditional view of creativity, where 'the photographic smock appears' and the photograph can 'make any tin of food' look beautiful 'but cannot grasp the "human contexts", as a complicated situation where 'less than ever does a simple "reflection of reality" say anything about reality' (Benjamin, 2009, p.185). Hence: 'a photograph of the Krupp works yields virtually nothing about the relevant organization. True reality has shifted into the domain of functionality. The reification of human relations (the factory for instance) no longer gives expression to those relations' (Benjamin, 2009, p.190).

Thus Benjamin argues for photographic and film technologies as part of a '*technik*' that makes available an index of 'the actual'. It captures a moment of time that can have a socially reformative, political function through being exported into future acts of viewing. This reconfigures the stasis of time past into the praxis of time present in addition to contesting the convention that imitation equals truth — what Leslie dismisses as 'a blank equation of reflected and external reality...a product of naïve realism' (Leslie, 2000, p.102). Benjamin thereby rejects traditions of art object making and their view of reality as something beyond the temporal and therefore outside materialist intervention.

4.4.2. Fracturing the class divisions in art

Accordingly, in the 1934 paper '*The Author as Producer*' (2007, pp.220-38) Benjamin's focus is on how, as a materialist practice, art can intervene practically in the strategic dominance of the cultural apparatus. That is, how it can over-ride the traditional manipulation of the relations of forces that limit understanding and thus stabilise power and knowledge. Here, Benjamin redefines the author as an 'engineer' of cultural and social apparatus, rather than a 'supplier' of cultural objects for consumption (Leslie, 2000, p.97), seeking to transpose art from formal production to socially productive intervention. Additionally, by arguing the necessity of confronting the misinformed view that art functions autonomously, he

precipitates the author into making a conscious decision to exchange the speciousness of artistic autonomy for useful, practical engagement in social struggle. Accordingly, from the beginning of the paper, Benjamin establishes art production as a class-based site of conflict:

You must prove to him [the bourgeois writer] that without admitting it, he is working in the service of certain class interests. A more advanced type of writer does recognize this choice. His decision, made on the basis of the class struggle, is to side with the proletariat. This puts an end to his autonomy (Benjamin, 2007, p.220).

Just as traditional art production services deeply sedimented elitist structures of social shaping, so Benjamin, in this paper, argues that art can enact an equally forceful revolutionary role; one in which it prefigures wider reformed social and technical relations. Through such art, where the focus is on democratising the relations in art production, reconfiguring the notion of the art product from object to force, and shifting value from the mode of art production to the social field in which it is productive, art can be developed as a forerunner of a ‘potential (communist) future in the (capitalist) present’ (Leslie, 2000, p.92). Thus, Benjamin argues that through rejecting the art object, the bourgeois social relations contingent to property/capital are thereby displaced, and the reformative political force of art, within a comprehensive social and political totality, is instated.

Benjamin’s nomination of the author/artist as ‘producer’ is fundamental to the reformed role he advocates, since within the traditional divisions of author/reader and artist/viewer there is a socially functioning hierarchy that affirms the naturalness of their relative positions vis-à-vis each other. As long as received wisdom accords agency to the author/artist, it can only allow the reader/viewer a passive role as consumer. In social terms, therefore ‘author/artist’ is a descriptor of social division over the centuries and, since the emergence of the bourgeoisie, one of class division. Ergo the position of the intellectual requires radical reformulation. Towards this end, Benjamin therefore draws important distinctions between a political tendency where the writer ‘feels solidarity with the proletariat only in his attitudes’ and a revolutionary tendency, which can only be enacted on the basis of ‘the place of the intellectual in the class struggle...identified, or, better chosen, only on the basis of his position in the process of production’ (Benjamin, 2007, pp.226-8).

Accordingly, he clarifies the nuances of the situation and the ever-present threat of recuperation through the forces of capital, by mapping a trajectory from Dada’s revolutionary testing of the authenticity of art via the rupturing force of fragments of daily life within the frame of a painting. Here the frame could no longer ‘hold’ the traditional functional distance of

painterly production from praxis because the mimetic function was disrupted. From Dada through John Heartfield and the parallel disruptive strategy of photomontage, Benjamin warns of culture's default mode of aestheticising and thus defusing the revolutionary potential of technical means of recording and reproduction.

Hence, he cites how the tendency in photography to transfigure industrial buildings into sites of beauty results in fashionably airbrushing the conditions of the working class within industrial production, into 'an object of enjoyment' where art resumes its well-rehearsed separation from life. He thereby demonstrates that one of the economic and political functionalisms of photography is to 'renew from within — that is, fashionably — the world as it is' (Benjamin, 2007, p.230). While technological innovation is therefore paramount for socially reformative art, Benjamin alerts us to the fact that it can only be effective through the agency of 'the revolutionary' who 'appears first and foremost as the betrayer of his class origin' (Benjamin, 2007, p.237). Here, as Leslie observes, Benjamin's call for 'betrayal' is not a matter of switched, sympathetic allegiance; rather it is 'a prescribed, operative form as a revolutionary technical procedure that interrogates a work's quality as a learning model for workers' (Leslie, 2000, pp.95-6).

Thus Benjamin argues that new technologies, combined with the appropriate tendencies in artists, enable self-representation and agency for the workers. He supports his claim by offering the Soviet press as the 'decisive example' (Benjamin, 2007, p.225), for there, he reasons, the core distinction between author and reader is dissolved. From the bourgeois press' practice to retain readership numbers by providing an increasingly wide menu of articles for consumption, he identifies a concealed 'dialectic moment' that materialises in the Soviet press. The dialectic he observes is one where language takes on a reformed function, moving from its atrophied use in self-consciously 'written' articles to an invigorated means of communication — 'the literarization of the conditions of living' — where views, questions, and expert technical knowledge are exchanged in a forum that 'masters the otherwise insoluble antimonies' between writer and reader (Benjamin, 2007, p.225). While it is clear that the distinction between author and reader was *not* dissolved in the Soviet press, Benjamin's point was that it is possible to think of different ways in which the author-reader relationship could be organised. The same revolutionary mix of technology combined with the appropriate political tendency (a position embraced within his use of the term '*technik*') in art facilitates the all-important redundancy of the contemplative response. In its place, Benjamin proposes the co-working of the erstwhile traditional intellectual with the proletariat, whence it conjoins with the Gramscian position that understanding the porosity between traditional and organic intellectuals enables us to attend to how knowledge is produced.

In these circumstances, an alliance between the intellectual and the worker, materialised through technological development and technological expertise, will expand the field and practice of art production so that the aesthetic and political realms coalesce in a new, emancipatory formulation. Benjamin cites Tretiakov, who 'distinguishes the operating from the informative writer' (Benjamin, 2007, p.223) as proof of this irresistible drive of art production across boundaries that formerly separated knowledge and practical expertise along the class divisions of the worker and the intellectual. He thus presents Tretiakov's slogan-writing, organising, fund collecting, reporting, broadcasting (etc.) as evidence of how new modes of communication initiate new forms of reception within the dynamic present, proclaiming that 'we are now in the midst of a mighty recasting of literary forms, a melting down in which many of the opposites in which we used to think may lose their force' (Benjamin, 2007, p. 224).

Thus Benjamin argues that assimilating new technologies into socially productive art practices will fracture class divisions within art, establishing self-representation as an inevitable and inalienable right. In a reversal of the historic impact of technology that, in driving the industrial powerhouse of Europe in the 19th century, had directed production from use value to exchange value, and had fetishised the commodity at the expense of the worker, Benjamin's argument reclaims technology's liberating potential in art. In this way, it can help reverse the processes of alienation through exposing and thus dismantling oppressive relations of art production. Leslie defines Benjamin's move from concerns with 'aura' to artistic production, understood within the parameters of industrial production, as a 'resolve to become more directly involved in open political debate and the promotion of recommendations for praxis' (Leslie, 2000, p.93). Thus, '*The Author as Producer*' (1934) outlines some of the core requirements and criteria for socially reformative artistic practice to potentially succeed.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the framework of a Gramscian/Benjaminite approach to art through separate exegeses on how and why they contest traditional cultural hegemony and the production and consumption of art and other cultural products. I have contextualised their theories by initially summarising more recent Marxist interventions in art history and art criticism. The sum of these approaches, which has foregrounded both the formative importance of social contexts in art production and practices of negation, reinforce my concerns and ambitions for art. In response, I have developed a trajectory from these interventions that foregrounds the relations of artistic production as the site for practical,

socially engaged intervention. Importantly, this more holistic approach explicitly refuses an understanding of art as isolated from other forms of production, which poses an implicit recuperative threat to art's potential as a socially engaged, politicising practice.

Most importantly, however, the work of the chapter has been to advocate a critical intervention based on Gramsci's recognition of the importance of the superstructure to the material conditions of people's lives, and Benjamin's arguments that new techniques in art production and reforming the role of the artist in social production will fracture class divisions and enable people's agencies in self-representation. They therefore privilege the relational approach over the aesthetic, which, as shown in previous chapters, was the perspective from which more mainstream and more critical understandings of art have been articulated. Thus, Gramsci and Benjamin combine in a productive symbiosis that informs the approach to art advocated in this thesis. My working with this symbiosis in the subsequent chapters testifies to Gramsci as the driving force and Benjamin as the art-specific enrichment; hence, together they prove to be greater than the sum of their parts.

Accordingly, a crucial diagnostic strategy in this thesis is to begin by compiling a Gramscian inventory (Gramsci, 1971, p.324) of the symbiotic development between art practice and art history. It thereby confronts the functionalisms serviced through the role of the master artist, and consequently calls for a devaluation/re-evaluation of basic core principles by which art is traditionally defined and through which it knows itself. Additionally, such an inventory counters the art history timeline in which past and present are recognised separately through developments in style and technique. Moreover by using the inventory, as a starting point of critical elaboration, it makes clear that the broad hegemonic concerns of the historical processes of art persist and prosper in the class divisions inherent in many art practices. Just as they have historically affected the material aspects of living, so too unreformed contemporary practices must have parallel agency in 21st century terms. Consequently, because the making of an inventory calls us to contest naturalised and de-historicised art values, it makes it possible for our thought and analysis to be an initial form of action.

Hence, the coalition of Gramsci and Benjamin on the necessity of the intellectuals' role to be expansive and all-inclusive enables further elaboration on the damage done to art through the social forces of elitism. It clarifies how they inhibit the freedoms of the practitioner and viewer to develop their own independent agencies, and debunks the notion that objects and the laudable intentions that produce them have reformatory agency. Here, Benjamin's insistence that a revolutionary function of the author/artist can only be met through solidarity with the proletariat *as a producer* makes an important contribution to evaluating practitioners'

claims to be ‘political’ in the reformative sense. Thus Benjamin’s thesis supports and amplifies Gramsci’s work on the organic intellectual, with its strong base in practical expertise. In coalition, they thereby advance practically useful, diagnostic criteria that signpost how basic reform of art’s relations of production will start to give a satisfactory answer to the old question: ‘Do the arts matter’?

In the remaining chapters, I show that the framework that has been outlined here is appropriate for understanding and critically engaging with Alfredo Jaar’s work. Several factors inform his self-proclamation as a political artist: the singularity of his background in architecture, his emergence as an artist in Pinochet’s Chile with the emergence of new critical theory, and his self-understanding as a Gramscian. In combination, they shape the keynotes of his approaches to producing politically engaged art, making it possible to assess his practice across a range of forms and categories with regard to his claims about what his art *does*, which is clearly as important for him as what his art *is*. Through doing so, the advantages of the framework outlined in this chapter, and advocated across the thesis, will be illustrated through a discussion of such an exemplary case, i.e. Jaar’s practices, not least because it enables us to offer a more nuanced analysis of his works than would be possible if making use of, for example, the approaches discussed in chapters 1-3.

In Chapter 5, the framework outlined in this chapter informs an overview of the Chilean context in the 1970s. This identifies the formative factors shaping Jaar’s emerging practices, and utilises the framework to both make sense of the practices and to engage critically with them.

Chapter 5

Alfredo Jaar's Chilean Work

5.1. Introduction

In the following three chapters, through analyses of the work of Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar, I examine in detail the tasks that confront art seeking to work as a socially engaged, politicising force. The current chapter has two foci: the first is specific to how Chilean culture and politics were formative forces in the development of Jaar's art practice. I summarise how decades of covert American domination had colonised most aspects of Chilean life, thereby establishing a common sense regarding Chileans' perceptions of their place in a global economy. The second focus considers art's ability to contribute to a counter-hegemonic force that resists cultural colonisation, making use of the approach outlined in the previous chapter.

The chapter therefore starts by summarising the Janus face of the covert American colonisation of both Chilean political and cultural life that spanned the presidencies of Jorge Alessandri (1958-64), Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-70), Salvador Allende (1970-3) and Augusto Pinochet (1973-90). It is a compelling demonstration of the hegemonic dynamic of coercion and consent and the controlling force of common sense: 'a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time' (Gramsci, 1971, p.326, *f.5*). Through the details provided, I discuss the coalition of forces created out of, on the one hand, the direct pressures of the military régime, where the threat of force governed, and, on the other hand, the Gramscian war of position, where a form of indirect pressure shaped Chilean consciousness. Their combination sought to transform consciousness in the population — addressing both their resignation to cultural colonisation and their experiences of brutal repressions. In the second part of the chapter, I work with the Gramscian/Benjaminite framework to analyse how Jaar's Chilean work directly responded to an understanding of art as a form of activism.

Prefacing my analysis of Jaar's early work through the Chilean context sets it in a wider frame than that of art and artist-specific arguments. My aim is to thereby explicate the challenges that art's socially reformative agency must focus on. The chapter therefore uses the Chilean contexts and Jaar's early training and art practice as an initial stage in the thesis' navigation of a route, whereby art's reformative politicising force is understood to be a matter of relational production rather than object production.

5.2. The background of American colonisation of democratic processes in Chile to the early work of Alfredo Jaar

When Jaar left Chile in 1981, he had already developed ways of making art as a form of counter-hegemonic action that responded to the Chilean cultural and political events of the preceding decades. His family had moved from Chile to Martinique in 1961, where they stayed out the remainder of Jorge Alessandri's presidency and that of Eduardo Frei, to return in 1972, drawn back by the socialist presidency of Salvador Allende. However, as part of the Cold War, throughout the decades of these presidencies, both the KGB and the CIA had been funding Chile's main political parties and this had led to a political polarisation under Allende. Hence, when Jaar's father decided to return to Chile after Allende's socialist party gained power, he repatriated the family to a country where decades of cumulative, covert US colonisation of Chilean life was securely established. It worked across the board, through the flood of American goods into the market, the control of press, in particular *El Mercurio*, and the funding of anti-Allende election campaigns. Subsequently, the 1973 military coup of Augusto Pinochet meant that Jaar's time in Chile was spent almost exclusively under a repressive regime that the US had facilitated and covertly supported. Jaar finally left Chile in 1981 to settle in New York, where he still lives. It was from the experiences of this background that he aimed to develop art's potential as a politics of resistance.

His early commitment to working from a Gramscian perspective was influenced by the prevailing conditions in Chile. Additionally, his initial training in architecture, as opposed to fine art, set him outside traditional painting and sculpture production. In particular, his social interventions are influenced by how architecture's project-based methodology, sited in urban spaces, pays attention to the socio-cultural needs, contexts and deprivations experienced by their inhabitants. This early training and his Gramscian affiliations together shaped his seminal *Studies in Happiness* (1979-81), where, in asking Chileans on the streets of Santiago 'Are you happy?', his purpose was to initiate reflection on what happiness means under a repressive politically regime (Jaar, 2006, pp.68-71). Consequently, in the work he produced in Chile he was already confronting cultural hegemony's war of position within civil society, where meanings and values are the objects of a covert conflict. As Gramsci observes, the initial task of counter-hegemonic action consequently requires a 'studying "in depth" which elements of society correspond to the defensive systems' (Gramsci, 1971, p.235), because it is there that cultural and political sedimentations are interwoven in a network of practices that seek to make revolution appear to be a psychological as well as a political impossibility. It is from this ground that the thesis proceeds to argue that art practice, seeking to improve the health of the society of which it is a part, must recognise and contest its own implication in the hegemonic process. The aim of the following overview of

declassified CIA documents of that period (Kornbluh, 2013), therefore, is to clarify the necessity of having a detailed understanding of how easily covert forces and pressures inhibit and control action.

5.2.1. Years of covert American operations in Chile

Peter Kornbluh (2013) observes that the American operations in Chile came from ‘an imperial sense of obligation and entitlement to overturn the democratic decision of the Chilean electorate’ (Kornbluh, 2013, p.6), a position that US ambassador to Chile, Edward Korry (1967-71), supported and advised. Hence Korry’s letter to the US Senate Select Committee to Study Government Options with Respect to Intelligence Activities states that the question was ‘not saying “whether” but “how” and “when” the U.S. would intervene’ (Kornbluh, 2013, p.6).

The Chile Declassification Project that released approved documents in July 2000 reveals the scope and the tactics of American interventions in Chile where, even as the US was protecting its political and economic interests there, the essential battlefield was ideological. The measures the US took to prevent democratically elected Marxist governments being voted in across the Southern American continent elucidate the dynamic between ideology, hegemony, and the functional passivity of those in whose lives it is materially enacted. The official American view was that ‘the most extensive covert activity in Chile...was relatively cheap...[and] continued at a low level during “normal” times, then was cranked up to meet particular threats or to counter particular dangers’ (The Church Committee Report, *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 1975, p.6).

The American focus was therefore on manipulating class dynamics by supporting and consolidating the interests of the petit bourgeoisie, against the erosion of privileges that would result from improving the material circumstances of the worker and peasant classes — hence, in the aftermath of the 1958 Cuban revolution, as the Kennedy administration was propelled into searching for a viable alternative to the leftist Allende threat in Chile, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (speech writer and special assistant to the president) defined the problem as class-based: ‘the problem for U.S. policy is to do what it can to hasten a middle-class revolution’ (Kornbluh, 2013, p.3).

Be that as it may, the US nightmare of what an unimpeded democratic process in Chile might ultimately produce had already been exacerbated in the 1958 election by the narrow victory of a coalition of right-wing parties led by Jorge Alessandri over Salvador Allende. Consequently, the Agency for International Development warned that the government had

only ‘five years in which to prove to the electorate that their medicine is the best medicine. Failure almost automatically ensures a marked swing to the left’ (Kornbluh, 2013, p.3). Thereafter, the US’ key goal became preparing a viable alternative to a subsequent leftist government; as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. warned the president, in March 1961, ‘If the possessing classes of Latin America made the middle-class revolution impossible, they will make a “worker-and-peasants” revolution inevitable’ (Kornbluh, 2013, p.3). Thus Alessandri’s right wing government, supported by American loans, and in sympathy with the need to align with bourgeois needs and self-perceptions, elected to stabilise the economy of the possessing classes ‘at the expense of the workers’ (Stallings, 1978, p.82).

The millions of dollars poured into supporting Salvador Allende’s opponents, after his narrow defeat in the 1958 elections, forcefully illustrates that while the propaganda war protected and enhanced American interests in Chile, it was also aimed at undermining the interior socialist landscape of the Chilean peasants and workers. \$3 million were invested in anti-Allende campaigns which made extensive use of:

the press, radio, films, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, direct mailings, paper streamers, and wall paintings. It was a ‘scare campaign’ that relied heavily on images of Soviet tanks and Cuban firing squads that was directed especially to women. Hundreds of thousands of copies of the anti-Communist pastoral letter of Pope Pius XI were distributed by Christian Democrat organizations...‘Disinformation’ and ‘black propaganda’ — material, which purported to originate from another source, such as the Chilean Communist Party — were used as well (*Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973*, 1975, p.15, quoted in Kornbluh, 2013, p.4).

Additionally, a CIA expenditure of \$4 million not only underwrote half the campaign budget of the Christian Democratic Party, thereby increasing its organisational efficiency and campaigning ability, but also secretly funded a group of centre-right political parties in order to enhance the popular view of Eduardo Frei as a moderate centrist (Kornbluh, 2013, p.4), thereby ensuring his election in 1964.

In fact, failure was inbuilt, as Alessandri’s economic strategy proceeded by withdrawing the state from many of its economic functions and thereby underpinning a process of social polarisation. Hence, many regulatory controls on prices, wages, imports and foreign exchange movements were removed, enabling the government to withdraw into a minimal role in industry, commerce and the provision of infrastructure, on the assumption that these responsibilities would be taken on by private enterprise. Initially, however, to allow time for

the realisation of such radical changes, which were intended to encourage private investment, the government increased its own investment with the aim of attracting foreign capital to finance some of its expenditures and to assist in capital formation. Thus in April 1959, trade tariffs were lifted resulting in a flood of imports, and in May 1959 Alessandri's economic tsar, Roberto Vergara, arranged US loans of \$130 million from eleven private banks, the US Treasury, the International Cooperation Agency and the IMF. Furthermore, he predicted that US public and private investment would increase significantly in the next three years because of the climate of fiscal confidence that the Alessandri regime initiated — a prediction that was helped in 1960 and 1961 by the government mandating tax exemptions and guarantees of repatriation rights to foreign capital (Stallings, 1978, p.87).

However, policies of cutting back on public expenditure and easing the flow of foreign investment goods into the country doubly undermined Chilean workers' independence, not only placing them in increasing straightened circumstances, but significantly, also subjecting them to the onslaught of cultural colonisation through the American imports. Together, this covertly cast the worker into the position of a dependent in the fiscal world and an ingénue in the advanced cultural consumption. Eventually, in the face of Alessandri's economic failures, the US advanced measures it was already taking to shore up its ideological position against the continuing threat of an Allende socialist government. Thus, three weeks before the 1964 Chilean presidential election, a reassuring memo to President Johnson, dated August 14th 1964, from Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, listed the areas in which the US was supporting presidential candidate Jorge Frei:

We are making a *major covert effort to reduce chances* of Chile being the first American country to elect *an avowed Marxist president*. Our well-concealed program embraces special economic assistance to assure stability, aid to the armed forces and police to maintain order, and political action and propaganda tied closely to Frei's campaign (Kornbluh, 2013, p.5; emphases in original).

While these interventions can be measured as successful by the fifty-seven per cent majority victory that Frei achieved in a three-way presidential election, they ultimately failed to avert the feared coalition of a workers'-and-peasants' class. So, although the Frei alliance began by introducing a stabilisation programme intended to be autonomous from both the bourgeois and working classes, in which both were expected to share the necessary sacrifices entailed in halting inflation, it ultimately reverted to the established trajectory of class polarisation. Again, the US supported behind the scenes with an estimated \$251 million of loans during 1965-1966, whilst in addition Frei was allowed to renegotiate Chile's foreign debt on

extremely favourable terms. By 1967, however, Frei's government had moved from an emphasis on construction investment, which had provided stimulus to the industrial sector and increased employment, to long-term, capital-intensive investments in copper production and the petrochemical and paper manufacturing sectors. The consequences were a sharp drop in both employment and industrial output, followed by a mass propaganda campaign to promote free enterprise against socialist economic policies. As part of its strategy, it sought to bring into the entrepreneurial fold small-time businesses, by presenting taxi drivers and small shopkeepers as part of an expanded bourgeoisie. The cost of the campaign was financed by contributions to the tune of \$400,000 (David Cusack, 1970, p. 22, in Stallings, 1978, p.113). However the resulting pressures forced the government to finally side fully with the bourgeoisie, thereby intensifying the social polarisation it had sought to ameliorate and leading to the inevitability of the 1970 elections.

In addition, throughout these years, American covert support of Chilean popular mass media, through its leading national daily papers *El Mercurio* and *La Segunda*, as well as its chain of newspapers and magazines — all owned by Chilean media baron and Miami resident Augustin Edwards — directed public opinion to support right-wing government and American interests. The CIA clandestinely funded the secret '*El Mercurio*' project (Kornbluh, 2013, p.91) during the 1960s, putting selected reporters and editors on the payroll. In 1971, after Allende's victory, the CIA reported to the White House that '*El Mercurio* continues strong opposition to regime, publishing attacks against Allende's attempts to nationalize banks, violation of press freedom, and land seizures' (Kornbluh, 2013, p.92). As Gramsci observes, 'the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion — newspapers and associations — which in certain situations are artificially multiplied' (Gramsci, 1971, p.80f).

When, later that year, *El Mercurio* faced growing financial problems owing to mismanagement, advertising loss, newsprint shortages and labour unrest, Washington funded it by \$700,000 on the understanding that '*El Mercurio* will launch an intensive public attack on the Allende Government's efforts to force them out of business' (Kornbluh, 2013, p.92). Prior to the coup, a CIA propaganda budget authorised 'a steady barrage of anti-government criticism' against Allende 'to exploit every possible point of friction' (Kornbluh, 2013, p.215). As noted in a secret memorandum for Associate Deputy Director for Operations the CIA (Kornbluh, 2013, p.245), the *El Mercurio* project thus disseminated propaganda to alert publics at home and abroad to the 'threat' of an allegedly Marxist totalitarian government. This set the stage for the military coup of September 11th 1973 and attempted to present the ensuing junta in a positive light both nationally and internationally.

American intervention in Chile therefore offers a detailed articulation of Gramsci's understanding of hegemony's working through both consent and coercion. While it made sure that its hand remained unseen, it was nevertheless covertly supporting a build-up to military action as it prepared for Allende finally achieving victory. Thus, even as Frei took office, the Nixon administration was evaluating how the US might gain ideologically from a future military coup, as the following conclusions from the *National Security Study Memorandum 97 (NSSM)* make clear:

1. The U.S. has no vital national interests in Chile.
2. The world military balance of power would not be significantly altered by an Allende victory.
3. An Allende victory would, however, create considerable political and psychological costs [and would] present a definite psychological set back to the U.S. and a definite psychological advance for the Marxist idea (Kornbluh, 2013, p.8).

Hence, during the period in which the state moved from primarily serving the interests of the bourgeoisie under Alessandri, to serving those of the workers under Allende, an inevitable reverse parallel movement by the US shifted from covertly supporting and influencing its preferred governments, to actively opposing that of Allende. Finally, therefore, American covert operations to contain socialist tendencies in the South American continent produced the opposite result, by increasing levels of organisation and class-consciousness between workers and thereby culminating in a US-backed military coup. In Chile, the polarisation between the classes moved the petit bourgeoisie closer to the industrialists who, in their turn, engaged in the increasing activism that helped install the seventeen-year dictatorship of Pinochet. As Stalling notes:

Under Alessandri [the industrialists] operated through behind-the-scenes persuasion and occasional threats to publish declarations in the press. Under Frei, they took the unprecedented step of a campaign to influence public opinion. And, under Allende, they participated openly in rallies and, ultimately, joined in the campaign to overthrow the government (Stallings, 1978, p.77).

The stain of hypocrisy seems not to have touched the American perception of itself even when deeply involved in subverting a democratic order – its concerns being to sustain an internationally acknowledged position as the protector of freedom and democracy. Nevertheless, Gramsci's assertion that winning the battle does not necessarily win the war, played out in the eventual need for the U.S. to distance itself from the international perception that 'the Latin generals look like our guys. We are especially identified with Chile.'

'It cannot do us any good.' (Secret briefing paper for Secretary Kissinger on operation Condor, August 1976, quoted without page numbers in Kornbluh, 2013, p.332).

Importantly, the American hegemonic project also exerted softer influence through its cultural products that flooded the Chilean domestic market. As Gramsci notes, even where violence is explicitly threatened, the pleasure-giving consumption of goods can gain willing allegiance:

The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group...is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci, 1971, p.12)

This is the focus of the following section, which identifies how Disney comics and cartoons, translated for the Chilean market, facilitated the consensual side of American influence in Chilean life. Their capacity to indoctrinate their readers (parents and children) with perceptions of Chile's second-class place in a world of global consumer values, articulates the Gramscian 'dual perspective' in political action and in national life that presents itself on 'the levels of force and consent' (Gramsci, 1971, pp.169-70).

5.2.2. Cultural colonisation: Donald Duck's Chilean station mission

The ideological analysis of Disney's Donald Duck comics, provided by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart (1975), deals with the ways in which political agendas are embedded via cultural products, meaning that they work as formative forces in the shaping of a cultural common sense. Their analysis of the cultural colonisation of Chile reveals how, during Allende's brief presidency, the 'invisible blockade' (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975, p.9) on imports and credit, essential to Chilean business and manufacture, in conjunction with a worldwide embargo on Chilean copper, went hand in glove with US military support and cultural imports — the latter, in Pinochet's words, aiming to 'conquer the minds' of the people (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975, pp.9-10). Far from being an exclusively academic exercise, Dorfman and Mattelart emphasise the practical reach of their work, 'conceived for the Chilean people, and our urgent needs, produced in the midst of our struggle' (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975, pp.9-10). Their cultural analysis is therefore designed to be accessible across the classes through choices of presentation in format, text layout, and paper quality, making it affordable to readers other than academics in the field of media and cultural studies. It is an exemplary Gramscian tool for raising awareness and criticism to enable self-defining agency in its readers (Gramsci, 1971, pp.323-4).

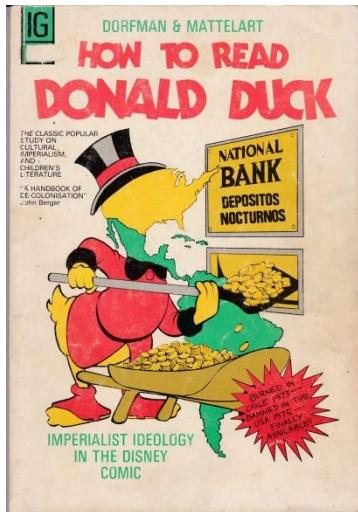


Fig. 7: Dorfman & Mattelart: *How To Read Donald Duck*
(259x179 mm, 72 pages of text)

Thus they give an account of Chile's dependent position in the global political economy, that is both analytical, and most importantly, accessible. It elucidates, in detail, how 'the discourse of these [Disney] comics provides cultural props for imperialism' (Davies, 1999, p.1) that infiltrate and shape every strata of Chilean society and thereby naturalise US interests and investments. As Davies emphasises:

Their closely argued and well-documented reading reveals, against the protestations of the 'innocence' of the Disney universe, an international division of labour, in which the Third World 'naturally' and happily provides its raw materials, which it neither knows how to use nor knows their value, to the more technologically sophisticated residents of Duckberg; in which the people of the Third World are infantile 'noble savages' residing in Utopias without work or workers, from which all conflict must be banned; in which only the primary and tertiary sectors of the economy operate; and in which, curiously, there are almost no women (Davies, 1999, p.97).

Under such conditions the *freedom* of the press becomes a misnomer, since 'the expression of universal values is structurally precluded under conditions of transnational oligopoly and monopoly' (Gill, p.viii, in Davies, 1999). In Chile, Augustin Edwards, a vice president of Pepsi Cola, controller one of the largest industrial corporations in Chile, and a resident of Miami to boot, had in 1956 inherited Chile's popular right-wing newspaper *El Mercurio*. He used his papers to shape public opinion and support the 1973 coup d'état. In the light of 'Duckology', this is particularly relevant to a conversation that had taken place ten years earlier, in February 1960, between Presidents Alessandri and Eisenhower, where overt propaganda was considered too crude a form of control. During that visit to Washington President

Alessandri 'urged that...the U.S. conduct a vigorous campaign of counter propaganda...Eisenhower said jokingly he assumed President Alessandri was not suggesting that the U.S. buy a newspaper in Santiago and turn it into an official U.S. propaganda organ' (Gustafson, 2007, p.24).

Ten years down the line, as Mattelart and Dorfman's analysis makes clear (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975, p.27), Donald Duck was doing vital work as an American cultural attaché in the Chilean mission. In Gramscian mode, they identify how cultural imperialism works from a mission to embed a common sense that services its own interests:

The definition of imperialism, which contributes on a daily basis to the erosion of the cultural identity and vitality of nations by the insidious penetration of a very particular way of viewing life, is precisely believing in the universality of its values and imposing them as if they were self-evident truths, as if they corresponded to the natural and happy evolution of things (Mattelart, 1979, p.58, in Davies, 1999, pp.17-18).

Hence, their argument that the Chilean masses in the second half of the 20th century were held in thrall to American cultural colonisation, helped by Donald Duck, challenges the US myth of its political innocence, and furthermore reveals 'innocent fun' to be an important hegemonic weapon. Importantly, Donald Duck, for all his wheeler-dealings inhabits a mythical, pre-lapsarian Eden that offers 'consumption rid of the original sin of production' and thus 'history rid of the original sin of class and conflict' (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975, p.65). As Davies argues, 'they demonstrate quite convincingly that an imperialist ideology of the subordinate status of the underdeveloped world and the unmitigated benefits of contact with the West organises the narratives of the Disney comics' (Davies, 1999, p.18).

Thus Dorfman and Mattelart enable a reading of Disney comics as disseminators of consistent disinformation and propaganda; subalterns to the popular Chilean daily *El Mercurio*, and its subsidiary, more sensational afternoon publication, *La Segunda*. These publications worked in coalition to protect American interests from the Chilean democratic process, taking place under Allende, which was returning land to the people and recovering industry from American magnates. Duckology makes clear how cultural products fortify an 'arsenal of psychological warfare' (Dorfman and Matellart, 1975, p.9) that, in this instance, embedded American ideology in the controlling and connective functions of hegemony, thereby establishing a perception of Chile as a culturally and economically under-developed country, hopelessly distanced from the siren allure of the American dream that it propagandised:

Donald: (talking to witch doctor in Africa): 'I see you're an up to date nation! Have you got telephones?'

Witch Doctor: 'Have we got telephones!...All colours, all shapes ... only trouble is only one has wires. It's a hotline to the world loan bank' (quoted in Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975, p.48).

Nonetheless, while reading Donald Duck within the Chilean context reveals how a palatable dish, served up as a 'freely elected' choice of values and positions, presents itself as innocent of its intention to dominate, most important here is its accessibility that leads 'a mass of people...to think coherently ... about the real world' and thus ensuring that its truth does not 'remain[s] the property of a small group of intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971, p.325). Hence, Dorfman and Mattelart confront the invisibility of cultural hegemony within the specifics of the Chilean experience, thereby attesting to the fact that bourgeois ideology is at its most effective in areas which appear to be politically neutral. This is no mean task — as Kunzle, who translated the work into English, notes with some irony, 'it proved easier to nationalize copper than to free the mass media from U.S. influence' (Kunzle, p.12, in Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975). No surprise, then, that reviews of its English translation polarised between claims such as John Berger's that it 'precisely and profoundly...illuminates a global situation' (John Berger, New Society, inside cover Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975) and a reactionary dismissal of killjoy Marxism:

But to find social significance and political evil in children's funnies — definitely not the sex and violence type — requires a 50-50 blend of Marxist drabness and academic obscurity. If Marxists can endure eight-hour speeches by Fidel Castro and find something sinister in Donald Duck, they must have something. We're glad we haven't got it (The Peterborough Examiner, Canada, inside cover Dorfman and Mattelart, 1975).

These conflicting responses make clear the high stakes at play in the production and consumption of the cultural object. With its mass/high cultural appeal, regardless of how it pleases, disgusts, enriches, entertains, confirms, divides, or affects to unite, art object production inevitably disseminates ideologies through the elitist relational dynamic that it operates. Thus, as this thesis has argued in the preceding chapters and will now advance in analyses of Jaar's work, emancipatory art practice is embodied in the active and critical engagement of the viewer in processes of production that refute the political paralysis of a passive model of reception (Leslie, 2000, p.95). As Davies emphasises, 'the possibilities for...oppositional cultures to become counter-hegemonic projects are, in the end, problems

of education and creativity' (Davies, 1999, p.27). Accordingly, Gramsci's clarifications of the necessary conditions for social reform have particular relevance for art.

Creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual 'original' discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their 'socialisation' as it were, and even making them the basis of vital action, an element of co-ordination and intellectual and moral order. For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a 'philosophical' event far more important and 'original' than the discovery by some philosophical 'genius' of a truth, which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971, p.325).

5.3. Evaluating Jaar's early cultural practices

Gramsci lays down two prerequisites for 'socialist conception of revolutionary process...pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will' (Gramsci, 1979, p.160, fn.2). He crucially observes that the Italian proletariat followed the Socialist Party rather than the anarchists in the late 1910s, because revolutionary social change can never be determined by the possession of a revolutionary truth but only by the agency of those in possession of the truth:

Only when they (the anarchists) have realized that absolute truth is not enough...but that a *specific* truth is necessary...for the purposes of human history the only 'truth' is that which is embodied in action, which infuses passion and impulses into the spirit of the times and is expressed in deep movements and in real achievements on the part of the masses themselves (Gramsci, 1979, p.160, fn.2; emphasis in original).

Transposed to problems of art production, it means that artists working with art as a socially engaged, politicising force must eschew traditional authoring and object production because through their relations of production they materially contribute (intentionally or not) to the system of oppression. Indeed, in a letter to his youngest brother Carlo, on 19th December 1929, three years after his imprisonment, which he largely spent in solitary confinement, Gramsci insists that in all circumstances, but particularly in extremis, 'the source of a man's moral force [lies in] the iron coherence of ends and means' thus rendering personal experiences of optimism and pessimism as 'vulgar' and 'banal' (Gramsci, 1979, p.159). Hence, since pessimism generates the impulse and optimism fuels counter-hegemonic action, artists can appropriate neither as descriptors of a personal landscape or the force driving political art object production. To do so would revert the best of intentions back into the very traditions they assume to overthrow.

Thus counter-hegemonic art practices in Chile needed to understand “State” not only [as] the apparatus of government, but also the “private” apparatus of “hegemony” or civil society’ (Gramsci, 1971, p.261). Their task, therefore, is to enable the important recognition and contestation of the systemic threat of violence at the heart of all hegemony:

For it should be remarked that the general notion of the state includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion) (Gramsci, 1971, p.263).

5.3.1. Jaar's Chilean work, 1979-81

As noted above, Alfredo Jaar was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1956, and after some years in Martinique returned in the early days of the short-lived Allende presidency. He completed his secondary school education in Santiago, and between 1979 and 1981 studied architecture at Chileno-Norteamericano de Cultura, and filmmaking at Universidad de Chile. He left Chile in 1981, eight years into the Pinochet regime, to work in the US. His art practice has been shaped by his experiences of living in the Pinochet years, and his early studies in architecture and filmmaking.

In conversation with Ana Maria Risco and Rodrigo Zuñiga (Jaar, 2006, pp.74-5), Jaar identifies two factors that influenced the way he works — not having studied art which left him almost without connection to the history, citations and critiques of art – and Duchamp, who ‘gave me my freedom. That’s as revolutionary as you can get. Art is whatever we decide it is. Whether it’s good or bad is another matter’ (Jaar, 2006, p.74). In this conversation the position he takes regarding ‘freedom’ favours a non-relational view of avant-garde art practice, where unrestricted ways of making art liberate an understanding of what art is, rather than what it does, ‘for good or bad’. However, the specific unfreedoms of life under Pinochet also grounded a political focus in his practices. Whether this focus works to foreground a struggle to democratise the relations between viewer and practitioner, or as a background that leaves the unfreedoms of traditional art undisturbed because it continues a relatively one-sided view of art through the prism of formalist innovation, is an important area in understanding the extent to which Jaar’s practices could contribute to wider processes of social and political change.

Jaar’s architectural training instilled a project-based approach to production, centred on problem solving — ‘no technical or administrative problem will stand in my way’ (Jaar, 2006,

p.79), while the Duchampian deflation of the importance of the skilled hand of the artist: 'made me take up art... Duchamp freed me' (Jaar, 2006, p.74). The sticking point is that while Duchamp released art from conservatism in terms of what constitutes the art object, he also maintained an essentially traditional understanding of the viewer's function as supporting and bearing witness to the artist, as the producer of art:

The spectator experiences the phenomenon of transmutation; through the change from inert matter into a work of art, an actual transubstantiation has taken place...All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work into contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act (Duchamp in Sanouille and Peterson, 1973, pp.139-40).

Thus within a fundamentally non-social topography of art, that Jaar's understanding of Duchamp ratifies, the concept of 'freedom' is relative since it is circumscribed by 'form-heavy accounts of art that operate on the same plane as traditional, narrower approaches such as those advocated by Greenberg' (Bruff and Jordan, 2015, p.9). It is no surprise, therefore, that Jaar accords the artist the capacity to '*show someone else's reality*', a different world. It may sound naïve, but I think...the world of art and culture is still the only one where something like that can be done' (Jaar, 2006, p.80; emphasis added). Accordingly, Jaar's perspective on the artist's role can be traditional, when he understands the artist as the seer and moral leader who 'should be listened to' because he is 'capable of sensing what is going on, and working with what [he] sense[s]' (Jaar, 2006, p.85). In such a dynamic his perception of the function of the viewers as subsidiaries, managed by the artist, rather than Benjaminite or Gramscian co-workers, would not realise art's social and political potential. As Bruff and Jordan argue, such a response to Duchamp inhibits the productive potential of art because it neglects the benefits generated by adopting a more materialist conception of art (Bruff and Jordan, 2015, p.10).

To an extent, this is the position from which Jaar produced some of the early work that established him as a political artist. While *Studies on Happiness* (1979-81) involved both artist and participants in counter-hegemonic actions, *Telecomunicación* (1981) and *Opus 1981 Andante Desesperato* (1981) were expressions of solidarity with the internees and their families in Belfast and the Sandinista Nicaraguan rebels respectively. Finally, *Antes de Partir* (1981) marked Jaar's departure from Chile with underlying reference to assassinations of prisoners in Pinochet's Chile. Thus, via the following focus on the early Chilean work I aim to

clarify the challenges of achieving a reformative function for art within the political and social contexts of its making.

5.3.2. 'Studies on Happiness'

Marshall McLuhan observed that the challenge facing any task of revolutionising art production lies in the necessity of constructing a counter-environment — 'One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment, which would enable them to perceive the element in which they live' (McLuhan, 1968, p.175) — and this is as relevant to art's counter-hegemonic agency in the political world as it is to artistic relations of production. In Chile at the time for instance, Jaar set about finding means of circumventing the repressions of the Pinochet regime that neither endangered the artist nor the public. Equally, however, we have to take into account how these means addressed the more deeply embedded circumscription of individual agency in the artist/viewer relations of production.

In the three-year project *Studies on Happiness* (hereafter 'SOH'), produced in Santiago at the height of the Pinochet regime, Jaar sought to find ways in which art could explore the limits of what could be said and done within the specific context of dictatorship, whilst also working with what he perceived to be a freedom from the traditional circumscriptions of art production. Thus, this work in seven phases, all photographically documented, is shaped by a street poll conducted on the 5th, 7th, 19th and 23rd June 1980, where he invited Santiaguinos to record their levels of happiness or unhappiness by posting a small white ball into a clear fronted box — five for each state. This was followed up with display panels where each box displayed its individual percentage. Finally, in September 1980, two separate, summative 'yes' and 'no' boxes recorded the results of the poll: thirty-four per cent 'yes' votes and sixty-six per cent 'no'.

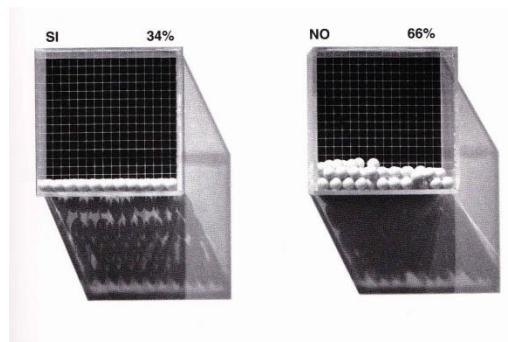


Fig. 8: Alfredo Jaar 1980: *Happiness Survey*

Additionally, over fifty portraits, each on an individual presentation board, displayed on the left, a full-face, large photograph of each happy or unhappy person above their responses to a brief questionnaire on their personal perspectives of happiness or unhappiness. To the right, posted above photo booth portrait strips, details were posted of names, birthdates, marital status, occupations and the significant length of time Jaar spent in conversation with them (e.g. forty-three minutes for *Feliz* [happy] No. 31, and one hour fifty-two minutes for *Infeliz* [unhappy] No. 58.

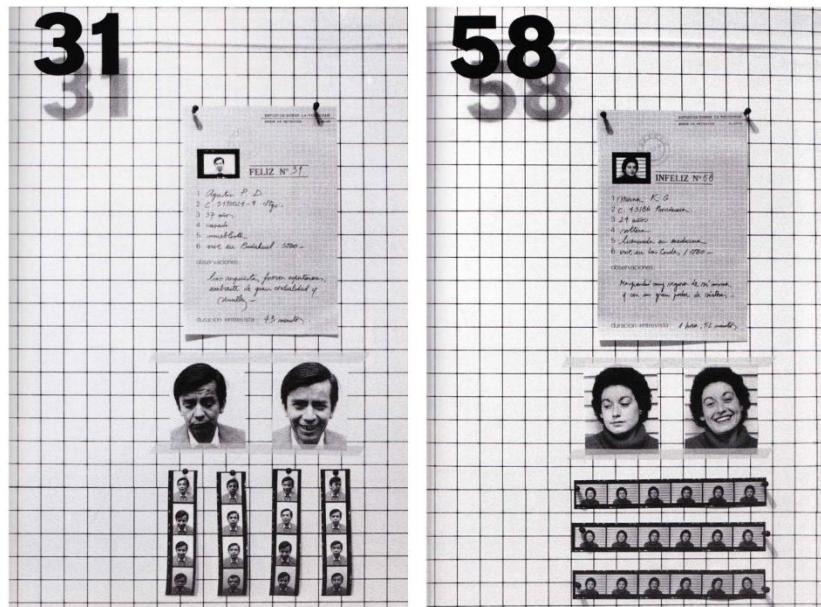


Fig. 9: Alfredo Jaar: *Studies on Happiness*, September 1980: Portraits of happy and unhappy people

Jaar also used video interviews, streaming them through a television screen, flanked on either side by an interviewee, each seated on high stools, impassive to their appearance on screen but part of a later, open discussion on happiness with assembled viewers — the setting was informal, a small space, no seating. Running concurrently with the survey, *SOH* moved into public interventions using existing advertising billboards to pose the ‘black and white’ question: “*¿Es usted feliz?*” [trans. Are you happy?]. Finally, between November and December 1981, in ‘An Open Work – A Non-Stop Record’ he produced hundreds of hours of video documentation that weave a portrait of Chile at the time.



Fig. 10: Alfredo Jaar: *Studies on Happiness* 1981 Billboard Intervention

Thus, in the three-year project, staged in Santiago at the height of the Pinochet regime, Jaar set about establishing ways in which art might enable a politicising counter-environment.

Later, the several documentations of people's responses were shown in an installation at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, and won him a privately sponsored competition that awarded him a grant for a year's stay in New York, whence he has developed his methods for culturally based interventions. However, when 'SOH' was next shown, eighteen years later outside Chile, in a Jaar retrospective in Barcelona (1999), its recuperation into visual art inevitably foregrounded how viewer participation can be part of the material by which creative political practices enact their political capital.

Jaar's stated aim in 'SOH' was 'to explore the limits of what could be done as *poetically* as possible' under the prevailing conditions of imposed censorship and self-censorship (Jaar, 2006, p.69; emphasis added). The work's methodology was inspired by Henri Bergson's 1900 collection of essays, *Laughter*, from which Jaar used the paradox that a naïve surface often indicates the deadly seriousness of things (Milner, 2013). It was also shaped by Hans Haacke's early example of institutional critique, *MoMA Poll* (1970), where visitors had been asked to deposit their answers in the appropriate one of two transparent Plexiglas ballot boxes to the question: 'Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina Policy be a reason for your not voting for him in November?' Hence, through asking passers-by to vote on what, superficially, appeared as a politically neutral question Jaar set out to initiate a counter-environment against the significant loss of Chileans' democratic rights within the more traditional values of *poetic* art production. Here we can see Jaar's Gramscian affiliation as a formative influence in the way Jaar adapted and

extended Haacke's methods for *SOH*, creating opportunities for Santiagunos to address their experiences in Pinochet's Chile. Their self-identification regarding happiness, in combination with discussions, worked as transformative forces in a Gramscian war of position. Moreover, *SOH*'s openness to all created an alliance across class divides that was essentially counter-hegemonic.

To summarise, through the functional naivety of the question '*¿Es usted feliz?*' Jaar used paradox as a critical tool in enabling both recognition and assessment of the level of public misery under the dictatorship, via methods that appeared innocuous because of how they were associated with consumer choices and popular polls in women's magazines. Moreover, by situating the question in a selected variety of situations, he was able to exploit the tightly controlled territory of Chilean media communications where political and consumer propaganda coalesced in dictating the environment of daily life as it had come to be experienced. Consequently, through deploying street polls, photography, questionnaires, appearances on a TV screen and bill boards, in '*SOH*' Jaar created a dynamic that was more seditious than the simple question on its own could be.

A fact hidden in plain sight was that posing the question publicly inferred discontent occurred under the junta. In particular, the use of billboards effectively subverted the approved function of advertising happiness as an easily accessible, non-relational commodity, by juxtaposing beside posters advertising regime-approved products such as Canada Dry ginger ale and *La Segunda*, the pro-regime afternoon newspaper. '*¿Es Usted Feliz?*' thereby countermanded their messages by posing the very question that foregrounded the general experience of poverty, hunger, and disappeared friends and family against the background of the failed promises of regime-backed consumerism. Thus in passing under the radar of authoritarianism '*SOH*' symbolically reinstated the displaced normality of pre-coup Chilean activity within a context of extreme violence that was directly or indirectly touching all lives. As Adriana Valdés notes, it enabled 'supressed acts such as voting and openly expressing opinions. It also made the screen available not to authoritarian figures but to just about anybody, to the viewers themselves (who were not only seeing, but being seen)' (Valdés, 1999).

In his retrospective evaluation of '*SOH*' (Valdés, 1999), Jaar inadvertently articulates how problematic it is to free art from the 'common sense' by which it knows itself. He inflects Gramsci's use of 'pessimism of intelligence' from the prerequisite for revolutionary action into a position whereby, in doubting the reformative force of counter-environments, the prescience and separateness of the artist from the viewer is presented as a unique badge of

political and aesthetic intelligence and integrity. Inevitably, from such a perspective, understanding ‘optimism of the will’ as related to ‘utopian idealism’ isolates the values of internal reforms of art practice’s own relations of production from the wider social and cultural issues within which they are inevitably implicated:

Studies on Happiness emerged twenty years ago out of a desperate situation...It was the fruit of my utopian idealism...I now realise having lost my utopian idealism of that time. It has been slowly but inexorably erased by twenty years of work about human cruelty...Against the pessimism of intelligence, Gramsci proposed optimism of the will. This is where I find myself today, not completely convinced (Alfredo Jaar in Valdeés, 1999).

Notwithstanding, with ‘SOH’ Jaar broached new ground within and beyond the Chilean art scene of the late 1970s, at the same time as making a wider contribution to the developing practice of artistic intervention. By following the gallery-sited model of Haacke’s *MoMA Poll* (1970) that had inspired him, but instead conducting a poll in the socially inclusive public space of the Chilean street, Jaar sought to enable a counter-environment that was specific to both Chile and more general concerns of art practice. In terms of the former, the subtext of ‘SOH’s’ question deployed a reverse strategy that allowed the participants and observers safety in addressing some of the conditions that were allowing the regime to continue. Furthermore, by surreptitiously infiltrating cultural and physical spaces, using the stalking horse of consumerism and its propaganda of personal fulfilment and freedoms, ‘SOH’ was able to seed the dangerous idea that the task of government is to ensure its enfranchised citizens live free from deprivation and fear and can contribute to the wider processes of social and political change.

Nevertheless, enabling an *art* counter-environment is challenging, since it is dependent on how the artist understands art’s potential for reformative production. Thus, according to the position taken, the political and social narratives of an intervention can straddle traditional production — art as a political object — whilst also working to enact processes of social and political change through the social relations working within the production — art as a politicising force. Hence, when Jaar determined the siting and rules of ‘SOH’ he ceded agency to chance and the passerby, since turning from a gallery-going élite to a demographically inclusive street-constituency balances, to a certain extent, both Benjamin’s concerns that the artist should be a social producer and Gramsci’s call for reform in the artistic relations of production. On the other hand, while he recognises these positives, Jaar’s retrospective reflections on ‘SOH’ inflect its values back to the needs of the artist above the

need for reforming practice, explaining the gallery relationship that the artist has with the viewer as one of control rather than partnership:

I do public interventions because I need to get out of the perfect white cube, the art world, which I see as pretty fictitious. Public interventions happen in the real world, and they keep me real. You can design them down to the last detail, but in public spaces anything can happen. *In art venues, everything works the way you intended* (Jaar, 2006, p.74; emphasis added).

5.3.3. ‘Telecomunicación’ (1981), ‘Opus 1981 Andante Desesperato’ (1981), ‘Antes de Partir’ (1981)

For two of the remaining three works that Jaar produced in Chile — *Telecomunicación* (1981) and *Opus 1981 Andante Desesperato* (1981) — he responded to press images of public protests that had gone viral. For *Antes de Partir* (1981), he marked the personal significance of his departure from Chile for America within a Chilean context of covert executions of disappeared Chileans. *Telecomunicación* is in part a visual response to the image of Catholic, Belfast women clashing bin lids on the ground outside the Maze prison, to mark the death of hunger striker Thomas McElwee on August 8th 1981, during Britain’s years of occupation and internment of IRA fighters. In *Andante Desesperato* Jaar re-enacts the photographer Susan Meiselas’ image of a rebel Sandanista playing the clarinet to his compatriots at a barricade during the last days of fighting in Matagalpa, 1979. Finally, in *Antes de Partir* Jaar plants small Chilean flags across the dunes and into the shallow waters on Valparaiso beach as both a valedictory gesture and a reference to bodies of Chilean victims of Pinochet’s Directorate of National Intelligence (hereafter DINA) that had washed up there — the selection of Valparaiso having particular significance for Chileans as the site of the infamous prison where dissidents were detained, tortured and disappeared.

In *Telecomunicación*, Jaar was inspired by the image of protesting Belfast women filling the air with the deafening din of dustbin lids, banged on the ground to mark a death of an internee hunger striker. The title references both the communication of ideas and the shared experience of political suffering across continents; for Jaar, the press photograph of women protesting about the death of a political prisoner in Northern Ireland paralleled events in Pinochet’s Chile, so that *Telecomunicación* is an expression of both oppression and solidarity. As a form of expression, it is the aesthetic of placing and photographing a line of six pristine white bin lids in quiet Santiago locations that predominates, particularly since these were discrete interventions that were photographed and then removed.



Fig. 11: *Belfast Women Protesting: Press cutting collection of artist (1981)*

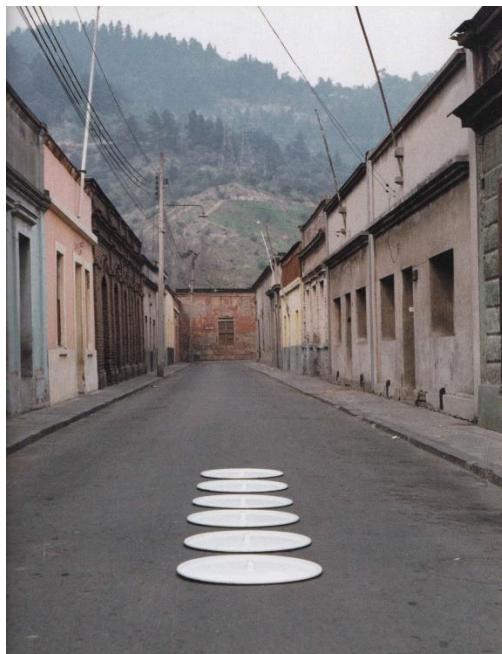


Fig. 12: Alfredo Jaar: *Telecomunicación* (1981)

Similarly, in *Opus 1981 Andante Desesperato* Jaar is videoed re-enacting Meiselas' image by blowing into a clarinet to the point of exhaustion. Again the action expresses his personal solidarity and shared experience with the Sandanista fighters in Nicaragua. Of course, the conditions in Chile rendered *Telecomunicación* subversive and dangerous, but *Opus 1981 Andante Desesperato* has both distance and the isolation of the actual performance as a

protection. Here Benjamin (2007, p.220) helps us evaluate the works' reformative potential, for although Jaar 'sides [with] the proletariat' of Belfast, Nicaragua and Chile, its production only involves the artist.



Fig. 13: *Sandinista Playing Clarinet to Fellow Fighters*: Susan Meiselas (1978)

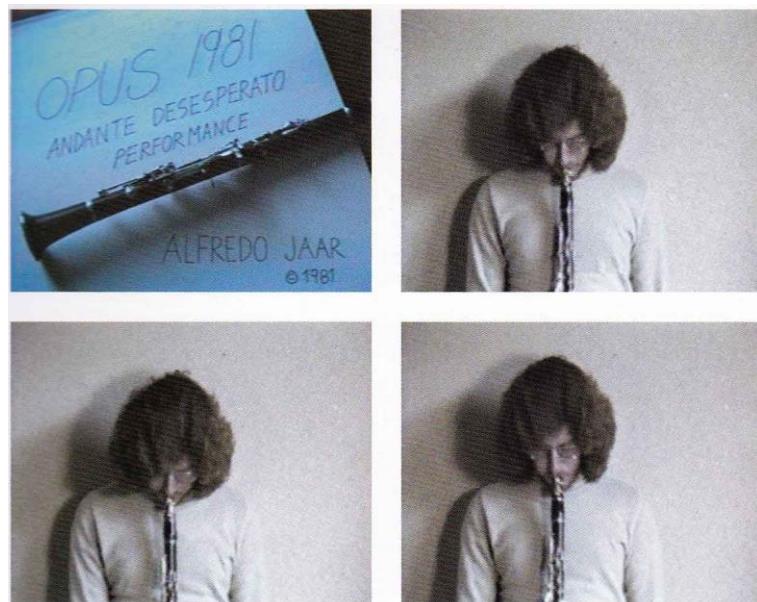


Fig. 14: *Stills from Opus 1981 Andante Desesperato*: Alfredo Jaar (1981)

Compared to the relational dynamics of *SOH*, *Telecomunicación* and *Opus 1981 Andante Desesperato* are paradigms of artists' individuated responses to oppressive political regimes and events. Of course, because Jaar could not risk showing them in Chile at the time of their making, since they drew parallels between repressions in Northern Ireland and Nicaragua with those in Chile, they could not realise the productive relationship between sign and function. Consequently their debut was in the Lausanne Jaar retrospective, '*La Politique des*

Images' (2007), as part of an archive of his early work. However, at the time of their making, close on the heels of 'SOH', Jaar's Chilean mentor, Adriana Valdés, acclaimed their political credentials as 'appearances [that] constituted a metaphor in reverse' (Lippard quoting Valdés in Jaar, 2012, p.58) when Chileans were disappearing without trace. Similarly Nicole Schweizer (Jaar, 2007, p.8) sees them as raising the pressing question of 'what form can be given to something that cannot be represented literally in a particular historical context?' Their delayed appearance foregrounds the problem that circumstances prevented them realising a social function as a critical model of reality at the time, since when they have become historic models of social critique and have acquired exchange value in inverse proportion to their prohibited use value.

Finally, Jaar's valedictory piece, '*Antes de Partir*' follows a similar pattern. With its line of small Chilean flags fluttering across the landscape, traversing dunes and beach and disappearing into the sea, it commemorates what came to full public light with the 1991 Rettig Commission Report, which stated that:

Approximately 1,100 Chileans — and one U.S. citizen — vanished during the seventeen-year Pinochet dictatorship — the majority of them at the hands of DINA. Some were killed and buried in secret graves; others were airlifted in a helicopter and thrown into the ocean by DINA agents 'after first cutting their stomach open with a knife to keep the bodies from floating,' states the Rettig Commission report (Kornbluh, 2013, p.171).

'*Antes de Partir*'s visual metaphor is more distanced regarding the political event than the personal, where Jaar is photographed planting the last few flags in the water. Like its companion pieces it first met its viewers, in recuperated form, in Lausanne, 2007. In a series of conversations that form part of the exhibition catalogue for '*Jaar SCL 2006*' in Santiago, Jaar clarifies what he perceives as the freedom of his methodology from traditional art practices:

In my studio we keep flow charts of the projects I'm working on. Each project has its phases. Ideally they should never coincide, either at the start or when they come to be shown. I have a studio manager who coordinates everything; I usually install a project only the first time round...Another assistant works with pictures, the animations, and the web. I also work with a cameraman who filmed me in Angola and takes care of the technical side. Another assistant is a sort of intern; he deals with more basic stuff and support. The studio is a laboratory of creation, it's for thinking and creating, like an architecture studio: not much is produced there. We have things made to order...No technical or domestic or administrative problem will stand in my way. We always find the

people to do it. I have a project that waited ten years to become technically feasible (*The Sound of Silence*, 2006). We usually organize local support groups for work in situ. (Jaar 2006, p.77).



Fig. 15: Alfredo Jaar: *Antes De Partir* (1981)

Additionally, in a further conversation, he confirms a residual confidence in art as a potentially reformative social force, albeit one that it is contingent on artists' authority, where 'people can see that there are artists capable of sensing what is going on, and working with what they sense. And that they should be listened to' (Jaar, 2006, p.85). To summarise, in 'SOH' Jaar sought to facilitate politicising function for art, not through the direct relevance of his question 'Are you happy?' to the people of Santiago, but through the project's relational methods of working. While he was involved with how art could function as a counter-hegemonic force in Chile he simultaneously sought to work in a counter-hegemonic way in terms of traditional art production. However, as noted, Jaar did not fully exploit the potential of this approach, leading one to query whether this was because of the repressive context he was working in or if his approach more generally retained some distance from art's politicising possibilities. The next two chapters follow up on this question.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has begun the thesis' analysis of Jaar's practices, looking at how it democratises or modifies the working relations between the artist, the viewer and the non-art world. First, it set formative phases of his early work in Chile in the context of the decades

between Allessandri and Pinochet. It summarised, in some detail, the covert American steering of Chilean politics from democracy to dictatorship, and thereafter it focused on concerns raised by Dorfman and Mattelart's position on the cultural colonisation of the Chilean people through policies of cultural imports that reinforce American values. It thus prepares the way for the Gramscian/Benjaminitite assessment of Jaar's work in the following chapters.

In particular, since the Chileans, in common with Gramsci and Benjamin, underwent severe economic and social controls and forcible suppression of opposition, the work of Chapter 4 has provided the approach for this and subsequent chapters in understanding how Jaar responded to the challenges involved in counter-hegemonic art practice. Gramsci and Benjamin's elucidation of societal change through artistic and cultural practices has underwritten the chapter's perspective on claims made for some of Jaar's Chilean works and their subsequent recuperation into gallery art. The chapter has attended to the particular significance of what Jaar says in conversations that look retrospectively at his early work. While it has identified art's potential revolutionary function in the relational dynamics of 'SOH', it has also considered how the more traditional object production of the other Chilean work, with time, has lost use value as a possible counter-hegemonic dynamic.

More broadly, in overviewing Jaar's early work, the chapter has established the ground for the thesis' elucidation of how art could work in a relational field of production. The thesis enlarges on this in Chapter 6, which analyses Jaar's photographic installations concerning the representation of suffering in mediatic images and the related agencies of authors and viewers. This is of particular relevance since almost everyone consumes these kinds of images, either through news, social media or streamed entertainment that exploits fashionable noir in crime, war or fantasy.

Chapter 6

Alfredo Jaar's Photographic Installations

6.1. Introduction

In the last chapter, I established the importance of the Chilean context to the development of Jaar's practice, arguing that the accumulative force of decades of cultural and economic colonisation suffered by Chile, combined with the brutal realities of living under Pinochet, projected Jaar into a search for ways of enabling art to contest and subvert the forces that shape the daily experience of unfreedom. I focused on the relational dynamics embedded in the ways Jaar used the ostensibly disingenuous question 'Are you happy?' as 'a starting point of critical elaboration' (Gramsci, 1971, p.324) and as a means of entry to the problem of how current practice can realise an enfranchising politicising force, rather than assume it to be a given in the production of political objects. I thereby used the specifics of Jaar's Chilean practice to identify the core dynamics by which art's potential for socially reformative agency might facilitate an active participation in practical life for all those involved (Gramsci, 1971, pp.9-10).

The work of this chapter is to analyse Jaar's post-Chilean work on photojournalist images of suffering. It assesses his presentational strategies for enabling viewers to engage critically with the images viewed. It is therefore concerned with the way in which art can contest how photojournalistic images embed a common sense interpretation of events, objects and people that impacts on the viewer's agency. The chapter will repudiate the contention that photographic images can unproblematically represent realities, to argue that they should be approached as structured scenes of interpretation frequently in the service of dominant worldviews. It therefore critically discusses whether the affective force of photojournalist images of suffering can be an engine of reform. Consequently, it will contend that interrogating the framing of images of suffering, asking what is held outside the frame and what histories already focus the viewer's reading of them, are the challenges that artists face in using them. Therefore, the chapter's critical engagement with Jaar's work on the photojournalist image develops the thesis' wider argument that recognising and reforming traditional relations of artistic production is a social and political matter as well as artistic.

My aim in this chapter, therefore, is to further elucidate how art's reformative action is in a relational dynamic between artist and viewer that contests the covert pressures that direct image production and consumption. This is the heart of my thesis, which champions the view that art's specific strengths can be deployed to contribute to social and political change. Thus

this chapter will evaluate Jaar's use of dramatic staging, shock, and affectivity in his use of images as either enabling tools that give us a clear sight of how we understand the suffering of others, or as innovative forms of image presentation that accommodate embedded preoccupations and conservatisms regarding the separate roles of artist and viewer.

6.2. Photojournalist images of suffering as documentation or distraction

The challenge of politicising art's function so that it can contribute to social reform is complex when it comes to its relationship with the image, particularly the photojournalist image. Among the influential positions whereby art has located its values and its functions, that of Baudelaire's 'perfect flâneur' is enduringly influential in the way that it extols an act of looking that is separated from the flux of life:

For the perfect flâneur...it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude...in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite...to see the world...and yet remain hidden from the world...He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures *more living than life itself* (Baudelaire, 1995, pp.9-10; emphasis added).

Because it promotes assumptions that pictures, and by inference photographs, 'are more living than life itself', it provides a ground from which the photojournalist image, which is consumed on a daily basis, is trusted as a reliable narrator of its subject, while its embedded, politicising positions pass under the radar. I maintain that this is a problem that confronts Jaar's work on images of suffering, which spans the years from 1987-2011, when he used them in installations including those that formed part of his six-year Rwandan project (1994-2000). Hence it is significant that his curation of photojournalist images in the exhibition *Inferno and Paradiso* (1999) was specifically designed to explore those failures of the affective force of the image that he was personally working to address in his own practice. During this period, he tended to experiment with ways of ameliorating the failure of the affective force of the image rather than with ways of interrogating the image as a vehicle of embedded ideologies. In other words, the chapter argues that the issues identified in the last chapter are more closely related to Jaar's understanding of his own practice than the repressive Chilean situation that he found himself in.

For example, he writes in his foreword to the catalogue for *Inferno and Paradiso* that he intended the exhibition to be a 'homage to photojournalists around the world who risk their lives to document difficult and distressing situations that most of us would rather ignore' (Jaar, 1999), whilst at the same time stating his conviction that 'images are rapidly losing

their capacity to affect us'. In conclusion, he declares the purpose of the exhibition is to question whether this loss of affectivity is caused by the image itself or the indifference of society. For this reason, I contend that he aligns with the traditional artist's belief that the affective force of the image carries a socially reformative potential; that if there is a burden of responsibility for the failure of such images it logically belongs to society, aka the viewer. Thus Jaar works from the position that the image-maker's integrity is uncompromised in the process of production. This means that the traditional framing of images through established visual tropes and iconography presents a reality that needed documenting:

I invited 18 photojournalists...because I believe [they] continue to produce remarkable images that still have the power to communicate the importance and *consequences* of the situations they depict, images that contain a *punctum* (Roland Barthes), an element that manages to astonish the viewer with its efficacy.

For *Inferno* I asked them to select the single image that was the most difficult to produce. The one that caused the most pain and anguish. For *Paradiso*, the most joyful one. All 18 *Inferno* images will be projected at once on the museum's walls for a period of 18 minutes. They will then be substituted by 18 *Paradiso* images. This alternating flow of images will continue during the entire exhibition (Jaar, 1999; first emphasis added; second emphasis in original).

Accordingly, Jaar contests the assumed ethics about what images can depict within the aesthetics of tastefulness, i.e. the form taken by the artwork. This has been documented as a problem since at least the first century BC, when Epicurean Lucretius deliberated on how to attach moral value to what could seem a voyeuristic and un-empathic act of viewing — both pressing problems regarding photojournalist images. At the start of the second book of '*De Rerum Natura*', he discusses the philosophical image of the shipwreck with spectators:

Pleasant it is, when over a great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another's great tribulation; not because any man's troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive you are free of them yourself is pleasant (Lucretius, 1st century BC, Book 2, lines 1-6).

Lucretius reasons that viewers have no cause to feel guilty since another's suffering affords them the ethical purpose of demonstrating the difference that exists between, on the one hand, our need for happiness, and on the other the ungovernable forces of physical reality. Ergo, the viewer's good fortune can be turned into the medium for a wisdom from which all can benefit. Hence, Lucretius' position is reassuring for those whose interests postdate the

birth of trauma photography, since it can be modernised to accommodate the affective force of the photograph's putative 'reliable' narration, whence flows the present day, perceived ethical value of regarding and recognising the pain of others.

However, I contend that the ethical problem of the spectator of the distant shipwreck remains unresolved, even in the face of Jaar's presentational methods in '*Inferno and Paradiso*', where his strategy of alternating the flow of images reworks the Lucretian divide in the hope that images of suffering will accrue affective force by repeated comparison with their opposites (see also Chapter 1 on Rancière and spectatorship). Embedded within this position is a belief in the ethical credentials of the trauma image's affectivity. Thus, while the '*Paradiso*' images of friendship, play, and love invite familiar recognition, as opposed to shock and pity, Jaar modernises the ethic by means of a technological comparative function, showing them in looped, eighteen-minute time slots against terrible images of death, loss and exploitation. The hope here is that art can refresh the affective moral agency of photojournalist images that has been lost in media consumption. Thus Jaar seeks to modernise the Lucretian divide along lines of identifiable geographical and cultural division that relocate the problem of distance from the providential to the political.

However, rather than placing it within the viewer's reach for action, the suffering remains distant and, in a harrowing way, exotic, with the result that a more implicit *ethical* distance separates the suffering, which takes place in real time, from image-making, display and consumption which all require suspensions of time. Furthermore, the problem leaches into curating and viewing since both reiterate the initial, photographic act of non-intervention. Here the curation strategy instates a clash between 'creative and constructive photography' (Benjamin, 2009, p.190) that complicates but does not fundamentally challenge the viewer's contemplative gaze. As a result, the images of suffering in effect require the viewer's ethical position to remain stable and consequently passive. Indeed, hearts and minds share a long, conjoined history regarding the image, as Kundera identifies in fascism's exploitation of representation: 'when the heart speaks, the mind finds it indecent to object. In the realm of kitsch, the dictatorship of the heart reigns supreme' (Kundera, 1984, p.250).

Accordingly, in the ensuing critical engagement with two of Jaar's selected 'infernal' images: Hocine's *The Madonna from Bentalha, Algeria*, (1977) (Fig. 16), and Dayanita Singh's *Marie Twelve Years Old*, taken in the early 1990s (Fig. 17), I argue that affect is problematically conflated with assumptions about an inherent, reformative, moral force in our viewing of photographic images of the pain of others, particularly when it takes place in the gallery environment.

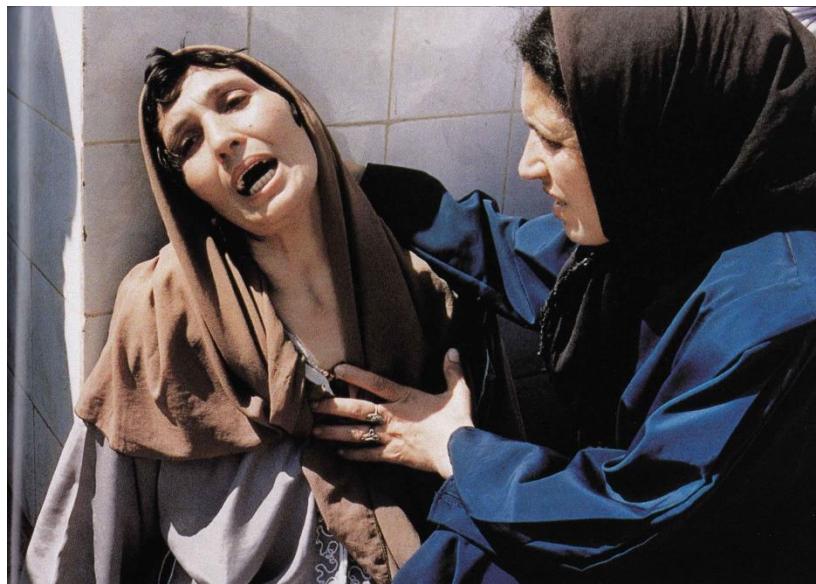


Fig. 16: Hocine (1977): *The Madonna from Bent al-Ha*



Fig. 17: Dayanita Singh (early 1990s): *Marie Twelve Years Old*

In conflict with the image as documentation of the aftermath of an Islamic extremist attack upon an Algerian market, Hocine's *Madonna* directs viewing through the historical filter of sacral paintings of Mary's redemptive suffering. Hence, the combination of the already-aestheticised image with the gallery siting undermines its capacity for reformative value, by way of its use of the highly traditional iconography of Mariology. While one can understand that the intention could have been to destabilise Mariology via new forms taken by such iconography, these kinds of photographic images, particularly when displayed for

contemplation, inevitably aestheticise suffering through a distancing dynamic where the viewer's function is to validate the exhibition of suffering.

By contrast, in a painting such as Grünewald's 16th century Isenheim Altarpiece (Fig. 18), the reverse happens, for here the details of Christ's flesh, pitted with plague sores, transposes an imagined image into a reality by breaking with convention, foregrounding specific suffering over the conventional imaging of a divine transcending of the reality of pain and death. Furthermore, it was painted for the Monastery of St. Anthony at Isenheim, where the monks particularly cared for plague sufferers and others with skin afflictions. Hence, in its original viewing context there was proximity of experience between the image and the viewers, as opposed to the distance accorded to an icon of suffering.



Fig. 18: Grünewald: *Isenheim Altarpiece*

Therefore, where we might assume that a photo-documentation of a moment in an Algerian market after a terrorist bomb attack, is terribly real, I would argue that in Hocine's photograph the reality of the woman's pain is leached from the image for the very reason that it draws so heavily on the distancing of the affective/ethical values of her Madonna status, as traditionally depicted in deposition paintings. Hocine states:

23rd September 1997: A distraught woman who has lost several close members of her family is comforted by a relative who lost her parents...Authorities said 85 people were slaughtered by suspected Islamic militants overnight...while survivors of the massacre put the number of victims at up to 200 (Hocine, in Jaar, 1999).

The striking clarity of the image, the expressive beauty of the captured gestures of desolation and succour, the composition of colour and form, the chiaroscuro effect and the strong diagonal of the extended arm all resonate the drama of a Caravaggio painting, and herein I contend lies the problem. Because the image is both beautiful and powerful, it aestheticises unbearable loss and inflects the Bentala Madonna into a body of established iconography that has the negative effect of distancing. Were affectivity to be a precursor of action it would at least need the pressing urgency of the here and now, which its historical positioning only serves to diminish.

By contrast, Dayanita Singh's image of twelve years old Marie, dressed as if for her first holy communion or her wedding, deals with child prostitution and by extension HIV, both subjects outside the iconography of traditional art. This image offers a Barthesian punctum: 'a cast of the dice...an accident which pricks me (but also bruises me) is poignant to me' (Barthes, 2000, p.27). It is a sort of vague, slippery, interest that Jaar claims will 'astonish the viewer with its efficacy' (Jaar, 1999). We can identify the punctum in Marie's shabby costume, which shows a small, torn strip of lace at the hem and a small rip in the veil, yet Singh's accompanying text absolutely rejects the possibility that the image, and by extension any image, can have any reformatory value in the face of the real.

Twelve years old Marie, the daughter of a sex worker, had just attained puberty and begged me to take her away from her destiny, but I could not. In India the highest price is paid for the first time, usually around 12 or 13 years...When this ran in TIME magazine, many families wanted to adopt her, so I went back to look for her in Bombay, but she had long been working and was not interested. *My photograph did not make any difference to sex workers' children, because finally all the people that contacted us only wanted Marie and not any other sex worker's child.* This was the hardest bit to come to terms with. It is still traumatic to write about it...*I realized that I could not change a thing with my photos and if I was so concerned, I should become an activist,* but photography was in my blood (Singh, in Jaar, 1999; emphases added).

Nevertheless, Jaar's concerns in '*Inferno and Paradiso*' implicitly propose that it is within the gift of art to add value to pre-existing photojournalist images by mediating the act of viewing through the 'punctum-friendly' conditions of the gallery, where there is space and time for

viewing (Jaar, 1999). Therefore, the curatorial position presents the photograph as a documentation of truth rather than interrogating how it may be an unreliable narrator of itself and its subjects.

The above discussion contains echoes of Chapter 3, which discusses how a critical understanding of art can ultimately remain within more traditional, formalist parameters. For instance, Barthes understands photography to concern sequences of doing, undergoing and looking (Barthes, 2000, p.9), and he focuses on its systemic violence to subject and viewer rather than its narration of social reality. The violence to the subject occurs in the process of posing where Barthes sees a loss of self, endemic in the actions of doing and undergoing: 'The photograph is the advent of myself as other...the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art' (Barthes, 2000, pp.12-13). Barthes goes on to identify the indeterminate state between subject and object that results from the photographic image: 'Death in person; others — the Other — do not dispossess me of myself, they turn me, ferociously, into an object, they put me at their mercy, at their disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions' (Barthes, 2000, p.14). Thus he reasons that the political right to be a subject is what requires protection in photography (Barthes, 2000, p.15).

For Barthes, the loss of privacy that turns the person into an object for contemplation (Barthes, 2000, p.15) originates in 'the studium' (Barthes, 2009, p.28), the contractual moment of viewing between producers and consumers, which he defines as a form of education bringing the viewer's knowledge and culture to the act of looking in order to understand the photographer's intentions — 'to establish and animate his practices' (Barthes, 2009, p.28). Barthes argues that with the studium 'everything that happens within the frame dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond' (Barthes, 2009, p.57). However, it is at the level of the 'punctum' (Barthes, 2009, p.57), that Jaar envisages photography's redeeming force where the eye perceives a small detail, such as the torn lace of Marie's dress. While the studium is encoded within a recognisable cultural field, the punctum speaks of a blind field that animates the image's dynamic out of an anaesthetised state, like specimen butterflies, into 'a whole life external to the image' (Barthes, 2009, p.57). The existence of this blind field, for Barthes, means that the viewer reads every photograph as a catastrophe that has already occurred 'whether or not the subject is already dead' (Barthes, 2000, p.96).

Consequently, the Barthesian proposal is not concerned with whether photography has an informative/reformative social force but focuses instead on its immanent violence — elected initially by the posing subject in the bourgeois world of a photographer's studio but thereafter reaching its apotheosis in the melancholy *affect* of the image on the engrossed isolation of

the viewer. Thus, for Barthes the image of Lewis Payne (1865), the young man waiting to be hanged for the attempted assassination of Secretary of State W. H. Seward (Fig. 19), speaks of the slipperiness of mortality, not the contexts of the attempted assassination nor the ethics of capital punishment, because he understands the affective violence of all photographs to lie in their capacity to freeze time, where '*this will be*' is coexistent with '*this has been*' (Barthes, 2000, p.96; emphases in original).

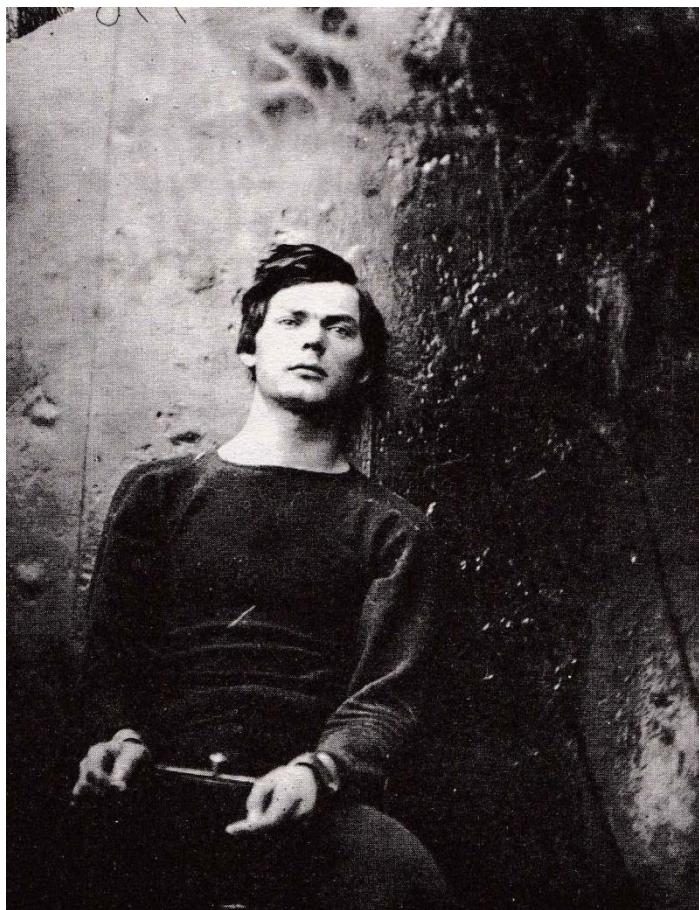


Fig. 19: Alexander Gardner (1865): *Portrait of Lewis Payne*

Hence Barthes is consumed by the traditional, melancholy power of images, which in allowing the voyeurism of the other's 'death' contrives a proscriptive life of the heart for the viewers that is fixed in *any* image through the punctum. Accordingly, the urgency of perceiving the material conditions of history is flattened and the melancholy Barthesian gaze settles on the image as image. Hence the power of his critique remains form-heavy and object-focused, thus ultimately aligning his approach with that taken by Jaar.

I therefore maintain that looking for reformative force through the punctum of the image, as Jaar proposes, is limited since it casts the viewer as the distant flâneur of reality via the image; isolates her from the immediacy of the social through a 'now' that is simultaneously a

'past'; and subordinates the unseen social forces which are the concern of all of us to the aesthetic and affective properties of the image. For sure, affectivity has reformative social force as a response to the suffering of others in real time, but as a currency for a reformative function for art I submit that it ultimately works as a conservative force, shaping us as viewers rather than as actors.

6.2.1. Re-framing the image

Separate from the problem of affectivity, the Lucretian proposition that we can acquire socially productive wisdom from viewing the suffering of others is significantly complicated by the proliferation and instant accessibility of images via smart technology, where instant and fleeting engagement further distances the photograph from a socially reformative, transitive function. Hence, as we queue at the bank; wait at the take-away; fly over the very warzones being imaged on our way to less dangerous destinations; or simply flick between applications on our smartphones at work, at home and at leisure, images tend to compound our superficial engagement with their subject.

Susan Sontag's concerns with a controlling power embedded in media images of suffering are only exacerbated with smart technology; she argues that over time they 'eclipse[s] other forms of understanding, and remembering' so that people remember the image over the event (Sontag, 2004, p.79). Judith Butler offers a more open assessment, specifically referencing the Abu Ghraib photos on the Internet, in an evaluation of the pros and cons of global accessibility. While they affirm that 'the uncontrolled circulability of the image and shifting contexts of its reception helped to produce a public outcry against the war across the globe', Butler is nevertheless concerned that the streaming of such images on social media induce 'a consequential metalepsis when the aberrant narrative that the images relate actually becomes the ground of everyday life' (Butler, 2010, p.xiv). Therefore, both Sontag and Butler's positions understand the photographic image as a device that paradoxically distances us from reality while also reinforcing a common sense by embedding an anthology of images, with their implicit ideologies, in the general consciousness. We thereby become the subjects of a collective instruction of which we have little or no awareness (Sontag, 2004, pp.76-7).

While on the surface Butler and Sontag seem in agreement with the aims of the thesis – for example, the argument that we 'cannot understand the field of representability simply by examining its explicit contents, since it is constituted fundamentally by what is left out, maintained outside the frame within which representations appear' (Butler, 2010, p.73) – they both ultimately occupy a position similar to Barthes. In contrast, the thesis argues that

images need to be viewed through a political aesthetic where *composition* means inclusions and exclusions rather than just how these compositions are *represented*. In other words, while the thesis addresses questions of production, for Butler they are issues of 'representability'.

This is important, because it allows us to see that Jaar's primary concern is in fact with representability, and in this chapter one can observe this in specific relation to the 'invisibility' of Africa in the western consciousness, as represented in two photographic installations: *Untitled Newsweek* (1994), and *Searching for Africa in Life* (1996). In the first, he directly targets the world's elective blindness to the massacre of twenty per cent of the total population of Rwanda within a sixteen-week period between April and the end of July 1994. He uses a strategy of counterposing a sequence of the sixteen covers of *Newsweek*, published during that period, with tags that refocus the week through the events in Rwanda that the world and the media had elected should remain invisible. Thus, three weeks into the massacre, when only immediate action could intervene in the catastrophe, *Newsweek* headlined a vitamin/anti-oxidant debate: 'Can "Phytochemicals" Prevent Cancer? The Truth about Antioxidants'.

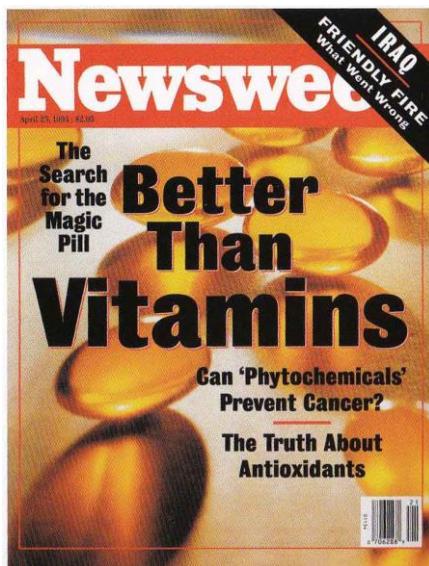


Fig. 20: Jaar (1994) (*Untitled*) *Newsweek*

Against this, Jaar's tag, in the top right corner, records that although half a million people had already been killed, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 912 to reduce the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda from 2,500 to 270. Meanwhile, the issue's understated cover strapline mediates US problems of friendly fire in its war for freedom and democracy in the Middle East: 'Iraq / Friendly Fire / What Went Wrong'. In the penultimate *Newsweek*

cover, July 21st 1994, we read: 'To Walk On Mars Scientists Can Get Us There, But Do We Dare?' against the tag: 'The United Nations Security Council reaches a final decision to send an international force to Rwanda. One million people have been killed. Two million have fled the country. Another two million are displaced within Rwanda'. Finally, one day after the cessation of the massacre, August 1st 1994, *Newsweek* ceded Rwanda visibility in a cover picture of a traumatised Rwandan toddler against the background of a crowded refugee camp — a traditionally approved, affective, visual trope of a distant world: 'Hell On Earth: Racing against Death in Rwanda'.

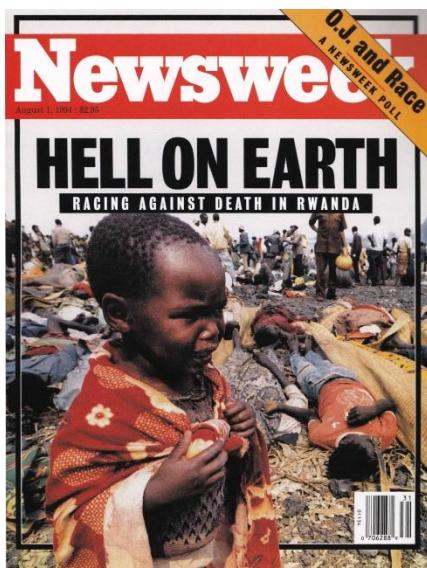


Fig. 21: Jaar (1994) (*Untitled*) *Newsweek*

Here I argue that Jaar uses a more effective strategy by eschewing affectivity in favour of counter-positioning text, image and absence of image. It enables viewers to contest the forces of visual representation because it reveals that globally influential authority frames understanding and decides what is counted and discounted as worthy of visibility. In doing this, it sets the viewers' agency in motion through the simple expedient of confronting how their compliance with a media inculcated passivity imposes a framework on their outlook.

Two years later, in his installation *Searching for Africa in Life* (1996), Jaar re-stages the invisibility of Africa within the wider context of sixty-years of *Life* magazine publications, presenting a huge installation of 2128 *Life* covers, published between 1936 and 1996, with the implicit invitation to the viewer to 'search for Africa'. The strategy involves the viewer in a more involved process of understanding that Africa's invisibility is selected and deselected according to nationalistic and market interests. In this way, the installation invites an active engagement on the viewers' part with the ethical impact of Africa's invisibility, displacing the

cliché of Africa as an occasional, acceptable icon of past historical greatness — the ‘ancient engineering miracle of the pyramids’ — and present exoticism —the ‘savage beauty’ of its tribal people. I maintain therefore that Jaar’s strategy in these installations effectively invites viewers to realise that they can take personal, ethical responsibility for viewing; and that they thereby become involved in reformative action — demanding that viewing be understood as an ongoing struggle towards agency and visibility for the viewer as well as the viewed.

6.2.2. ‘The Sound of Silence’

In Jaar’s installation *The Sound of Silence* (2006), he extends his work on the photojournalist image of suffering, using a constructed space and analogical context that brings into a single frame the problematic positions of the photojournalist and viewer, image and viewing. The work extends the challenges of *Untitled Newsweek* and *Searching for Africa in Life*, this time highlighting the viewer’s responsibilities in viewing using shock tactics. Nevertheless, while effective in a number of respects, I maintain that it sustains a basic position present in *Inferno and Paradiso* that keeps the ethical complexities of the photographer’s inevitable non-intervention and his/her contingent commercial involvement out of the frame (compare and contrast the below analysis with Rancière’s more one-dimensional view, as discussed in Chapter 1).

This can be seen in the way Jaar’s text is concerned with photojournalist Kevin Carter’s background of failed activism, rather than the suffering of the malnourished child and the significance of the recurring famines in Sudan in the preceding twenty-two years of civil war, during which time two million people died. However, at the same time he successfully uses a reverse photographic flash in which the viewers find themselves on both sides of the lens, voyeur and subject. The installation briefly shows Kevin Carter’s 1993 Pulitzer prize winning photograph of a tiny, starving, naked, Sudanese child (Fig. 22) crawling over arid ground watched, at what appears to be about a metre’s distance, by a waiting vulture. Moreover, it uses presentational strategies that dramatise and re-enact the taking and viewing of this particular image, so that Carter’s situation is replicated by the viewers’. In terms of bringing the viewers face-to-face with their voyeurism it is certainly effective, confirming how the deleterious social impact of images of suffering, as the master subject of our mediatised times, brings about ‘a cultural transformation [where] experience is being used as a commodity, and through this cultural representation of suffering, experience is being remade, thinned out and distorted’ (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1996, pp.1-2). However, the installations’ final and summative focus is on the problems of activism.

The Sound of Silence consists of a freestanding, architectural box that accommodates around eight viewers, and is normally situated inside a gallery, making it simultaneously part of, and separate from, acts of gallery viewing. On one exterior side it is covered with vertical, blinding white lights that demand attention but defy being looked at. On the opposite side, a green and red signal tells the viewer when she can enter. She then sits in front of a large black screen, which is flanked on either side by two standing strobe lights facing her at eye level. An eight-minute screen display of white text streams one- and two-line sentences at a time; they timeline the story of Carter's life and the taking of the photograph. The streaming stops momentarily as a selected fragment of his suicide note appears and the strobe lights release a blinding flash into the viewers' eyes; an instant later Carter's photograph flashes on the screen, for as long as it would take to operate a camera shutter or, indeed, blink an eye.

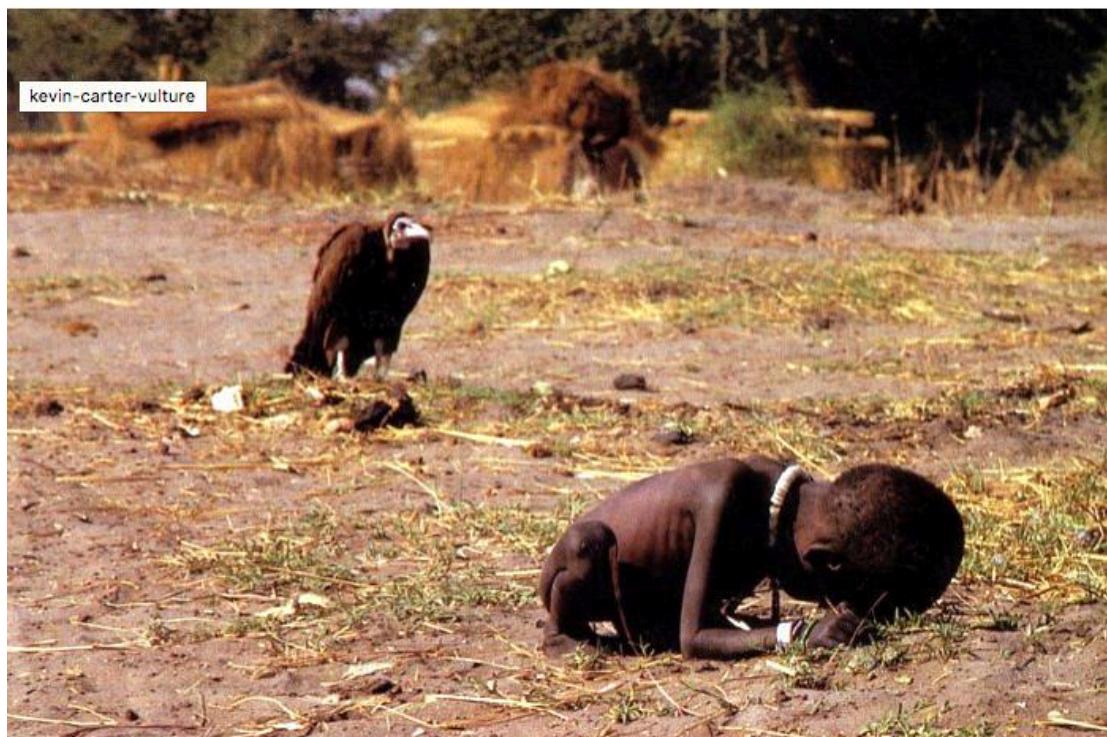


Fig. 22: Kevin Carter's 1993 Pulitzer Prize winning photograph

A second explosion of strobe lights causes whiteout and after images, and the final lines of text sets the image within the image market where the suffering of others is a lucrative affair:

this photograph is owned by the Megan Patricia Trust
 the rights of this photograph are managed by Corbis
 Corbis is owned by Bill Gates
 Corbis is the largest photo agency in the world
 Corbis controls close to 100 million photographs

the reference number of this photograph
 is corbis 0000295711-001
 no one knows what happened to the child

In this installation Jaar sets out to *frame* the image within the problems of activism. In this he is helped by Carter's use of the frontal camera position for documentary photography that subliminally speaks of unmediated truth. It is a standard photojournalist persuasion to present images as plain and artless surfaces that we look through to concentrate on the things depicted (Edwards, 2006b, p.20). Here, I also understand it as a tactical conflation where the documentary camera position aligns with our own eyes, both of which we erroneously assume to be unencumbered recorders and witnesses to the truth of an event: 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking' (Isherwood, 2012, p.3). The possibility of such innocent viewing is forcefully countered in Butler's argument that 'how we respond to the suffering of others, how we formulate moral criticisms, how we articulate political analyses, depends upon a certain field of perceptible reality having already been established' (Butler, 2010, p.64). This is an important point, to the extent that images of suffering are almost instantaneously transformed into modern icons of suffering that perform the icon's traditional function of producing a stable, culturally grounded, pre-troped otherness, where visual familiarity not only works to displace anxiety but also reinforces that displacement by inviting the pleasures of voyeurism. Nevertheless, Butler simultaneously obscures the *composition* of such perceptible realities through her focus on representation.

Indeed, Carter's image ticks all the boxes of the iconography of passive and innocent suffering: its child-ness, its female-ness, its black-ness, its naked-ness, its starved and enfeebled body, the mythical aridity of its surroundings, its abandoned loneliness. They all coalesce in Carter's image where, because the child is in Africa, she becomes Africa and instantly Africa's social and political landscape are rendered invisible by the classic tropes of a land empty of human signs other than the unclothed African body suffering in an arid landscape and exposed to predatory nature. Thus, in a world saturated with such images, Carter's inevitably confirms the continent of Africa, and the sub-set famine in Sudan, as the conditions of otherness and thereby his vocation of photojournalist activism is subordinated to the ubiquity of images that nourish the belief that tragedies play out in other parts of the world with other religions and other ideologies, as the inevitable conditions of their existence. While Jaar focuses on Carter as a paradigm of failed activism the viewers are also recognised as casualties of the developed world because, as already argued, the Lucretian distance, which is the necessary adjunct of iconography, inevitably reduces and reconfigures their subjective capacities.

Sontag defines a vicarious form of participation as 'one of the principal devices' of images such as Carter's (Sontag, 1979, p.10). She argues that a primary split between affectivity and the viewer's ability to think and understand is influenced psychologically in the sexual field of voyeurism, since 'not all reactions to these pictures are under the supervision of reason and consciousness' (Sontag, 2004, p.85). In support, she invokes Plato's account (*The Republic, Bk.4*) of a story where one, Leontius, overcome by the desire to view freshly executed bodies lying on the ground, curses his eyes as functioning separately and uncontrollably from his reason: 'There you are, curse you, feast yourselves on this lovely sight' (Sontag, 2004, p.86). In contrast, I contend that in *The Sound of Silence*, one of Jaar's aims is to counter this problem of indecent spectatorship of pain by refusing viewers the established retreat into moral outrage and its attendant voyeurism through his presentational strategies of delay and denial. At their most successful they project a viewer's focus on to the socially regulative force of the image. Although his text deals exclusively with Carter, building up to the moment he takes the photograph and its subsequent ownership by Bill Gates' Corbis, it also heightens the viewer's desire to see the image through a delaying sequence. It begins by contextualising the photographer, Carter, as an activist who had been beaten up and imprisoned for his photographs; subsequently it details the child and the appearance of the vulture; this is followed with the excerpt from Carter's suicide note before the image is released in a photographic flash, whence the camera lens is conflated with the blink of the viewer's eye.

As a consequence, viewers' mounting desire to see the image ultimately brings them face-to-face with their prurient interest as it appears momentarily, in an almost blinding flash, which ensures the attendant mockery of its after-image. If read in this way, *The Sound of Silence* embodies a robust intervention in repositioning the act of viewing. Nevertheless, I maintain that it also stays within a Western frame by way of its failure to contest famine as endemic to Africa. There is an absence of a contextualisation of the Sudanese civil war as a major cause of food shortages because, like all wars, it disrupted the normal cycles of sowing and harvesting. When Jaar elects Carter's suicide as the context, he thereby doubly frames that image as an unreliable narrator of the meaning of events. In short, Jaar, perhaps inadvertently, focuses our attention on the master photographer rather than the politicising possibilities immanent to the image itself.

Therefore, although Jaar's framing in *The Sound of Silence* softens the indictment that Carter's photojournalism conflicts with his activism, it nevertheless confirms the ethical challenges associated with image-making. For example, João Silva, a colleague of Carter

who worked with him in South Africa, gives an alternative, first-hand account of the contexts of the image. Jaar's text states that Carter flew into the village of Ayod, at the epicentre of the Sudanese famine and, after taking dozens of photographs, saw the child and the vulture. He waited twenty minutes to take the best shot then chased the bird away, 'sat under a tree and lit a cigarette talked to god and cried' (Jaar 1999). Silva, who along with Carter and other photojournalist had flown to Ayod with UN Operation 'Lifeline Sudan' on a thirty-minute food drop, reframes the specific details concerning Carter, setting them in a fuller context (interview with Silva in Fujiwara, 2005).

Silva records that the village was an established feeding station, and that the village mothers were just out of the frame because they were queuing for food, having briefly left their children. He notes that Carter, who had stayed near the plane, approached the vulture very carefully in order *not* to scare it, and that he did, indeed, wait twenty minutes, at a distance of ten yards, to frame several shots before chasing the bird away. In addition, however, two Spanish photographers also took photographs of the child and the vulture. Silva adds the significant information that, as is common practice in photojournalism, Carter used a telephoto lens to dramatise the situation because it diminishes actual distances between victims and aggressors, foreshortening the sense of distance. While I have critically discussed the sense of distance at various points in the thesis, the problem here is that Carter foreshortens the sense of distance *within* the form taken by the photo, not between artist and viewer. Thus, the isolation of the child and the sense of the chance momentary framing of its suffering are re-framed into the landscape of a crowded scene clustered around a brief drop, where photojournalists spanned out into surrounding bush impelled by the urgency to get an image that could frame Sudan and shock the world for the duration of its consumption.

Thus Jaar's careful *framing* of Carter from an opening, emotionally-charged, repetitive invocation of Carter's name, to the selected excerpt from his suicide note: 'the pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy does not exist' (Jaar 1999), edits out: 'depressed...without phone...money for rent...money for child support...money for debts...money' (MacLeod, 1998). Jaar thereby creates a shared bond of reformative idealism with Carter as image-maker that endows the failure of activism with a metaphorical, Gramscian stigma of 'pessimism of the intellect', elevated over its adjunct 'optimism of the will'. I therefore contend that *The Sound of Silence* is a curate's egg; it works productively in terms of viewers because it offers an epiphany in which they are the subject of the flash, caught in a moment of socially inculcated voyeurism that could inform their subsequent

viewing of such images. Nevertheless, at the same time it accommodates the failure of the activist image-maker above the functional ideology of mediatic images of suffering.

Here the Gramscian/Benjaminite perspective advocated by this thesis elucidates how, in this installation, Jaar engineers an act of viewing that sees the cultural and political dynamics of the media's *interest* in catastrophe, and the contingent problems of activist working within the media, over and above the central image of the child and the vulture. It therefore headlines the artist as one who intervenes in the political functionalisms of cultural products and production. Thus, although Jaar presents the role of Carter, and therefore implicitly the artist, as victims of capitalist media functionalisms, over and above the Sudanese victims whose starvation feeds the media's maw, he does also challenge the elitist interests serviced by the established hierarchies within art object production and consumption. In other words, Jaar occupies similar ground in this chapter compared to the previous: his self-understanding as a critically engaged, political artist goes some way towards fulfilling art's politicising potential, but his underlying respect for the forms taken by artworks – in this chapter, the integrity of the idealist master photographer – leaves us with an ambivalent legacy.

6.2.3. Narrowing the frame to broaden the field

Jaar's *Rwandan Project* is a self-contained unit from his global circuit of commissioned installations and interventions, although many of its pieces now make an appearance with them. Collectively, the *Rwandan Project* is a series of exercises on representation that work on the ethical problems that afflict documentary photography, namely how to represent suffering and genocide without aestheticising them and thereby how to involve the viewer in ethically informed activity. It spanned six years and comprises twenty-one pieces that each experiment with circumventing the looking/not-looking dilemma by increasing the viewers' awareness of the responsibilities entailed in the act of viewing. Jaar's assessment of the project is that it failed, gradually turning into a 'futile attempt to represent something that cannot be represented' (Jaar, in *Camera Austria*, 86, 2004, quoted in Höller, pp.376-7). Here, I argue that a concern with representation is the issue more than whether the representation 'succeeded'. As noted by Benjamin, it feeds its public an apparatus for consumption rather than use (Leslie, 2000, p.97).

only by transcending the specialisation in the process of intellectual production — a specialization that, in the bourgeois view, constitutes its order — can one make this production politically useful...the barriers of production must be breached jointly by the productive forces they were set up to divide (Benjamin, 1999, p.775).

Notwithstanding, I contend that his minimalist installations: *Real Pictures* (1995), *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996), and *The Silence of Nduwayezu* (1997), are effective in foregrounding a wider problem, where the uninflected viewer of photojournalist images suffers as a form of collateral, ethical damage. Such a re-focus acknowledges more than the speed with which images of suffering are embedded in ordinary discourse. It looks, additionally to the relational agencies of both the artist and the viewer. These operate in a gallery workspace, where the social function of the artist 'as constructor, organiser, [and] permanent persuader' (Gramsci, 1971, p.10) operates beyond that of image-maker and exposer of governments' failures to intervene. It involves the viewer in an unfolding sequence where the artist puts at the disposal of the viewer, the means to realise viewing as a personal responsibility.

Thus in *Real Pictures* (Fig. 23), rather than display images that he and an assistant took in Rwanda, immediately after the atrocities, when bodies remained unburied and survivors lived in their midst, Jaar deploys a reductive process of concealing them.

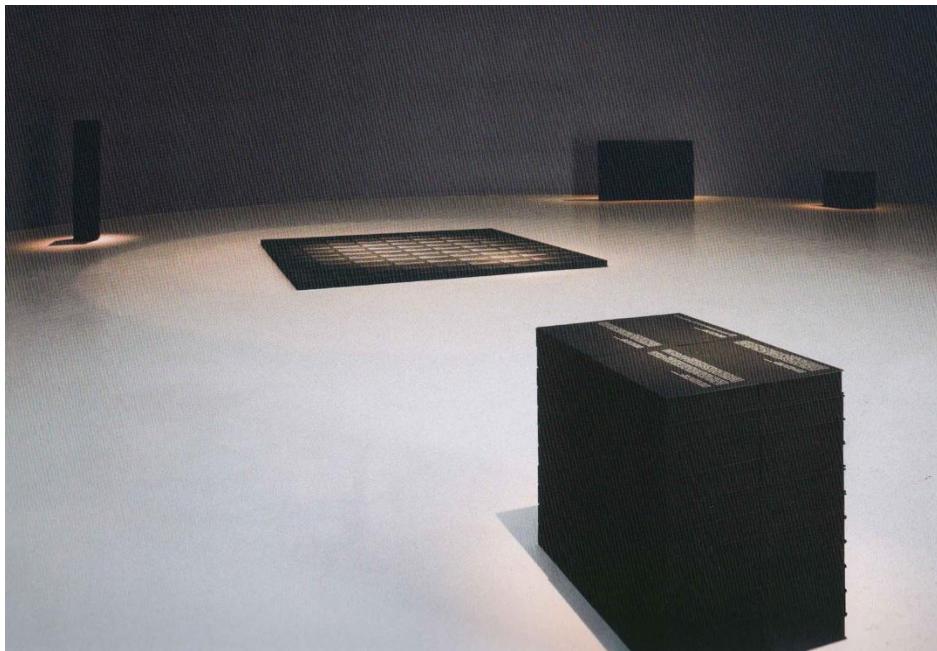


Fig. 23: Jaar (1995) *Real Pictures*

As the title suggests, *real* in terms of images and events, demands discursive attention to its terms. Accordingly the strategic way in which pictures are *real* is that they are protected from becoming *unreal* icons. Hence, the installation separates knowledge, as image, from understanding, as a freedom from the troping power of images. The problem that Jaar consequently confronts is how to enable viewers to contemplate what would be too awful for the literal gaze, what is beyond mental imaging, and what was outside media interest at the time of its happening. Ultimately, as the Benjaminite position avers, pictures cannot do this; they can document framings of the event and its aftermath, but thereafter quickly become icons carrying an inevitable function of comforting, distancing, and thereby enticing voyeurism — they become *de-realised*. In response, Jaar makes *Real Pictures* a matter of

Ntarama Church, Rwanda
40 kilometers south of Kigali
Monday, August 29, 1994

This photograph shows Benjamin Musisi, 50, crouched low in the doorway of the Church amongst scattered bodies spilling out into the daylight. Four hundred Tutsi Men women and children who had come here seeking refuge were slaughtered During Sunday mass

Benjamin looks directly into the camera, as if recording what the camera saw. He asked to be photographed amongst the dead. He wanted to prove to his friends in Kampala Uganda that the atrocities were real and that he had seen the aftermath

reflection, rather than a matter of viewing, through stage-setting it as a mortuary gallery encounter. He uses a darkened space that houses closed, black linen covered stelae and floor tablets in which the photographs that he and his assistant took are interred, while printed-white text on the top of each memorialises not the image, but the realities they cannot hold.

In the installation, Jaar's strategies withhold the prop of images of suffering that feed voyeurism and demand outrage, and in doing so propose that not only are images less reliable than words, but also that the viewer's consumption of images contributes another strata to that unreliability. Finally, they slow the viewer's movement in a large, darkened, silent space through the placing of the boxes and tablets, thus enabling reflection on atrocity and the responsibility viewing as a process of socially-based concerns outside the standard

gallery experience. Again, the visual impact of the installation testifies to Jaar's attraction to drama as an affective force, but I argue that in common with politicising drama it supports a discursive understanding rather than simply an affective dynamic. In setting a viewing space for reading and reflection as serious and individual activities within the traditional viewing space of the gallery, it reinforces the social function of art as a means of disclosing truths about the part images play in structuring our view of reality and the social function of the viewer as an intellectual concerned with such truths.

6.2.4. Returning the gaze

By contrast, in *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996) and *The Silence of Nduwayezu* (1997), while Jaar repeats the strategy of feeding raw information using white text on a black ground, he augments it both times with the image of the survivor, cropped to a gaze, as a visual synecdoche to frame the suffering of the one million Rwandan deaths that happened in the space of fourteen weeks. Thus he directs an encounter between the viewer and the victim, using images of the eyes of two survivors who witnessed the atrocities, so that the abstraction of a million deaths is personalised, and conveyed as an invitation or accusation to engage with the damage of indifference. Again, in these installations Jaar stage-manages the impact of that indifference for both the victim and the viewer, using a strategy later repeated in *The Sound of Silence* that can have the effect of the viewer becoming the viewed. It thereby relies on a gaze that instates an *otherness* for the viewers, which they share with the victim and moreover which they experience in real time.

Jaar uses minimal narrative text, exhibited at eye level in light boxes; they lead into another of his darkened environments where, heaped on a huge light table, a million slides of the individual's eyes represent the million victims of the genocide (Fig. 24, Fig. 25). When viewers examine a slide they experience an eye level-to-eye level contact with a survivor's gaze (cf. Fig. 3, Chapter 1). Jaar's stated strategy was to reduce the meaninglessness of one million dead to 'the scale of a single human being with a name, and a story. That helps the audience to identify with that person. And this process of identification is fundamental to create empathy, solidarity, and intellectual involvement' (interview: Art21: Alfredo Jaar: 'The Rwandan Project' (Jaar 2014)). Thus Jaar assumes a pedagogical relation with the viewer, with the aim of provoking thought as a prelude to action. While a Gramscian strategy of active unity in a master-pupil relationship (Gramsci, 1971, pp.350-1) calls for combined action on the prevailing conditions of the cultural climate in specific terms — here concerning the lack of engagement with the Rwandan crisis and its aftermath — it also requires the artist-viewer contradiction to be addressed. As Freire argues, 'dialogical relations —

indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object — are otherwise impossible' (Freire, 1996, pp.60-61).

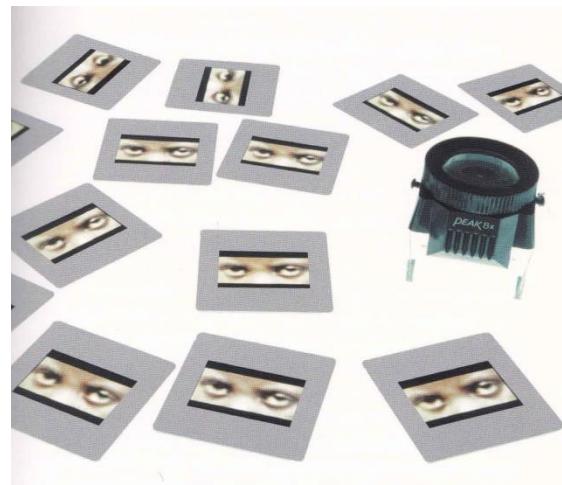


Fig. 24: Jaar (1996) *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*

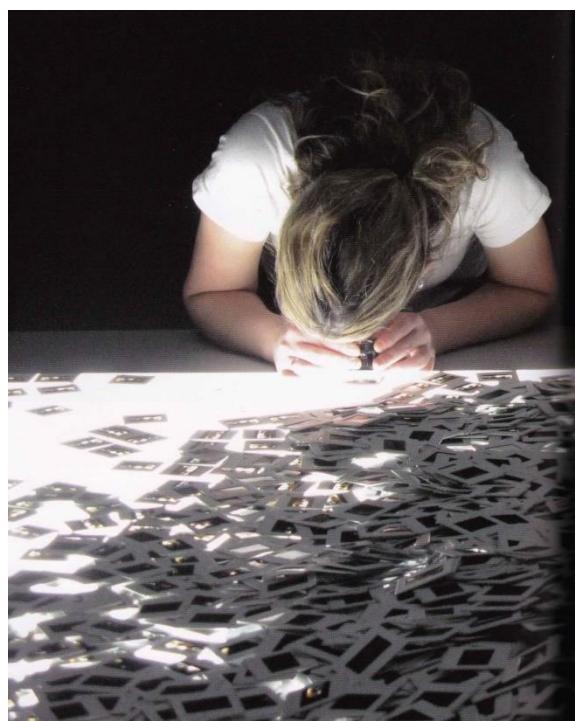


Fig. 25: Jaar (1996) *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*

The Eyes of Gutete Emerita and *The Silence of Nduwayezu* form part of Jaar's programme of twenty-one art essays seeking an activist function for art in the second, post-atrocity phase of Rwanda's 'invisibility' on the world stage. Because they both combine the visual format of raw information used in *Real Pictures* with images, they mark his experimentation with the affective force of images and drama as engines of art's political functioning:

If I stick to raw information, it's not interesting as art. I want to be able to move you, challenge you, touch you. I want to be able to irritate you, provoke you...with information and emotion, information and culture, information and spectacle...works fail...they're either too weighted toward information or toward spectacle...How do you strike such a balance that it's informative, moving, inspires people to think and act (Jaar, 2006, p.83).

In this conversation, where Jaar uses a conventional sequence of 'think' followed by 'act', he declares the works fail because of the 'impossibility of representation' (Jaar, 2006, p.82). I argue, however, that the politicising force of the installations is not contingent upon representation of suffering in the gazes of Gutete and Nduwayezu, but rather on the enablement of self-scrutiny through art as action. As such, unlike Jaar I view affectivity as a tool which enables art to fall short of a socially engaged, productive potential — as flattering as it is for the artist to have moved the viewers, and the viewers to perceive themselves as affected by another's suffering, in both cases affect brings its own comfort, offering an emotional dynamic that can substitute for action.

The question is what kinds of action can political installations achieve? I submit there are two kinds: in Jaar's case the first materialises the viewer's political insight when she experiences herself as the object of the other's gaze; that is, catches herself in the act of viewing. The ensuing destabilisation that this brings about has the productive potential to reverse the direction of the gaze back on to seeing the way she sees and the ways in which she has been trained to see, whence it broadens out from specific circumstances to general cultural persuasions. In this circumstance a *change in thinking* is a form of action. This is something that Jaar experimented with in these installations and refined in *The Sound of Silence*. The second lacks both affectivity and visibility but is political at a fundamental level because it requires reformative action in artistic relations of production — whence, as Freire argues, the artist's pedagogical role is dialogical not instructive.

What is significant about the installations representing Emerita and Nduwayezu, who were both at the massacre in Ntarama church, that Benjamin Musisi also witnessed, is that they use the same representational strategy of slides heaped on a huge table. Thus apart from the texts that lead to the slides' room their identities are merged as victims of atrocity. Even so, Jaar considers the Emerita installation as 'very effective' (Jaar, 2006, p.82) and the Nduwayezu installation as having failed (Jaar, 2006, p.82). There are differences: the Gutete Emerita narrative is a personal account exchanged with Jaar on their meeting, and Jaar has developed this installation from an initial screen streaming white text on a black ground (as represented below), with the cropped image of her eyes flashed briefly at the end, to its final

form using light boxes mounted on walls that lead into an enclosed space, housing the huge light table on which a million slides of her eyes are heaped.

Gutete Emerita, 30 years old, is standing in front of a church where 400 Tutsi men, women and children were systematically slaughtered by a Hutu death squad during Sunday mass.

She was attending mass with her family when the massacre began. Killed with machetes in front of her eyes were her husband Tito Kahinamura, 40, and her two sons, Muhoza, 10, and Matirigari, 7.

Somehow, Gutete managed to escape with her daughter Marie Louise Unumararunga, 12. They hid in a swamp for three weeks, coming out Only at night for food.

I remember her eyes.
The eyes of Gutete Emerita.

By contrast Nduwayezu's story is narrated by the artist:

I visited a refugee camp and Nduwayezu was seated on the stairs...[he] actually saw his mother and father killed with machetes. His reaction was to remain silent...He couldn't speak. His eyes were the saddest eyes I had ever seen, so I wanted to represent that and speak about his silence — because his silence refers to the silence of a world that let this happen (interview: Art21, Alfredo Jaar: The Rwandan Project (Jaar 2014)).

I contend that the repetition presents several problems concerning Jaar's role as producer in his relations with the victims and the viewers. As I have already noted, a conflation takes place that thereby casts them as tropes of the Rwandan genocide. Hence, the viewers' responses to their trauma become stained with the distance that the affective force of the tropes perversely encourage, and this the more so since we are presented with two *individuals* that Jaar encountered.

Moreover, I contend that repeating a dramatic device in such closely related circumstances, here Jaar's visit to Ntarama church, works counter-effectively because the repetition carries an association with elitist practices regarding his relations with the viewers. Although in the first Jaar aims to represent 'eyes that have seen what we refused to see' and in the second 'to convey silence' of the mute child (Jaar, 2006, p.82), in both he predicts the viewers' response as consumers through a sort of art algorithm, rather than enabling it by 'eliminating the antithesis, first, between viewer and subject 'and, second between technique and content' (Benjamin, 1999, p.775). Thus, while I concur with Jaar's eventual verdict of 'failure' for this installation, I contend its failure stems from his stated aim of *representation* of suffering – because it does not address a dialogical exchange between artist and viewer – and not from the *success or failure* of the representation.

For sure, the damaging force of the colonial positioning informing much photojournalist imaging lies outside representation since it is part of an inherited relational dynamic, enacted here in the global silence regarding the genocide. Thus Jaar's personal trauma in visiting Rwanda gives force to his wider, culturally informed anger about the invisibility of suffering in Africa. Consequently, he inducts the viewers into the unwitting part they play in a world that lets this happen. As a result, while on the one hand he projects the viewers into the static position of *representing* an apparatus of disregard, on the other, meeting the gaze of Gutete Emerita invites their twofold action of first seeing their own voyeurism and distance and then the possibility of changing their habits of perception through interrogating the covert ideologies of image distribution and consumption. Hence, the conflicting faces of Jaar's Rwandan Project, both in what I understand as its achievements and its shortfall, underpin my wider concerns with the hegemonies whereby we are trained as viewers. Ultimately, Jaar's focus is on modes of representation rather than how such modes could politicise.

6.3. Conclusion

This chapter has applied the thesis' analysis of Jaar's innovations in artistic and relational production to his work on photojournalist images of suffering, particularly in Africa. It has interrogated the significance, for socially engaged, politicising artistic practices, of his aims to restore the affectivity of such images as an engine of reform. Thus the chapter analysed the range of presentational strategies that he has used to rehabilitate what he argued to be their agency as reliable narrators of suffering. The chapter's concerns have been with Jaar's relational responses to his subjects, and also to his viewers as co-workers or receivers. In terms of his work with mediatic images, it analysed how far his role realigned the embedded cultural acts of viewing that he aimed to subvert. It therefore examined tensions between

Jaar's perceptions of the authority of the artist, in relation to his faith in the affective force of images and the agencies he thereby accorded the viewer.

In this sense, the chapter connects with Chapter 3's work on how the collective Art & Language contested the traditional understanding of individual authorship. Art & Language challenged the limitations imposed on art by the formalisms of Modernism through collective practices, whereas Jaar's photographic installations are designed to be part of counter-hegemonic politics. As can be seen, there are some differences. For example, Art & Language challenged the traditional expectations about the viewing of art, working with a nominal but specific understanding of the viewer as someone concerned with reforming art practice. They thereby exposed and contested the fetish of the artist/author through collective production. By contrast, this chapter examined Jaar's photographic installations through the filter of his Gramscian sympathies. It analysed the effectiveness of his use of stage setting and his emphasis on affectivity as strategies to increase the viewers' awareness of being controlled through their consumption of images. Nevertheless, there are also similarities: in an analogous manner to Art & Language's ultimate focus on reforming formalist practices by way of new formalisms, Jaar's form-heavy approach to the role of the photographer and of representation partially obstructed the wider possibilities inherent to an avowedly political understanding of art.

More broadly, the chapter argued that in seeking to address the problems of representation through presentational strategies and the affective impact of images, Jaar neglected to address the politics of affectivity that projects viewers towards a mass response of being moved by the images of suffering. It therefore concluded that Jaar's photographic installations can be situated in a regime of viewing where individual responsibility is sublimated into a brotherhood of viewers, made possible through the alterity of the sufferer. Thus, since responses within such a regime are more than epiphenomenal (Morton, 2007, p.92), the chapter affirmed that 'their nature as instruments of domination' needs understanding 'for reasons of political struggle' (Gramsci, 1995, pp.43-6).

In summation, this chapter has worked to elucidate how art's traffic with images, particularly those of suffering, partially disables its reformative potential by accommodating too pedagogical a role for the artist vis-à-vis the viewer. It has addressed the complications whereby photography entrappels viewing, either directly through the camera lens, or in gallery installations, with problems of non-intervention. It has identified how the act of viewing can contribute to a wider hegemony in which art, the artist, and the viewer remain innocent of the implications of their respective positions. It has thereby prepared the ground for the

Chapter 7's analysis of Jaar's social interventions, while also expanding on Chapter 3's work on the problems of authorship and the viewer's agency. It has further developed a nuanced understanding that differentiates art's functionalisms as a political object from its functioning as a socially engaged, politicising force. Moreover, in making clear the ways in which Jaar tends not to live up to the Gramsci/Benjamin approach, it has identified the final foci for Chapter 7, which cover problems concerning the practices of commissioned work for the international art circuit.

Chapter 7

Alfredo Jaar's public interventions

7.1. Introduction

As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, the problem of how art can engage as a socially engaged, politicising force is complicated by deeply embedded traditions concerning the roles of the artist and the viewer. Gramsci, who was concerned with contesting the common sense that buttresses hegemony, recognised that critical activity is effective at the group level not the individual (Gramsci, 1971, p.325), something that Benjamin makes specific to art production. Therefore, this chapter covers a range of Jaar's social interventions in relation to the ethical problems within art regarding the picturing of politics, which accommodates traditional values of good taste in individual consumption and interprets activity at the group level in ways that sustain its own embedded relations of production.

Inextricable from this problem is the assumption that social interventions address specific unfreedoms in ways that will educate the viewer, an assumption that is exacerbated by the expectations of the commissioning process and Jaar's global reputation as a political artist. Thus, while the chapter critically engages with interventions ranging from regime injustices and the effects of war, to raising awareness of the social benefits of the art gallery and therefore art, its focus is on how they work in relation to inclusion not education *per se*. The latter is of course important, but this chapter takes as its starting point the notion that the (re)production of knowledge is an ongoing, dialogical process and not the linear passing on of wisdom from artist to viewer. Accordingly, it is less concerned with subject matter and problems of the artist's right to represent communities, and more on how the desire for art to be a politically reformative force can (perhaps unintentionally) neglect an embedded common sense that has historically allotted different agencies to the artist and the viewer.

The chapter therefore addresses those aspects of Jaar's output and practices which specifically and explicitly address questions of politics and social intervention. In doing so, it seeks to show how a confusion of art's politicising force with subject matter and community involvement often leads to unreformed relations of artistic production. The examples examined include *The Gramsci Trilogy* (2004-5) and *The Marx Lounge* (2010), before moving to earlier works which paralleled the output and practices discussed in the previous chapter.

7.2. 'The Gramsci Trilogy'

Jaar's *The Gramsci Trilogy* (2004-5) is paradigmatic of how aesthetic representation of specific political subject matter can unintentionally obfuscate the deeper problem of addressing the traditional, relational dynamic between artist and viewer. Thus it is an exemplary means of foregrounding the challenges inherent to the intellectual's task of criticising the 'chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions' comprising common sense (in this case an artistic common sense) in order to instil 'a new common sense and with it a new culture and philosophy' (Gramsci, 1971, p.422, p.424). Consideration of Gramsci's position calls for the artist to recognise and reject the embedded politics of tastefulness that underpin a common sense in art production, since they contain its functioning within traditional social structuring. Gramsci identifies intellectual agency as having an organic function for political change, notwithstanding its discursive tensions – hence his specific concerns with the emancipation of labour. He worked for change through the institution of Factory Councils, attempting to cultivate grassroots mechanisms of democracy as part of 'a dynamic, democratic movement from below incompatible with any image of authoritarian control from above' (Femia, 1998, p.113 in Morton, 2007, p.210). This directional movement, requiring reformed relations of production, is fundamental to emancipation, which is contingent on action and thus cannot be achieved through the ethics of subject matter and the aesthetics of representation. Therefore the issues I shall address with Jaar's social interventions concern assumptions that subject matter and its representation substitute for action.

Here Freire's position on pedagogy (Freire, 1996) has practical relevance to art, since it clarifies what can separate artists from viewers, and therefore art from being a socially productive force. He identifies how equality is 'allowed' through means built upon inequalities — a banking concept of education where students are permitted agency as the recipients and depositories of education that thereby limits them to receiving and retaining lessons (Freire, 1996, p.53). This insight, which elucidates assumptions that art can be effective as a reformative force through subject matter as opposed to internal relational reform, enables us to see how a pedagogical mission can preserve its own autocracy even as it affects to offer freedom through a trickle-down act of enlightenment. Freire advocates an understanding where pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation (Freire, 1996, p.36). The 'good sense' of this position accords with Gramsci's philosophy of praxis that sees 'unity [as] given by the dialectical development of contradictions between man and matter' that entails 'educat(ing) the educator, (and) the social environment in general' (Gramsci, 1971, p.403). Applied to art, it therefore rejects the traditional understanding that art can work through subject matter and aesthetics for the enfranchisement of viewers.

I maintain that this traditional view underpins Jaar's *Gramsci Trilogy*, in which Jaar pays homage to Gramsci (and Pasolini) after a five-year period spent re-reading and reviewing their work:

Both believed in the capacity of art to *affect* society and to change the course of history. I think that these ideas are more important than ever, and this is what has prompted me to pay homage through my work to these two illuminating intellectuals. As soon as I received the invitation to work in Italy, I decided that I would focus on them and their work. While conceiving *The Gramsci Trilogy*, I was also evaluating how I was going to address the legacy of these key figures of our social history who have been shamefully neglected by contemporary Italian society. I wanted to draw attention to Gramsci's incisive concepts of the intellect—that is, an instrument for the organisation of human life (Jaar interview Tihonova, 2008; first emphasis added).

The trilogy, executed between 2004-5, combines image and text in five separate works exhibited across three Italian cities: a prologue: *Searching for Gramsci* (2004), *Infinite Cell* (2004), *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom* (2005), *The Ashes of Gramsci* (2005), and an epilogue: *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (2005). It was aimed at linking Italy's past with its present in order to draw attention to the continuing relevance of Gramsci's belief that social equality is to be achieved through workers' participation in shaping the conditions of their lives across all sectors. Thus the Gramscian issues involved in evaluating the trilogy's effectiveness concern the potential for reforming the relations of artistic production involving artist and viewer.

This principle directs a critical focus onto the prologue, *Searching for Gramsci*, which works visually as thirty-four photographs taken by Jaar, through present-day Rome, on a journey from Gramsci's grave to bridges across the Tiber. He stated its purpose was to make the connection obvious between the divisions that separated rich and poor, powerful and marginalised, and progressive and conservative factions of Fascist Italy of the 1930s, with contemporary society (Jaar interview Tihonova, 2008). Hence he begins the trilogy with the use of symbolism, thereby reinforcing the traditional relational dynamic between the artist and the viewer that paradoxically articulates the Italian problem in the art world. Here, we can see how the aesthetic model carries an elected ethical purpose.

I therefore contend that, from the outset, Jaar identifies his function as an artist through researching, making, displaying and finally directing attention to images as metaphors, while the viewers' function is to receive and reflect. His political intention was to provoke

discussion of a global cultural climate, reinforced by its Italian locations, where the Italians' passive accommodation of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's control of media in Italy was implicitly compared with Gramsci's resistance to Mussolini (Jaar interview Tihonova, 2008). However the prologue offers a paradigm of how visual metaphor within an ethical/political agenda of addressing cultural division sustains traditional artistic relations of production.

In the following piece, *Infinite Cell*, Jaar again used metaphor as a tool to encourage the viewers to confront their passivity in the face of global values of *having* rather than *being*. He identified his working method as one that orientates the work towards requiring the viewer 'to actively participate in the perception of the space and the work' (Jaar interview Tihonova, 2008; emphases added), thus identifying his intentions for the piece within Freire's 'banking model' of education. To this end, he initially confronted viewers of *Infinite Cell* with Mussolini's calculated cruelty in sentencing Gramsci to twenty years, four months, and five days, printing the figures on a red banner at the entrance to the *Infinite Cell*:

To amplify the evocative qualities of this work, I sought the most intense gradation of the red pigment, which was finally achieved by layering twenty-nine coats of the color. This surface never dries and one can still mark one's finger with the color red—the allegory of blood (Jaar interview Tihonova, 2008; emphasis added).

After this, viewers entered a reconstruction of a prison cell with only one light source from a barred window and a small door, designed to emphasise the small stature of Gramsci. Jaar lined the space with mirrors to create 'the emotions of claustrophobia and fear [that] overpower the spectator when encountered with a myriad of self-reflections. The intimidating continuity of this space is another metaphor for Gramsci's nearly half-life sentence' (Jaar interview Tihonova, 2008). Hence, in choosing drama as a tool, Jaar's purpose was to affect the viewers with an experience that was initially visceral and subsequently intellectual, causing them to reflect on how restrictions, softened by the consensual operation of hegemony, are cousins to the forces of coercion. Here, there is an elucidating comparison between Jaar's perception of educational function and Gramsci's. In accordance with his early training as an architect, Jaar stages the viewers' experience and invites critical understanding through an idea of aesthetic tastefulness embedded in political art and social practice, whereas Gramsci, working from his prison cell, *in partnership with other prisoners*, organised a prison university for the education of all, *including the educators* — a working paradigm of the organic intellectual. As Gramsci explains:



Fig. 26: Alfredo Jaar (2004) *Infinite Cell*

We have started a school, dividing it into various courses...designed to correspond to the background that the students have in those subjects, reducible to a certain basic set of concepts. Thus students in elementary courses attend the 'extra' history and geography lessons. We have tried to respond to the need for graduated scholastic levels, keeping in mind the fact that although some of the students are almost illiterate, they are intellectually developed (Gramsci, 1975, p.66).

Gramsci's project is multifaceted and importantly demonstrates how using the conditions in which the political prisoners found themselves, as the tools of change, drives action from prevailing conditions. The prison school therefore was grounded in an ethical need to seek ways of change. By contrast, *Infinite Cell* illustrates how artists, in this instance Jaar, apply ethical ideas to the project of art without seeking to challenge fundamentally the tools, institutions and structures of art; leaving the ethical assumptions embedded in art's traditional relations unchanged. For art to bridge the span separating Gramsci's prison project and political art projects calls for twice-politicised art, where the decision to make the work is driven by the need to overturn embedded assumptions that art's purpose lies in contemplation rather than engagement. Thus the political content is put to work as a tool to enable that process as well as to deliver a political message.

The problem of traditional relations within political art production persisted in the next part: *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom* (2004), where Jaar extended the frame of reference around the words of Mao Tse-Tung in the 1950s, when he invited intellectuals to freely express their thoughts and then inflicted terrible repressions on them when they took him at his word. While using the struggle of the one hundred flowers constantly exposed to blasting cold air

was an affective aesthetic metaphor for intellectual thought struggling to survive the onslaught of a hostile social/political environment, it further reinforced the trilogy's involvement with representation and viewing, rather than action in the field of relational reform. This position was sustained in *The Ashes of Gramsci* and *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. Indeed, the exhibition catalogue (Cecco in Jaar, 2005a) reiterates the conflation of ethics and aesthetics as political action:

The installation...unites the image of the explosion of a star contained — in an obviously futile gesture — in an iron structure which recalls the modern pavilions of the early 20th century...a contrast between the immense energy of those who never give up and modernist thinking, which in its most evolved form is translated into a perfect control system (Cecco in Jaar, 2005a).



Fig. 27: Alfredo Jaar (2004) *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom*

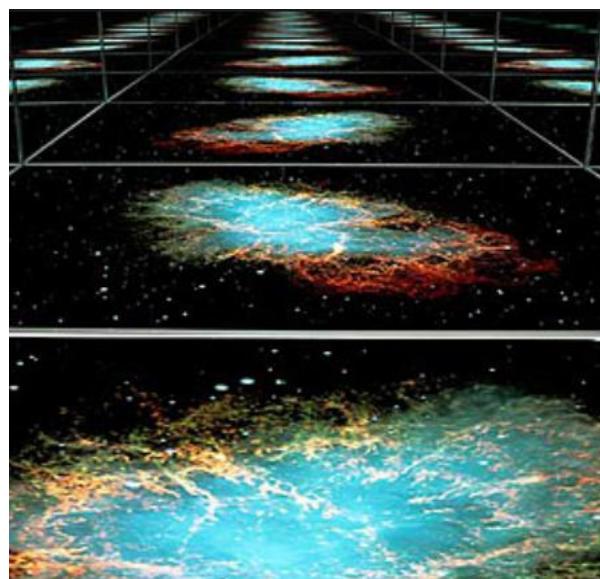


Fig. 28: Alfredo Jaar (2005) *The Ashes of Gramsci*

Finally the epilogue, staged as a projection on the façade of the Casa del Fascio, Como, which was designed as a set piece for mass Fascist rallies for Mussolini by Terragni, used a public arena as opposed to a gallery. Here, Jaar illuminated its façade with the strips of colour that appeared on television screens before a broadcast — the Berlusconi family having controlled Italy's top three national TV channels for more than thirty years. Between the strips, images of the cemetery where Gramsci was buried gradually focus on his tomb to make an explicit, visual link between past and present forms of dictatorship.

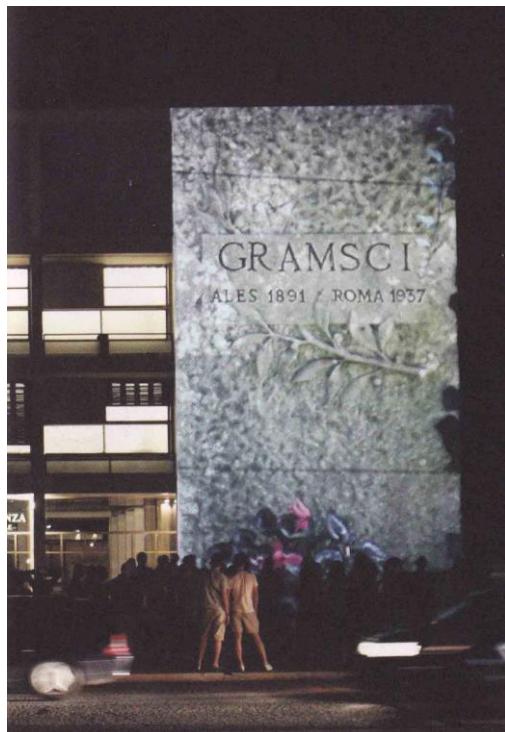


Fig. 29: Alfredo Jaar (2005) *The Aesthetics of Resistance*

Thus my concerns with *The Gramsci Trilogy* are not with Jaar's right to speak to the citizens of Rome, Milan and Como about the need for a Gramscian engagement with the apathy that permeated Berlusconi's Italy, but rather with the fundamental ethical problem that is deeply embedded in the aesthetics of tastefulness in political art and social practice which accepts engagement with representation and viewing as substitutes for action. By contrast, I argue that with *The Marx Lounge* (2010) Jaar is more involved with action than traditional representation.

7.3. 'The Marx Lounge'

Significantly, an issue that Jaar identified in an interview about *The Marx Lounge* (2010), concerning his social interventions, was the constant challenge of finding a balance between content and spectacle, acknowledging that he generally fails because his work is 'either too didactic or too beautiful' (Art Monthly, no. 342). However, during the fourteen weeks from July to October of *The Marx Lounge* in Liverpool, I maintain he worked in a more socially active way, largely outside his concerns to balance these two traditional values that circumscribe art's reformative social functioning, and more in sympathy with Gramsci's model of the prison university. *The Marx Lounge* offered a large room painted red, including a red carpet, with black sofas and a large 8x2m table offering 1,500 books by Marx as well as subsequent writers, theorists and philosophers available for reading by anyone.



Fig. 30: Alfredo Jaar (2010), *The Marx Lounge*, Liverpool Biennale

Jaar explained it was his response to 'a renewed interest in Marx because of the financial crisis', (Art Monthly, no. 342, p.1). Indeed, its siting in one of several large, empty stores in Liverpool's formerly thriving centre, underlined the pressures that have changed life and the opportunities for employment in cities like Liverpool that traditionally had serviced a predominantly working class population — the niche boutiques and Liverpool Tate being located in its dockside re-development. Thus a socially productive opportunity offered by the Liverpool biennial is that artists can communicate with many unversed in the vocabulary of

contemporary art (*Art Monthly*, no. 342, p.2), since unlike Venice, for example, Liverpool has a large working population living in the city. While this affords opportunities for artists to bridge the gap that traditionally separates a non art-public and the art world, it does not automatically mean that the art on offer will eschew traditional relations of artistic production. However, I maintain that with *The Marx Lounge* Jaar was more in tune with the Gramscian model of an organic intellectual and Benjamin's position on the author as producer (see Chapter 4).

The active dynamic of *The Marx Lounge* came from the open availability of Marxist texts and a space for absorbed reading. Therefore its '*beauty*' function offered comfort and tranquility for activity, thus foregrounding engagement with the discourses of the texts above visiting the lounge as an art site. The practical results of this, in Gramscian terms, situated *The Marx Lounge* as a preliminary to reformative action — the texts enabling a personal conception of reality in the ethical field before action in the field of politics proper.

Consciousness of being part of a hegemonic force (that is to say political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one. Thus the unity of theory and practice is not just a matter of mechanical fact, but part of the historical process, whose elementary and primitive phase is to be found in the sense of being 'different' and 'apart', in an instinctive feeling of independence, and which progresses to the level of a single, coherent conception of the world (Gramsci, 1971, p.333).

My afternoon in *The Marx Lounge* supported this view, as visitors read in a comfortable space conducive to attentive reading, that situated the intervention within an intellectual revolution that Jaar identified as having, over several decades, been gaining momentum in response to the excesses and deprivations of global capitalism (over and above the communities). By offering hundreds of books by and about Marx, plus others by political theorists and philosophers, it put new readers in touch with alternative ways of thinking about the world. As an educational project, *The Marx Lounge* worked '*with* the oppressed in the process of organizing them' (Freire, 1996, p.36; emphasis in original) through connected economic and educational strategies. It responded to the stringent funding cuts to UK education, by gifting one of the three copies of each text to the Free University of Liverpool — the other two sets were donated to underfunded libraries in marginalised communities. The Free University of Liverpool was set up by Gary Anderson and other politicised workers, as a programme of radical, creative self-education and viral interventions, protesting that Higher Education is a right for all not a privilege for the few. It closed on Sunday 27th

October 2013. In further involvement with the project Jaar organised a series of public discussions in the form of encounters between a political theorist, someone from the art world and an audience. Jaar chaired the one I attended (Fig. 31), between Professor David Harvey and the Zagreb based curatorial collective *WHW* (What, How, and for Whom?) — a forum for discussing both social action and the role art can play in such action. As visitors to the lounge and/or the discussions, we had access to a huge body of knowledge and discussion on how to use it. I therefore maintain that this intervention acknowledged and worked with the dilemma that faces reformative work in the cultural field, which is how art can be transformative of and for the subject who engages with it.



Fig. 31: Alfredo Jaar, Professor David Harvey and *WHW*, 12/11/2010

7.4. An impossible place for artist and viewer

A problem that is particularly relevant to art as social intervention, is the perception, identified by Benjamin, of the artist (qua intellectual) as an 'ideological patron' (Benjamin, 2005, p.773). Benjamin argues that 'the place of the intellectual in the class struggle can only be identified...on the basis of his position in the process of production' (Benjamin, 2005, p.773). Furthermore, Gramsci argues for 'an organic quality of thought [manifesting] the same unity between intellectuals and the simple as there should be between theory and practice' (Gramsci, 1971, p.330). Thus Benjamin and Gramsci highlight the dynamic that renders art vulnerable to a social pathology and argue that the conditions for its operative health are grounded in reforming the relations of its own production. Therefore, the concern I bring to Jaar's other social interventions is not with his right to represent communities, but with the

more embedded ethical problem of traditional relations within artistic production. Below, I consider works which paralleled those discussed in the previous chapter.

Jaar's multimedia installation *Two or Three Things I Imagine About Them* (1992), staged at the Whitechapel Gallery, is a good example of a case of the relational problem of art production being clouded by the pedagogical ethic of representation. Here Jaar, who was 'invited to make a site specific work' at Whitechapel, 'decided to produce a piece about' the Bangladeshi community that had settled in the area (Kester, 2004, pp.148-51). Its final form was a multi-media installation that focused on the cultural and economic conditions of Bangladeshi workers. Initially, part of the installation used photographs that Jaar had commissioned of several of the young women workers, captioned with racist and sexist descriptions of them that were taken from an interview with an East Indian factory owner.

Grant Kester identified the subsequent problems of the intervention to concern issues with a commissioning pattern that enacts a double delegation/colonisation. This proceeded first via the funding institute that '*invites artists* to make a site specific work', and secondly by the selection of a constituency to be represented where Jaar '*decided to produce a piece about...*'. Of course, had Jaar himself worked in conjunction with the women the political dynamic would have been substantively different. Paradoxically, however, while wanting to make art that protested against sexism and racism the outcome was that he repeated, within the art and gallery contexts, the patriarchal attitudes that he had set out to criticise. Kester, who believes in art's social and political work, therefore had issues not with the project's aims, but the patriarchal operation of the gallery that Jaar neither addressed nor worked to overturn. Thus, as identified earlier in this chapter in the comparison of Gramsci's prison school with Jaar's *Infinite Cell*, the focus, (here of Kester's argument) is on the politics outside art rather than the internal politics of art.

Kester makes the valid point that collaborative art projects can be 'centred on an exchange between an artist (who is viewed as creatively, intellectually, financially, and institutionally empowered) and a given subject who is defined a priori as in need of empowerment or access to creative / expressive skills' (Kester, 2004, p.137). This elucidates that Jaar's decision to represent a cohesive community needed sensitivity to its diasporic values and customs. It thus reinforces Kester's concerns with the rights to representation, rather than the embedded problems of representation in the relations of production. Here Kim Charnley (Charnley, 2011, p.47) notes that while Kester's ethic emphasises the role of the artist in socially engaged work it is nevertheless fraught with the risk of calling for democracy from a structure of social relations that enacts inequality. In its final, dramatic modification the

installation highlighted how representation is fundamentally seen as an aesthetic rather than a relational problem. However, this pitfall cannot be generalised as a sign of art's basic injustice, as this ethical formulation of the problem inhibits enquiry into the enigmatic quality of art's opposition to and complicity with power.

Had Jaar himself worked in conjunction with the women through reformed relations of artistic production rather than repeating the unreformed relations of production that they met in their factory work, the outcome would likely have been different. Nevertheless, Kester's focus is on the sensitivities surrounding representation rather than the relational politics of production. While noting that the type of community Jaar elected to represent enjoyed a cohesion that needed sensitivity to its diasporic values and customs, Kester's concerns were channelled into the rights to representation while the embedded problems of the artistic relations of production passed under the critical radar. In its final, dramatic modification the installation highlighted how representation is fundamentally seen as an aesthetic rather than a relational problem.

As noted above, Jaar opulently displayed commissioned photographs of young Bangladeshi women, captioned with racist and sexist descriptions of Bangladeshi women workers. Gayatri Spivak, the collaborator for the commission, raised concerns that were over-ridden by Jaar's confidence that its intentional irony (a form of dramatic critical metaphor) was inescapable and therefore inoffensive. However, the women the intervention represented visited the gallery before the exhibition opened and demanded the removal of the images and offensive comments, thereby demonstrating how the traditional art methods Jaar had used had fallen short of his intentions, because the ethical sedimentations within which the work was conceived obscured the first principle of relational co-production. At the time, Eddie Chambers, a British black artist and writer, in a revue for *Art Monthly*, (1992, pp.19-20) raised concerns on aesthetic grounds, where the opulence of the installation seemed at variance with the depredations suffered by those it purported to represent, and also with 'the more profound question of where the artist positions himself in relation to his *subject matter*' (emphasis added). Thus while the problems of the Whitechapel installation bring into focus different, valid political views of what such art undertakes, they underline the thesis' concerns that foundational inequalities in art's relations of production are obfuscated by more specific concerns. Of course, the two are not incompatible where the reformative relational project uses the political subject matter as a tool to redirect the viewers from contemplation to engagement.

Benjamin identifies the dilemma as whether we conceive of the intellectual as 'a type of

person defined by his opinions, attitudes, or dispositions' or by 'his position in the relations of production' (Benjamin, 2005, p.773). Thus in the following analyses of Jaar's social interventions I evaluate how he situates himself in relation to Benjamin's 'impossible place' of 'benefactor or ideological patron' (Benjamin, 2005, p.773). As Leslie observes in reference to 'The Author as Producer', 'the question of politics in artworks is not one of the political authority of an artwork's content...[but] rather a prescribed operative form as revolutionary technical procedure that interrogates the artwork's quality as a learning model for workers' (Leslie, 2000, p.95). Thus the task for artists who want art to intervene in established common sense is to avoid the place of an artist's executive power that Marx warns 'subjugates the commonweal to its own autocratic will' (Marx, 1852, p.106).

This understanding therefore contests claims, such as Nancy Princenthal's, that a reformative political traction in many of Jaar's public interventions stems from his 'vocabulary [that] relies in a large part on strategies of reversal' (Princenthal, 2005, p.13). In the case of *Camera Lucida* (1996), this reversal concerned the involvement of the community in a project to which they vociferously objected. Here, Jaar designed a commission for the opening of a new art museum in a poor neighbourhood in Caracas, Venezuela, where he aimed to demonstrate that the untutored viewer could find a place in the art gallery. This was in the face of local opposition to using public money to build a new art museum when they had wanted a new soccer stadium. His response was to distribute one thousand disposable cameras via various local organisations to participants who could choose a print for display from the many they had taken, to form part of the inaugural exhibition. Hence a view that *Camera Lucida* had created:

a warmly embracing communicative circle...in one sense [it was] an exercise in self-reflection (and wholly justified as such for people with scant opportunity for personal expression, [it] also created a radical opening to an institution — the contemporary art world — that is often perceived as impenetrably closed (Princenthal, 2005, p.20).

Of course, a local football stadium would also have afforded wide-reaching opportunities for personal expression in a community setting, although not as traditionally conceived art. Hence, as social intervention *Camera Lucida* worked an ethical/aesthetic value that was anchored in traditional perceptions of art, whence the identified strategy of reversal served to literalise inclusion without reforming the artistic relations of production. Thus I contend that it affirmed the misconceptions that separate artist from viewer (whatever their class), inviting outsiders inside, and thus reinforcing the disabling value of aesthetic tastefulness as a politicising force in social art practice.



Fig. 32: Alfredo Jaar (1996) *Camera Lucida*

7.5. The level of action in social intervention

The problematic relations of art and community, evident in *Camera Lucida*, are argued from more relationally ethical positions by Miwon Kwon (2004) and Grant Kester (2004), who both focus on how social intervention art facilitates or represents the concept of community. They have common concerns relating to the social functioning of the artist and the expectations of what the art may achieve. Kwon argues that the market for such art has engendered the commissioned nomadic artist as a figure of international reputation who travels between sites and who finally ‘comes to approximate the “work” instead of the other way round as is commonly assumed (that is, the work as surrogate for the artist’ (Kwon, 2004, p.47), whence, as in the case of *Camera Lucida*, the community provides the artist with the subject of the art. For his part, Kester sees the artist as having the social function of facilitating conversation pieces where ‘it is possible to define oneself through solidarity with others while at the same time recognising the contingent nature of this identification’ (Kester, 2004, p.163). Thus, Kwon looks for a socially productive importance through a project’s relational sensitivity to community, arguing that it enables ‘local encounters [that can be turned] into long-term commitments and transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks’ (Kwon, 2004, p.166). Conversely, Kester argues for a dialogical interaction between artist and viewers that he sees as producing a locus of expressive meaning for groups that have struggled to define their political identity and interests prior to the process of collaborative production (Kester, 2004, p.161).

Thus, they understand the function of social art practice in specific relation to community and individual subjectivity, where the artist’s task is to facilitate enhanced communal experiences. By contrast, Gramsci maintains that it is an error to look only into ‘the distinctive nature of

intellectual activities rather in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities...have their place within the general complex of social relations' (Gramsci, 1971, p.8). With this in mind I now analyse a signature mark of Jaar's social intervention work — his strategy of asking questions, arguing that it embodies different roles and functions for Jaar and viewer in different commissions, sometimes meeting the concerns of Kwon and Kester and at others working more with a Gramscian purpose.

Jaar has established a strategy of using city street signs to display explicit or inferred questions, which are aimed at provoking passers to engage with important issues. He first used it in *SOH*, Santiago (1981), with the question *¿Es Usted Feliz?* (see Chapter 5). Later In Malmo city centre, Sweden (1994), he repeated 'Rwanda' eight times in stark black on white in illuminated advertising stations in the city thoroughfares (Fig. 34). For the Belfast Biennial (2008), as part of *Art, Media and Contested Space*, he presented 'Why' in white letters that filled the space of black billboards, while in the same year *Questions, Questions*, Milan (2008), posed a selection of fifteen questions, punctuated with bright pink question marks, on a series of white on black street signs, telephone boxes and buses.



Fig. 33: Alfredo Jaar (1981) *Es Usted Feliz*

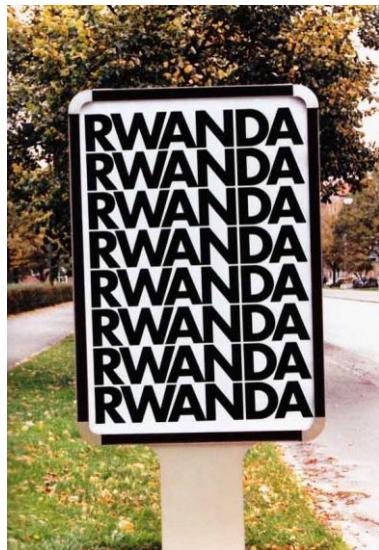


Fig. 34: Alfredo Jaar (1994) *Rwanda*



Fig. 35: Alfredo Jaar (2008) *Questions Questions*

Although the strategies appear identical, there are differences in the relational dynamic between Jaar and the viewer that these questions raise. Unpunctuated questions, as used in Malmo and Belfast, worked provocatively through enigma, while the use of a direct question in Santiago and Milan inferred a commonality of need to ask and to answer on both the part of the artist and the viewer. However there are further differences between the Malmo and Belfast interventions: the former, which confronted the international neglect of the Rwandan genocide and, by implication, the lack of knowledge of the passers-by, expressed Jaar's personal outrage at that international indifference, while the Belfast boards were specific to the long-standing Irish division. In both cases, however, the artist privileged subject matter over the relational dynamic with the viewer and implicitly used ignorance, apathy or collusion

as an aspect of its subject matter. Thus the boards operated an ethical aesthetic, expressive of the artist's position, which was defined in opposition to that of the viewer's.

This was less the case with the direct questions posed in Santiago and Milan, initially because the grammatical form carried an implied commonality of concern between artist and the addressee. Additionally, the questions were relevant to common experiences in Chile under Pinochet, and in Italy under Berlusconi, where there was a shared background of suppression of intellectual engagement with the regimes. Additionally, in Milan the questions such as 'Intellectuals are useless? Do politics need culture? Is culture politics? Does culture make Italy fly? Where is culture?' were also available in hard copy both inside and outside the museum of art; they could be answered on a website and they formed the basis for a symposium on the importance of contesting the common sense.

I therefore argue that taken as a series using the common strategy of the question, they related differently with their passing publics. Being sited in public spaces meant they reached beyond gallery visitors or selected community pockets, so as interventions, in this sense, they were socially inclusive in terms of viewers. Additionally, their purpose was to engage everyone in 'active participation' as a counter measure to "spontaneous" consent...to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group' (Gramsci, 1971, p.12). Through different means, the state was significantly directing people's responses to issues of freedom in Santiago, Belfast and Milan, which the interventions attempted to disrupt through the elaboration of the individual's political consciousness. Hence, consciousness *is* action since it already modifies the existing relations so that they 'take on a different aspect and importance' (Gramsci, 1971, p.353). Thus while the change that the individual can make is negligible, in combination with others and through the elaboration of their intellectual energies, 'the individual can be multiplied...and can obtain a change which is far more radical than at first sight ever seemed possible' (Gramsci, 1971, p.353). Importantly, however, the issue at stake with the Question interventions is not the subject matter but the extent to which Jaar engaged with action at the fundamental level of artistic relations of production, which is the 'difference between supplying a productive apparatus and its transformation' (Benjamin, 2005, p.774).

Jaar's ethical/pedagogical turn also neglected the relational dynamic in *Welcome to Canada* (1998) (Fig. 36), which accommodated the putative problem of Canadian immigration officials rejecting it as soon as it appeared. This predictably only reinforced its credentials as political rather than politicising art. It took the form of 100,000 leaflets of a pastiche of Canadian tourism brochures that Jaar designed for distribution at 'Arrivals' in the Mirabel Airport,

Montreal. Like *The Gift* it appears to be a single-issue campaign and highlights the inconsistencies of politicising artists working as political campaigners. In this form of work, the politics internal to art are neglected to the extent that the political *coup de theatre* is taken as an innovation in art's aesthetic means of expression. By contrast, for example, the art collective Liberate Tate explored the creative social role of art intervention for change, beginning with a movement for the Tate to adopt a more ethical approach to its relationships and sources of funding.

The Gift's red and white covers, which were emblazoned with the Canadian maple leaf, opened to reveal an apparently incongruous photograph of smiling Nigerian villagers. Jaar's aim was to indict the failures of the ostensibly magnanimous 'developed world' whose prosperity has its foundations in the colonisation of resources in less developed areas. Predictably, immigration officials immediately confiscated them on the grounds that they were confusing and unwelcoming to arrivals in Canada, and Jaar subsequently distributed the remainder, as political art objects, through a magazine published in Barcelona. However, the issue concerning Jaar's use of irony is that it reinforces the viewer/pupil experience, thus sustaining the distance between action and passivity attendant on traditional relations between artist and viewer. Particularly it problematic use of innovation is entangled in Jaar's attraction to spectacle and theatre where all the players involved are, in a sense scripted into constituent actors in a drama that incorporates hostilities, conservative attitudes to art and the validation of an art market for objects with political capital.



Fig. 36: Alfredo Jaar (1989) *Welcome to Canada*

Thus *Welcome to Canada*, in common with *Two or Three Things I Imagine About Them* (1992), and the Malmo and Belfast interventions, not only raise questions concerning ethical presumption in a work in which the artist tasks the viewer with making the links that duly educate and reform her, but they also articulate how the political aesthetic in subject matter and presentation obfuscates the relational dynamic that separates art from reformative social action.

Jaar also works directly, without irony, using art to initially evoke outrage and compassion, which he thereafter transmutes into action on the part of the viewer. Because the art results in action it can be misrecognised as socially reformative art practice, on the political/aesthetic ground that it produces measurable, practical, socially beneficial results. This is the case with *The Gift* (1998) and *Offering* (2000), which are both traditional in their use of objects and images as sources of visual affect, and therefore leave traditional relations of art production undisturbed. In these instances, the interventions raised money for NGO (Doctors without Borders) in Rwanda and North Korea; *The Gift* worked through the distribution of charity boxes which, as they carried a Jaar provenance, were also art, while *Offering* worked through the sale of the art object.

The Gift, as part of the Rwandan project, involved the production of 15,000 red cardboard charity boxes, offered at thirty-seven public places in Stockholm by volunteers from the Nobel Prize-winning NGO. They carried a sequence of four images of two African boys, taken from behind, whose embrace tightened as they apparently witnessed a horrific scene withheld from the viewer (Fig. 37). Of the two remaining panels one read: 'What did you expect? We can offer you the possibility of getting outside yourself. Please help someone. Please help Doctors Without Borders', while the other gave all necessary bank details of NGO. In its first year of circulation it raised more than \$200,000.



Fig. 37: Alfredo Jaar (1998) *The Gift*

Offering was made for the 2000 Biennial exhibition of international art in Kwangju, South Korea, and it was used to direct attention and financial aid to North Korea, where approximately three million people had died of starvation in the preceding decade. It entailed the production of 10,000 boxes of individual soaps, inscribed throughout (like seaside names in rock) with Korean characters spelling Offering (Fig. 38). These were displayed like market goods, on black blankets on exhibition hall floors, and sold for around \$10 each. All the proceeds went to World Vision, one of only six charities allowed to work in North Korea, which set up noodle factories to help employ and feed a population who, at the height of the famine in the 90s was reduced to eating soap — a local product.

In both interventions the artist took an executive role, directing the relations between the suffering subject and the viewer, and the poor country and the prosperous, where the art object produced reformative social action. Each intervention strategically muted the element of expressive initiative by using multiples of everyday object, charity collection boxes and soap, thus transposing the affective value of art as a form of visual, singular act into tangible outcomes of relief and support. Consequently, while the interventions activated viewers into charitable donation their position as viewers, and thus their relations with the artist as maker

remained unreformed — it was inevitable that the bars of soap became art objects in their own right as a limited edition linked to Jaar's name, making:

the transit from public to private without loss of...civic function...additionally Jaar observed that Westerners, interested in art, often asked him to sign the soap bars they purchased; that was seldom true of Koreans, who were concerned above all with famine relief for the intended recipients (Princenthal, 2005, p.19).



Fig. 38: Alfredo Jaar (2000) *Offering*

While these reactions do not diminish the value of the aid raised, the understanding of 'civic function' emphasises the fundamentally ethical problem embedded in art's traditional relations of production, here mapped between the separation of artist as benefactor from the artist as Benjamin's producer.

7.6. Education versus inclusion

So far, I have argued my position on how art can work as a socially engaged, politicising force through focusing on the importance of understanding that art's potential in this field is incompatible with its historic position of elitism and object production. Accordingly, the following two analyses of *The Skoghall Konsthall*, Sweden (2000) and *Lights in the City*, Montreal (1999), articulate the comparative difference between a socially situated, aesthetic ethic that cannot establish the artist as active in the field of social reform, and art as a social intervention within its own relations of production. In accordance with Gramsci and Benjamin I understand social productivity as a relational concern that reshapes the social apparatus. Gramsci maps an educative politics from common sense to good sense at the individual and collective level which first entails criticising 'one's own conception of the world...to make it a

coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world' (Gramsci, 1971, p.324). For him the critical understanding of self takes place 'first in the ethical field and then in politics proper' (Gramsci, 1971, p.333), which mediates between the individual and social groups. As a result, if critical activity is to be effective it cannot remain at the individual level:

Creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual 'original' discoveries. It also, and most particularly means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their 'socialisation' as it were, and even making them the basis of virtual action, an element of co-ordination and intellectual and moral order (Gramsci, 1971, p.325).

To become politically effective, therefore, Gramsci maintains that the individual must be part of the whole, a precept that has significant implications for the artist's relations with the viewer and vice versa:

Philosophical activity is not to be conceived solely as the 'individual' elaboration of systemically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular 'mentality' and diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to become concretely — i.e. historically and socially — universal (Gramsci, 1971, p.348).

Additionally, Benjamin's argument for the revolutionary artist promotes him as a betrayer of his class origins through 'conduct that transforms him from a supplier of the productive apparatus into engineer...a mediating activity [that] frees the intellectual from the purely destructive task to which...many of his comrades believe it necessary to confine him' (Benjamin, 2007, pp.237-8). The apparatus is something to be *used* rather than *consumed*, and thereby radically reforms the agency of the viewer. Leslie argues that Benjamin 'attempts to understand not just how art relates to the world of production but how it is itself a form of production' (Leslie, 2000, p.98). Thus Benjamin looks to the function the work has within the relations of its own production where his concerns are with their technique:

In bringing up technique I have named the concept that makes...products directly accessible to a social, and therefore materialist analysis. At the same time the concept of technique provides the dialectical starting point from which the unfruitful antithesis of form and content can be surpassed (Benjamin, 2007, p.222).

The following analyses complete the argument which has animated this chapter, i.e. that

there is an embedded ethical problem in art that pictures politics. This, I maintain, is usefully illustrated by Jaar's intervention *The Skoghall Konsthall*, where the citizens' concerted resistance to his initial proposal for a cultural centre should not be viewed as an embedded act of philistinism but a genuine objection to becoming an ethnographic site without a voice in the commission (compare and contrast the below analysis with Mouffe's more one-dimensional view, as discussed in Chapter 1). They had much in common with those involved in *Camera Lucida*, but brought more pressure to bear on the commissioning body and the artist, than had been the case four years earlier in Caracas. The Skoghall people cohered as a form of relational catalyst that required Jaar to suspend his designs for an aesthetically sophisticated *product* in the form of an art centre. Indeed, what he said about it in retrospect shows the confidence of traditional, artistic authority and aesthetic values that the townsfolk had needed to contest, not least the authority Jaar awarded to himself regarding the supply and withdrawal of his art:

I was shocked to discover that a community could exist for thirty years without any visible cultural or exhibition space...I found it hard to believe that people could live without the intellectual and critical stimulus that visual art can provide to question, to speculate, and to search...I wanted to offer a glimpse of what contemporary art is and what it can do in a community. Then by 'disappearing' it in such a spectacular way, I hoped to reveal its absence (Garzon, 2011).

Skoghall had a secure and tight-knit population of 80,000 that revolved around the local paper mill, as its primary source of employment. Thus, in response to initial resistance to the idea of a cultural centre, Jaar turned from the municipal funding that had initiated the commission and sought support from the local paper mill, which was so important to everyone. With its assistance, and using a municipal site, he designed a temporary museum: 6x8x20 m, entirely from paper and timber sourced from the mill (Fig. 39). For one day it housed a wide range of projects by fifteen Swedish artists, many involving audience participation and all relating in one way or another to locally produced paper with many referencing the processes and discussions entailed by the project. After one day, as advertised, it was spectacularly set alight by the fire brigade who thereby ratified the gesture and recuperated it as a civic project that many gathered to witness (Fig. 39).

The intervention is conventionally judged as successful on the grounds that it prompted the townsfolk, some years later, to ask Jaar to design a permanent art centre in Skoghall. The outcomes were, in fact, less clear-cut. While many objected to seeing paper and wood, the mainstays of their lives, set on fire for the sake of art; some appealed to have the building

reprieved for a longer time, while others objected to funding being spent on art when it could have provided a play park. Furthermore, Jaar's strategy of demonstrating the advantages of an arts centre for only one day and then destroying it as theatrical performance focuses on art as an object rather than a politicising force. Although he subsequently designed a playground for free, as with his design for a permanent Konsthall, neither project was realised. Thus *The Skoghall Konsthall* effectively illustrates the embedded nature of the ethical problems within traditional relations of artistic production.



Fig. 39: Alfredo Jaar (2000) *The Skoghall Konsthall*

Notwithstanding the above, it is worth noting that the project did accommodate an element of reform initiated by the townsfolk. Although Jaar's initial proposal conformed to Kwon's observations that nomadic artist practice is grounded in the conviction that art provides social and intellectual enrichment and therefore an enfranchisement that validates the intervention of intellectual, patrician sagacity (Kwon, 2004, pp.46-7), the people's vociferous opposition modified the proposal. To that extent, Jaar's construction and destruction of the paper

museum as the motivating act of persuasion accommodated a partial change of the relational dynamic. Additionally, the later desire to have a permanent centre (acknowledging Jaar's contribution by inviting him as architect to the project) came from the community.

Therefore I contend that there was a trajectory from pedagogy to participation in *The Skoghall Konsthall* that privileged social process over product. More impressive than the final *coup de theatre* – which would normally be the focus of attention – was the fact that the uninvited intervention of the community, in their initial act of rejection, proved to be a major, creative component of the final intervention. It articulated how a cultural centre is an essentially conceptual space approved, and thus owned, by the people for creative and constructive activity — and is only rendered visible in construction materials. Thus, rather than measure the success of the intervention by the community's later request for a cultural centre, I propose that its value came from the people's insistence on being part of the process. Their struggle stands as a measurement of the traditional power of the art world, and I contend that the social value of the intervention is that it illuminates the people's right to co-production in the cultural empowerment of their community, which in my view exceeds the significance of their final desire for a Konsthall.

Jaar used spectacle again in '*Lights in the City*', but here its operation differed in its inception. It was shaped by consultation and materialised through interactivity, whilst additionally it aspired to produce social agency from the act of viewing, educating viewers to adopt a more egalitarian set of conditions for ceding recognisability to socially excluded people. The intervention was developed through dialogue with the homeless in Montreal, one of the wealthiest cities in Canada, where in a total population of about three and a quarter million there was a local homeless population of 15,000. Its agreed aims were to render homelessness visible and thus provoke social action by expanding media engagement with resolving the problems of homelessness. Finally it aspired to bring about the provision of enough shelters for the homeless in Montreal to solve the problem of homelessness. It thus seems aligned with *The Gift* and *Offering* in its intentions of support but differs from them in the shared work of the artist and the homeless. Thus, though less practically successful since it did not raise money, it was relationally successful in its inception and its realisation.

Lights in the City made use of the Marche Bonsecours, a building that now houses galleries and shops but was formerly the Canadian Parliament building; it is sited in Montreal's historic centre and its cupola is a visible landmark. By seeking to represent the homeless without violating their privacy Jaar, in consultation with them, evolved a strategy which displayed the following text at the entrance to each night shelter: 'This artistic intervention aims to inform

people of your presence. While respecting your dignity and privacy, it transforms the cupola into a danger sign.' It pointed to a button, which when pressed briefly turned on a 100,000 watt battery of red lights in the cupola — what Jaar described as 'anonymous photography' (Jaar, quoted in Princenthal, 2005, p.23). It ran for six weeks before the mayor ruled that it be halted.

The results were largely dominated by how the media responded. Contrary to the strategy of the installation to represent an invisible problem through absent imaging, the media focus was not on homelessness but the homeless (giving some of them temporary star status). Their combined hopes had been that the intervention would effect a material difference in the lives of the homeless:

Eventually all the shelters for homeless people in Montreal could be wired and connected to the cupola. This way a major landmark and historical monument in the city would be acting as a non-stop lighthouse, producing endless, painful distress signals to society. With enough media coverage and public outrage and support triggered by these on-going distress signals, homelessness could be eradicated from Montreal (Jaar, 1999, quoted in Robbins, 2009, p.12).

Thus the intervention was a strategy to contest how the unequal set of conditions for recognisability, which circumscribes the homeless, ensures their unrecognisability as equal citizens of Montreal. Representing them through their absent presence, as agreed between Jaar and the homeless, accorded them equality and privacy in representation by withholding them visually. Furthermore it broadcast their social position as an ethically unacceptable strategy of differential framing, that was repeated every time a person chose to press the button and illuminate the night sky over most prosperous area of a very prosperous city with their ineluctable right to equal presence.

The social value of *Lights in the City* as art was achieved through the attention it paid to its co-producers, working with them to contest the functionalisms of the common sense regarding the relations between artist and viewer. As Eric Hobsbawm observed, forty years after Gramsci's death, the 'key to social transformation is the active and conscious participation of the people' because it will isolate exploiters and oppressors (Hobsbawm, in Sassoon, 1982, p.20). It was through its inception and realisation that it turned from art's traditional role as a specious form of intellectual enlightenment, where to produce art as a political object misunderstands the essential controlling politics behind object production, regardless of subject matter. This is how, in terms of social reality, unreformed art practice

actually holds the line against social reform. As a result, Jaar's work is of such significance because of the way in which it, to greater or lesser degrees, succeeds in overcoming these challenges, and sometimes not for the reasons which are immediately apparent (such as in Skoghall).

7.7. Conclusion

Drawing on the conclusions reached in the previous two chapters, this chapter has employed the Gramscian/Benjaminite criteria of assessment to uncover the broader social significance of how art as a political object can be distinguished from art as a socially engaged, politicising force, and the significance of this distinction. It has elucidated how subject matter, the aesthetics of taste, theatre, and community inclusion combine in constituting a problem for emancipatory social intervention that is difficult to recognise. It has identified how this problem is exacerbated by assumptions that social intervention art succeeds in being reformatively political through strategies of practical outcome, specific and innovative inclusion of communities for the duration of the work and affective theatricality. Additionally, it has noted how deferred practical benefits for the communities, whilst admirable, essentially are part of the same problem.

The Gramscian/Benjaminite perspective has foregrounded the most important area concerning the ethical problem embedded in art practice. It has distinguished between the artist's choice of political subjects that contest injustices and the politically sedimented ethics of how the artist works relationally with those s/he champions or represents. It has acknowledged how the ethical position the artist takes with reference to starvation in North Korea or Berlusconi's media control in Italy can obfuscate the more embedded un freedoms in unreformed art production.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the political implications of viewing and being viewed in terms of image-making and consumption, when transposed to socially sited interventions, do not concern the artist's right to represent the subject positions but rather the artist's place in the relations of production that the works involve. Thus the chapter elucidates that the artist's freedoms are as much circumscribed as those of the viewer and the viewed, since all can be entrapped in a system that fundamentally seeks to stabilise social relations rather than reform them.

Thus the real work of the Gramscian/Benjaminite approach has been to show precisely how the unreformed conceptualisation of political art works within art's traditional role, and how pervasive it can be. First, it uncovers the elitisms embedded in art's traditional intellectual

function. Secondly, in the context of Marxist art theory it highlights the imperative of interrogating the understanding of art's traditional productivity as an ethical problem unaffected by the subsidiary ethics of representation and subject matter. Thus Gramsci and Benjamin provide clear analyses of the part culture plays in the formation of agency and therefore the potential for artists and viewers, in coalition, to enfranchise their traditional social functionalism. It is the critical understanding that a Gramscian/Benjaminitite approach facilitates that maps how art can transcend stasis in its social agency, and the challenges inherent to attempts to do so – as shown throughout chapters 5-7, Alfredo Jaar is an artist whose output and practices are well-suited to exploring these complex challenges.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1. Summary of key arguments

The aim of this thesis has been to address what changes are necessary to the understanding and production of art that would enable its potential as a socially engaged, politicising force to be exploited effectively. The thesis has identified this as an embedded problem concerning the distinction between *political* art and *politicising* art. It has mapped the former in political object production and the latter in reform of art's relations of production. Throughout, it has emphasised the importance of this distinction in order to offer a more nuanced account of art practices which are explicitly political in intent. Put simply, it has defined political art as having a reformist social agenda for viewing which remains *within* more traditional parameters for understanding and conceiving art's function. This often means an embrace of ideas, objects, performances, and images, and at times people and communities, all of which can be substituted for objects and conditions requiring representation. While frequently an advance on more conservative approaches to art (see chapters 2 and 3, and also chapters 6 and 7), political art inadvertently highlights the challenges inherent to attempts to exploit art's politicising potential. Ultimately, the thesis has argued that art's politicising potential must be understood within the broader social field and not within the possibilities for innovation in the forms taken by art; that is, for art to be politicising the focus, in theory and practice, needs to be on what art *does* rather than what art *is*.

The thesis has therefore distinguished its position from one that understands the artist as spokesperson for ideas, positions, injustices and the need for representation, which it has presented as a fundamental ethical problem in art practice. In the light of the problems that the early chapters identified, Chapter 4 detailed the case for returning to the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin and combining them in one framework to advance an understanding of art's social functionalisms and hence its transformative potential. The subsequent analyses of Alfredo Jaar's work in chapters 5-7 were structured through that framework. Jaar was an appropriate artist to examine in this respect, because he self-describes as a Gramscian and understands his work as political; hence, Jaar is an exemplary case for illustrating the potential of the framework advocated across the thesis, because he understands his practices to be in line with what the thesis takes to be the social and political potential of art. Therefore, the thesis offered analyses of his installations and interventions to elucidate how art can either service traditional hegemony in work that seeks

to operate as a counter-hegemonic force or contest it by mapping a path that reconfigures the relational dynamic of artist and viewer.

The first half of the thesis focused on a critical engagement with cultural theories and art criticism which have often been understood to offer more political and/or transformative understandings of art. It elucidated how such approaches logically have their focus on what is produced (the political art object) as opposed to reforming the relations of artistic production (the politicising force). The second half has applied the insights gained in the first half, in order to analyse thoroughly the work of Alfredo Jaar. These chapters critically engaged with Jaar's work across a range of years, works and forms, arguing that, while at times the work has embodied a politicising dynamic, more often than not the work has remained political and thus within more traditional understandings of art and of the artist. Moreover, as shown in Chapter 7 when discussing Skoghall, on occasion the politicising dynamic emerged via the unanticipated responses of the community and not through Jaar's own initiative. To be clear, the thesis has not sought to polemically critique Jaar; more to point out that his work sometimes fell short of the ideals he articulates for his practices, and thus to forefront the challenges inherent to transforming more traditional artistic relations of production. In doing so, these chapters further demonstrated the advantages of the framework, outlined primarily in Chapter 4 and advocated across the thesis, by offering a more nuanced analysis of Jaar's practices than would be possible with the frameworks critically discussed in chapters 1-3.

The rest of this chapter will go into more detail about the thesis' key arguments. It will then discuss possible areas of future research on the themes explored in the previous chapters, before concluding.

8.2. Art's political, rather than politicising, function

Chapter 1 put forward six subsidiary research questions to the main question asking how art can be conceived and practised as a socially engaged, politicising force. The first two subsidiary questions, principally covering chapters 1-3, were:

- i. How is art's function conceived in both mainstream and critical contributions? What do these have in common and where do they differ?
- ii. What problems are caused by the commonalities shared across seemingly different understandings of art's function? How do they affect how art could contribute to social and political change?

8.2.1. Mouffe and Rancière on art and politics

In response to the questions, Chapter 1 sought to identify and discuss fundamental themes pertaining to questions of art's political or politicising function, with recourse to two highly influential theorists (Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière) who have also critically engaged with Jaar's work. Although they work from different starting points and theoretical premises, what has stood out is that they have conjoined in a rejection of the significance of class for a study and critique of society. Their relevance for the thesis has therefore been one of articulating the current robustness of an understanding of art's function and its potential political role as discursive, one that is elaborated through the established traditions of affective imaging and adversarial positioning. Thus the chapter introduced the fundamental ethical problem within art practice of picturing politics that the thesis has elaborated upon.

The chapter's ensuing critique of Mouffe's position on art's counter-hegemonic agency elucidates the paradox that on the one hand it argues that the formation of subjectivities is an on-going process of identification, yet on the other hand it looks to how art can articulate that position through representation. The chapter identified a similar paradox in Rancière's arguments for political art, that position him against elitisms in the reception of art yet neglect the more functionally repressive elitisms in art's relations of production (as shown in their discussion of Jaar's work compared to the analysis that I offer in the thesis). Thus, the opening chapter introduced the thesis' position on art's embedded social functionalisms and how reformatory theories and critiques can sustain (intentionally or not) an essentially traditional understanding of art. The main points to have arisen from Chapter 1 therefore revolved around the ethics of representation. It introduced the thesis' position that reform within the relations of production in the art world will establish autonomy for art that many artists, viewers and theorists assume already exists. The chapter's final brief outline of the Gramscian/Benamini framework (covered in detail in Chapter 4) clarified the limitations inherent to the approaches taken by Mouffe and Rancière, and how the thesis will seek to overcome them.

8.2.2. Problems concerning formalism

Chapter 2 further developed the position staked out across the thesis, this time with regard to dominant forms of art criticism in the 20th century. Principally, it argued that formalist means of expression and innovation are traditionally misinterpreted as operating a new, reformatory agency for art. It therefore analysed how that view was developed and reinforced in the 20th century, by focusing on how art's engagement with political and social concerns has been reinforced explicitly and implicitly by critics and art historians, firstly in reference to American abstraction and secondly to new social movements in art production.

Chapter 2 emphasised three key points of immediate relevance to the thesis. The first, already stated in Chapter 1 but expanded and reinforced here, was the assumption that art's political force comes from how it is used rather than in the relational field through which it has been produced. Strengthening this focus required the chapter to analyse how social and political values are embedded in traditional notions of authorship. Secondly, it elucidated how the close alliance between art, art history and art criticism has made it difficult to think about and engage with art in a socially productive and thus politicising way. Thirdly, it reasoned that the struggle for art's social engagement as a politicising force is unlikely to be achieved by expanding the inclusion of formerly marginalised artists and techniques to the canon, despite the advances such inclusions offer. Hence, it established that what needs to be contested is the embedded authority and values of the canon, not how the canon is constituted.

The first key point applied specifically to how the original purpose of Clement Greenberg's concerns with the function of avant-garde art, vis à vis kitsch, was recuperated into formalist values. Greenberg's distinction was aimed at contesting the political use of populist, realist art as a means of engineering a sense of mass social cohesion for use by repressive European regimes. However, its importance to the thesis is that it taught the 'value of functionlessness without the stain of the function of functionlessness. That is, you have to be alert to the social functions of kitsch and Socialist Realism and blind to the social function of autonomous art' (Freee Art Collective, 2008, p.8). The second point elucidated the thesis' argument on how the institutions of art history and criticism combine to reinforce the embedded ethic of tastefulness that requires viewers who receive, as opposed to co-workers who help produce. It therefore reinforced the thesis' position that art's intellectual engagement with social and political issues and the viewer's intellectual engagement with art have been conceptualised within formalist values that obscure their ideological functionalism.

The third concern summarised contemporary evaluations of a seminal feminist installation by Judy Chicago. It provided a detailed examination of how Chicago centre-staged feminist politics, expanded formalist expression from established genres into domestic craft, and also made inroads into the embedded authority and values of the traditional art canon. On the other hand, it also noted that while Chicago eschewed the aesthetic sensibilities that the recuperation of Greenberg's concerns had reinforced and subverted the formalist parameters of who could make art and how it could be made, she did not ultimately transcend the Greenbergian legacy because she paradoxically challenged formalism by expanding formalist parameters. As such, the discussion of Chicago is the first window into the subsequent discussions of art theory and practice which were explicitly predicated upon

challenging the mainstream, yet did so in a way that left intact certain, key assumptions about art's function.

8.2.3. The potentials and limitations of the Barthesian inheritance

In order to give a fuller account of the difficulties embedded in the assumptions reinforced by the Greenbergian legacy, the work of Chapter 3 was to unravel some of the contradictions inherent in critical engagements with the legacies of Modernism. It used the work of the Art & Language collective as its point of reference, after having first contextualised the concerns with the closures inherent in authorship that were introduced by Barthes in 'The Death of the Author'. The chapter brought together the importance of Barthes' contribution to destabilising assumptions about the production and consumption of art; the limitations inherent in his separation of the author and viewer functions; and how Art & Language formed its practice around addressing these problems, as preparation for Chapter 4's contribution of the Gramsci/Benjamin framework that is then utilised in the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 3 reasoned that centring practice around contesting Modernism's formalist aesthetics and its focus on the individual artist as producer, inevitably engages with the essentials of Modernism's self-reflection on the means of its own production. Thus the chapter argued that Art & Language's dematerialisation of art into collective, author-centric discourse in the indexing strategy, and the interrogations of the aesthetic values placed on expressive, gestural painting in the painting by the mouth strategy, acknowledged the viewer as only a nominal presence. Hence, paradoxically, while working to release art from the tyrant reign of the author, and the viewer from the elitisms of aesthetically tutored sensibilities, both Barthes and Art & Language focused heavily on formalist innovation rather than more substantive questions of transformation. While acknowledging their important contributions in bringing problems of authorship and aesthetics centre-stage in post-Greenbergian theorising and practices, the chapter argued that the strategy of allowing the viewer access to the group's internal processes, after the event, did not contest the essential social divisions embedded in art's relations of production, but rather sustained separate functions for artists and viewers under the new conditions of conceptual art practices. This then set the scene for the outlining of the thesis' framework for understanding art's social and political potential in Chapter 4.

8.3. Gramsci's and Benjamin's contributions

Chapter 4 expounded the key conceptual contribution of combining Gramsci and Benjamin's concerns with enabling people's agency in social production. It is the heart of the thesis and has directed the way in which the research questions have been addressed. Hence, in

addition to the brief overview in Chapter 1, Chapter 4's discussion addressed the following two subsidiary research questions:

- iii. In what ways does a return to the writings of Gramsci and Benjamin, and their combination in one framework, advance our understandings of art's function and thus of how it could contribute to social and political change?
- iv. How does this framework enable us to analyse the practice of artists who explicitly self-identify as socially and politically engaged?

Initially, Chapter 4 recognised key contributions by Marxist scholars on art's potential for reformative agency, before covering key enriching concepts from Gramsci and Benjamin. This was necessary, because such scholars demonstrate that there is an existing acknowledgement of the need to move beyond the approaches discussed in chapters 1-3. However, it was not sufficient either, because Gramsci and Benjamin's focus on societal transformation makes it possible to connect more effectively art-specific themes with wider social and political questions.

Starting with Gramsci, the chapter elucidated how power, operating through all the facets of culture, from the production through to the consumption of its products, has governed the agencies of those involved and thus, in the thesis' terms of reference, the agencies of the artist and the viewer. Working with Gramsci therefore clarified how one can understand art as a political or a politicising force, and brought the cohort of artist/art object/viewer into focus as one of culture's constituent bodies, which in turn helps to rebut the understanding of art as isolated from other aspects of the social world. Moreover, Gramsci's nuanced understanding of hegemony must drive any reformative work that art undertakes. Hence, this chapter's work on his recognition of how hegemony establishes and exploits embedded alliances between bourgeois intellectuals and the masses directed the aims of later chapters, in framing how conceptions and misconceptions that concern art as a political object as opposed to art as a politicising force are essentially matters of relational production rather than art-object production. This key point has highlighted the thesis' pivotal position that art's social functionalisms are grounded in the politics of division, and therefore can only be addressed through inclusivity.

Following hegemony, the chapter clarified the significance of Gramsci's key strategy of working from an inventory that excavates the complex of relational forces enabling hegemonic power. The method of the Gramscian inventory opens up the possibilities to disentangle parts of the web of influences, values, and traditions that have embedded the

art-specific ‘common sense’ critiqued in chapters 1-3. In line with Gramsci’s directions, the thesis elucidated how this ‘art common sense’ is not simply a set of ideas imposed upon people but rather social cement that has bound disparate elements together into a coherent ensemble that appears natural and objective. The Gramscian approach of contesting common sense by inventorying its origins and influence has clarified how understanding art as a free expression of independently elected values has embedded functionalisms cementing a socially circumscribing agency for traditional art.

The chapter also covered how a Gramscian coalition between the artist’s function as a traditional intellectual and the combined functions of artists and viewers as organic intellectuals establishes relational cohesion as an alternative possibility to the traditional class structures that dominate art. It thus recognised the ambition of the enterprise that, following Gramsci, has to be waged over an extensive period of time, i.e. as an ongoing war of position. Through the later chapters on Jaar, a Gramscian ‘art’ war of position demonstrates that a struggle over meanings and values in art involves concerns with the authorial genesis of art projects that have been designed to transform the relations between the artist and the viewer. As such, Chapter 4 specifically identified how concealed power relations operating through taste and expertise have historically functioned as effective forces in policing the boundaries between classes. Gramsci helps us demystify and unmask how traditional intellectual values universalise and naturalise the production and consumption of art, *apparently* outside the material concerns of social construction.

Benjamin’s concerns with the political dynamics of representation have enriched the thesis’ utilisation of Gramsci’s writings. Chapter 4 elucidated his arguments on representation in relation to how art has been colonised by specific political agendas, which in Benjamin’s case concerned the appropriation of the representation of the people by the forces of Fascism in Europe. Like Gramsci, Benjamin had first-hand experience of how it peddled an illusion of freedom while circumscribing basic liberties. For the purposes of the thesis, Benjamin’s focus enriches Gramsci’s by being directed specifically towards art’s role as a political functionary, for good or for ill. Chapter 4 covered two of Benjamin’s most important arguments: how art can intervene practically in the strategic dominance of the cultural apparatus; and the emancipation possibilities immanent to technological innovation on the grounds that it subverts the aesthetic and social privileges that attend to art’s aura. Bringing Benjamin into alliance with Gramsci strengthens the thesis’ framework in terms of how it critiques and reconstructs art’s reformatory social functioning. Benjamin has argued that realising art’s potential for emancipating people from values that exploit their agency and freedom is contingent upon reforming the artistic relations of production, which he saw as

having historically channelled the divided agencies of artist and viewer into sustaining the stability of wider social divisions. Hence, Benjamin enables us to understand art's social agency within the wider parameters of general production and consumption.

This means that Benjamin in coalition with Gramsci makes possible a decisive rebuttal of traditional views that art can exist in a discrete cultural world, and that avant-garde art consists in innovative formalist production. This has been a reinforcing factor of the thesis' arguments on avant-garde art and conceptual art in chapters two and three and has directed my analysis in the chapters on Jaar's art. One of Benjamin's enduring legacies has been an understanding of the revolutionary potential of art, and the chapter has elucidated how his argument that art object production is reactionary in both its concepts and its consequences has reinforced the need to address the relations between the artist and the viewer as the site where art reform takes place.

The chapter also underlined the force of Benjamin's argument for the central importance of the viewer's agency in contesting Fascism's appropriation of film and photography as controlling forms of imaging. His theorising on photography and aura presented strategic, art-based challenges to Fascist regimes' use of film and photography in embedding an ersatz representation of the people with the purpose of withholding their right to political representation and agency. Benjamin's importance to our understanding of the political force in all forms of imaging has informed the work of Chapter 6 on the challenges inherent to how mediatic images can be withheld or used for purposes that control how and what is represented. While Benjamin specifically focused on Fascism's use of aura in the cult of the leader, in traditional art-specific terms he identified photography's problematic standing between the studio and the workshop.

This, in turn, led the chapter to consider Benjamin's writings on the author as a producer. His understanding of the author's work has not been that it produces objects for contemplation, but that it potentially puts an improved apparatus at the disposal of a greater number of producers. In this way, he mapped the path for art to intervene practically in the strategic dominance of the cultural apparatus. Benjamin's position has thus defined art through its socially productive intervention as opposed to its traditional role of producing cultural objects for consumption, a distinction that has reinforced and amplified the thesis' position that art production is a class-based site of conflict. Thus, in alliance with Gramsci, the thesis has used Benjamin's reappraisal of the work of the intellectual from one who supplies the traditional apparatus, to one who engineers its social production. His subsequent separation of political tendency from revolutionary tendency has resonated in the thesis' division of the

political art object, that embodies the artist's solidarity with subjectivities and conditions that have been chosen for representation, from the socially engaged, politicising force of art that is grounded in equality in the relations of production.

Finally, Benjamin's identification of the ethical problems with the author has particularly underwritten Chapter 7's discussions of Jaar's public interventions. For example, with *Camera Lucida* the people's opposition to a proposed art gallery provided Jaar with a social, art-focused ethic for reinforcing traditional art's aesthetic preoccupations as well as its conviction about art's ameliorative effect on the viewer. As the thesis' analysis has argued, the class divisions historically reinforced by the artist/viewer divide are further embedded in actions that appear to be inclusive yet are nevertheless grounded in the necessities of exclusion. Moreover, the thesis' work across the chapters has been informed by Benjamin's claim in this paper that non-artists' inclusion in production (enabled by technological advances) would do away with the authority embedded in concepts such as creativity, genius, eternal value and mystery. Both Benjamin and Gramsci teach the importance of the cultural apparatus in sustaining class divisions and therefore its potential to reform them. The work of Chapter 4 was therefore to outline their importance in elucidating how art can engage in a counter-hegemonic war of position. As such, it prepared the ground for chapters 5-7, which sought to address the final two subsidiary questions covered by the thesis:

- v. What does this framework reveal about Jaar's art practice, both its potentials and its limitations?
- vi. What does this framework reveal about Jaar's self-identification as socially and politically engaged, both its potentials and its limitations?

8.4. Jaar's political and politicising art

Chapter 5 mapped the enduring relevance of understanding art as part of the social, cultural and political contexts of its production in terms of Jaar's early work. In explaining the impact of the Chilean background to his choice to work as an artist, the chapter made use of the Gramscian strategy of making an inventory that was discussed in Chapter 4. It gave a summary account of the decades spanning Allessandri and Pinochet in order to provide an overview of the context to Jaar's emergence as an artist. It focused on the impact of the US across the spectrum of Chileans' lives. Its purpose here was two-fold: mapping Jaar's decision to work as a political artist in the repressions and brutalities that had undermined democratic systems of governance and muted usual forms of criticism; and presenting the forces faced by Chileans as an illustration of how peoples' freedom and agency for reform can be countermanded. In this way, the chapter brought into focus art's agency for or against

operative hegemonies. Moreover, in its analyses of Jaar's Chilean art it showed why some work has been effectively counter-hegemonic while more traditional forms of protest work have remained in the established parameters of traditional relations of art production. It thus enriched the thesis' arguments in Chapter 3 regarding the challenges inherent to attempts to move beyond rather than remain within art's traditional parameters.

The chapter's analyses of '*Studies on Happiness*' brought the Gramsci/Benjamin framework into full use, foregrounding how it worked with an inclusive relational dynamic. By the same token, its consideration of concurrent works, '*Telecommunicacion*', '*Andante Desesperato*' and '*Antes De Partir*' elucidated reasons for a relational shortfall in traditional protest work. The chapter thus synthesised issues raised in the broader discussion of the first three chapters concerning how formalist innovations (intentionally or not) obfuscate and recuperate the politically reformatory aims of artists, and return them to the embedded politics of traditional relations of production. The chapter thus outlined how the specifics of Jaar's Chilean works are instructive regarding the distinctions between the political art object, and art as a socially engaged, politicising force, within one artist's work.

Chapter 6 furthered the thesis' arguments concerning the challenges inherent to producing socially engaged art, within the specific contexts of an international art circuit exhibiting in galleries. From the thesis' analyses of problems inherent in representation, foregrounded in Jaar's Chilean work, it focused on how he has used photographic installations to address the pressing social problem of mediatic images of suffering. In this it also analysed the contingent agencies they inscribe for authors and viewers. The chapter therefore engaged with the *explicit* ethical agenda of such work. It reasoned that such an agenda is separate from the *implicit* ethical agenda embedded in art's traditional relations of production. Much theoretical work on photography has been concerned with the rights and wrongs of using images of suffering for ethical as well as commercial purposes in mainstream media, and Jaar has received acclaim for his art's engagement with some of these problems. The chapter therefore focused on issues that concern mediatic images in particular, and art in general. It also elucidated the ethical problem of using affectivity to orchestrate the response of the viewer. Finally it considered the ethical concern with how far the artist as pedagogue can instruct viewers without trespassing on their individual rights to freedom. As such, the chapter analysed Jaar's work in the light of these questions, with the purpose of elucidating the works' relevance to the wider aims of the thesis concerning art's functionalism in sustaining social divisions.

In Chapter 7, the thesis' substantive discussions concluded with analyses of Jaar's public interventions, which have helped earn him his international reputation on the global commissioning circuit. Its aim, in covering a range of different forms of work was to elucidate the complexities and challenges for artists to work effectively in the chosen field of socially engaged public interventions. Here the term 'intervention' presents the challenge of how it should be defined and enacted in practice. In this sense, a key concern of the thesis has been with how art *intervenes* in the embedded assumptions that seem constantly to recuperate its reformative intentions. This concluding chapter therefore has analysed the works as *interventions* in art's traditional relational dynamics between artist and viewer. What emerged has been enlightening. For example, comparing *Camera Lucida* with *The Skoghall Konsthall* has elucidated a class-based difference in the reactions of the two communities to very similar initial strategies of overriding their concerns in order to demonstrate the enrichments that art and art centres offer. Class is therefore of central concern to the thesis. Its Gramsci/Benjamin framework has foregrounded that the most important ethical concern in art practice lies in the reform of its traditional relations between artists and viewers. Indeed, this was the case to the extent that the chapter argued that Jaar's interventions sometimes produced more transformative possibilities than his original intentions for the works implied.

To return to Gramsci and Benjamin, the thesis has presented, across its chapters, the argument that 'the starting point for critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is...knowing thyself as a product of the historical process up to date which has deposited...an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory' (Gramsci, 1971, p.324), thus leading to the understanding that to be socially productive the place of the artist 'in the class struggle can be identified, or, better, chosen, only on the basis of his position in the process of production' (Benjamin, 2007, p.228). This not only offers a richer, more holistic approach to theorising art and discussing artistic practices, but it also enables us to develop more nuanced analyses of artworks which are presented as political and potentially transformative. Hence, Jaar's practices could be considered *both* political and politicising, depending on the work under consideration. While, overall, his work tended to be that of political rather than politicising art, the thesis makes it possible for us to avoid simplistic judgements when discussing artistic practices such as Jaar's.

8.5. Directions for further research

No thesis is able to cover all of the issues addressed in depth, and no thesis can discuss all potential aspects of the topic. Therefore, the thesis was necessarily limited in these respects. For instance, in seeking to provide an overarching discussion of art theories and criticism, along with related artistic practices, the thesis has not covered the full complexities of these

theories, criticisms and practices. For instance, Mark Hutchinson's objections to dominant understandings of avant-garde art (see Chapter 4) were not reflected fully in chapters 3 and especially 2. Moreover, while focusing on Gramsci and Benjamin the thesis did not discuss wider debates in the Marxist tradition on art's and culture's social and political potentials – for example, the contributions of Adorno. And finally, by centring chapters 5-7 on Jaar, the thesis did not consider contemporaries of Jaar whose work could also be considered as explicitly political in intent (such as members of the Brazilian Tropicália movement, for example Hélio Oiticica).

Nevertheless, it is my contention that the focus provided by the thesis has provided a strong foundation upon which further research could address themes such as those just outlined. Moreover, it is important to recall the research questions outlined at the start of Chapter 1 and reprised earlier in this chapter, which gave a particular scope and direction to the thesis. For example, Jaar has explicitly self-identified as a political artist informed by Gramsci, meaning that those in the Marxist tradition which foreground social and political possibilities were focused on, rather than those contributors who give less space to such potentials (such as Adorno, as was briefly mentioned in Chapter 4). Moreover, Jaar's work has been cited by two of the foremost scholars on the relationship between art, culture, politics and emancipation, Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière, meaning that the thesis could engage with an extant literature in order to make its original contribution. And finally, my consistent advocacy of a framework fit for evaluating artistic practices when considering their social and political potential means that contemporaries of Jaar could be analysed in a manner analogous to what is found in chapters 5-7 in this thesis.

Turning more centrally to future research, in the thesis I have identified and analysed two problematic issues that I plan to work on in future projects – the authorial and pedagogical function of the artist, and the ethical/aesthetic idea of tastefulness – that are embedded in political art and social practice. Moreover, in addition the thesis' analyses of Alfredo Jaar's installations and interventions, I plan to contribute a counter-balance critique to the body of work on Jaar's art that has been grounded in the understanding of political art rebutted in this thesis. In terms of future scholarship more generally, the thesis has opened up possibilities for researchers working on these themes to consider more closely: how radical artistic and cultural movements become co-opted into more traditional concerns and self-understandings, and possible strategies for dealing with this; the position of art within the Marxist tradition, not just in the 20th century but also in contemporary discussions of, for example, austerity and crisis in the present-day; the possibilities for dialogue between the approach advocated in this thesis and those which, for instance, cover themes of

relationality, conceptualism, and site-specificity; the role of formalism's focus on form as opposed to substantive content in debates about art's social and political potential; and finally, the tendency for more recent examples of political art to be self-consciously spectacular in their presentation and technique (e.g. Banksy).

8.6. Conclusion

To recap briefly, the thesis has addressed the main research question 'How can art be conceived of, and practised as, a socially engaged, politicising force?' It has done so with recourse to an extensive survey of art theories, criticisms and related practices, and with regard to claims made about art and politics by two key contemporary theorists. Moreover, it developed an original evaluative framework based on the insights of Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin, and utilised this framework to deliver a second original contribution, an in-depth analysis of the political and politicising practices of Alfredo Jaar. In doing so, it has sought to open up possibilities for further research on art's social and political potential, across a range of topics and themes. Therefore, while the thesis is line with Gramsci's pessimism of the intellect to the extent that the strong influence of traditional understandings of art can be felt in even the most political forms of artistic practice, it has also been explicit about how Gramsci's optimism of the will can be brought to bear when thinking about how art can help us move towards alternative, and emancipatory, futures.

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